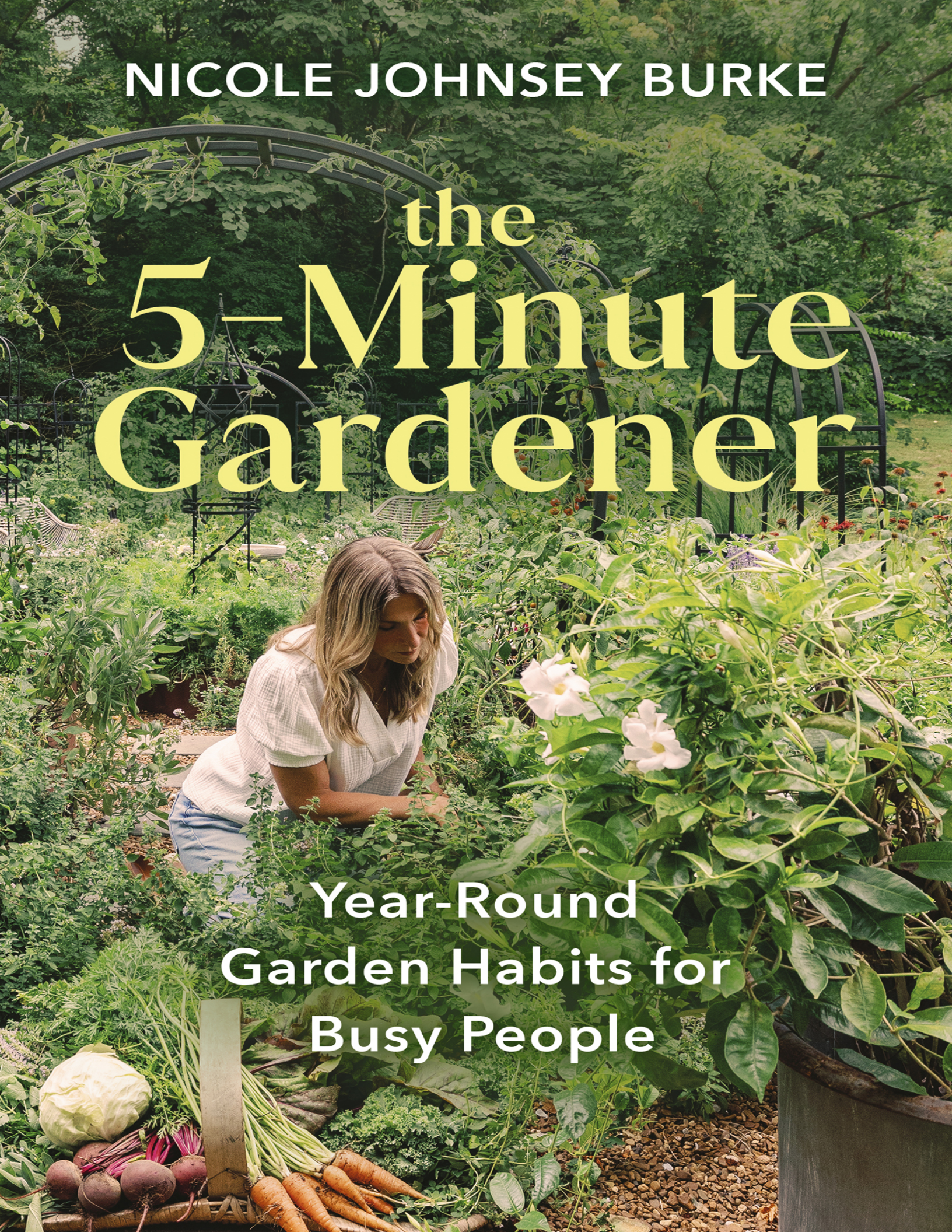


NICOLE JOHNSEY BURKE

the 5-Minute Gardener

Year-Round
Garden Habits for
Busy People



Praise for *The 5-Minute Gardener*

“*The 5-Minute Gardener* is the solution for anyone who dreams of cultivating a beautiful garden but feels short on time. As a busy entrepreneur and mom of three, time is not on my side, but I’ve had the opportunity to implement Nicole’s advice in my own garden and watch it transform. With practical tips and easy-to-follow guidance, this book proves that you can nurture a thriving garden in just a few minutes a day.”

— *Shea McGee, co-founder and CCO of Studio McGee and McGee & Co.*

“This book provides simple, accessible, inspiring gardening advice that any gardening nerd will enjoy. Gardeners at every level can benefit from Nicole’s advice.”

— *Jim Gaffigan, comedian, actor, writer, and producer*

“*The 5-Minute Gardener* empowers readers with the tools and information to cultivate a garden, grow our own food, and transform our relationship with nature—all things which have a profound impact on our health, our communities, and the planet.”

— *Casey Means, M.D., #1 New York Times best-selling author of Good Energy*

“Starting a garden has been a dream come true for me and my family. Somewhere between growing my business and raising my girls, I added growing a tomato to my dream list—and finally checked it off! Nicole’s simple, practical approach made it possible, and I can’t recommend enough the power of just five minutes in the garden. If you’re busy like me, this book will show you how to make gardening a part of your life.”

— **Jenna Kutcher**, New York Times *best-selling author of How Are You, Really?* and *host of the Goal Digger podcast*

“I’ve been doing this long enough to know a true industry leader, and that’s exactly who Nicole is. She combines innovation, real-world application, and a depth of caring for others, which has resulted in the garden revival sweeping the nation. *The 5-Minute Gardener* is a game-changer for anyone looking to bring more beauty, balance, and joy into their daily life.”

— **Dean Graziosi**, *entrepreneur and New York Times best-selling author*

“If you want to start a garden, Nicole Johnsey Burke is the first person to call. And if you want it to thrive without losing your mind, she’s the second person to call. We started and maintain a garden using her techniques and could not be happier!”

— **Donald Miller**, *author of Building a StoryBrand*

“As a business owner and a mom, I’ve always struggled with keeping up with managing a garden. Nicole’s garden tips and teaching make it so easy to keep up with in a realistic and simplified way, and because of it, my garden is thriving!”

— **Jenna Rainey**, *artist and author of Everyday Watercolor*

“We often think we need to grow a garden, but what if it’s the garden that grows us? Nicole transforms how we think about gardening, proving that even the busiest can cultivate a thriving garden—and, in turn, a flourishing life.”

— **Lara Casey Isaacson**, *author of Cultivate and founder of Cultivate What Matters*

“Quick, easy, actionable tips in Nicole’s signature style: coaching you through health and happiness with humor and humility. This book

makes you want to garden. More importantly, it makes it all so doable, season by season!”

— **Bari Baumgardner**, founder of *SAGE Event Management*

“In *The 5-Minute Gardener*, Nicole brilliantly applies productivity principles to the world of gardening. Her practical, habit-based approach makes growing food achievable for even the most time-strapped individuals. As a productivity expert, I’m excited by how Burke breaks down gardening into small, manageable tasks that compound over time. This book will change how you think about food, time, and connecting with nature.”

— **Michael Hyatt**, New York Times *best-selling author of Living Forward*

“Nicole has truly helped me become a 5-minute gardener! Her method of planting and tending a garden has inspired me for years. You and your friends and neighbors will be glad you picked up this book because you’re about to have veggies and flowers to share!”

— **Ellie Holcomb**, singer/songwriter, author of *Fighting Words Devotional*, and gardener

“I’ve always been afraid to garden. Nicole is the only person I would ever trust to help someone like me, without a green thumb and with limited time, be able to create a garden and grow my own food. *The 5-Minute Gardener* is going to become my gardening bible!”

— **Stacie Bloomfield**, designer, author of *Give Yourself Margin*, and founder of *Gingiber*

“I always dreamed of having a vegetable garden, but I didn’t think I had enough land or time . . . until I came across Nicole Johnsey Burke. She taught me that I only need a few square feet and a few minutes a day to grow my very own food. Nicole is a gardening genius and she makes me feel like one too!”

— **JJ Heller**, singer/songwriter

“This book is so easy to dive into. No matter what time of year, Nicole will help you get your garden boomin’ with goodness!”

— **Stu McLaren**, creator of *The Membership Experience*[™] and co-founder of [Membership.io](https://membership.io)

the 5-Minute Gardener

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NICOLE JOHNSEY BURKE

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Year-Round Garden
Habits for Busy People

Nicole Johnsey Burke



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*For my children,
Carolyn, Brennan, Rebekah, and Elaine.
I write with the hope that you will always live in a world
full of gardeners.*

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Preface

I didn't mean to laugh out loud.

“Mommy, when are you going to build me a garden?” It was my four-year-old talking while I was holding the baby and flipping (and burning) the grilled cheese.

“What was that?” I yelled over my shoulder, fanning the smoke alarm.

“My garden, when are you going to make it for me?”

She asked while I was in the middle of something. But for her, *this* was the something. She didn't care about the grilled cheese, the messy kitchen, or the errands we needed to run.

She knew it was summer, and she knew summers were for gardening.

What she didn't know was that there was barely time to brush my teeth, much less start a garden. With three small kids at home and another on the way, life was busy, if not chaotic. One step inside my living room and it was obvious: I wasn't thriving.

So when she asked when, not if, I'd start a garden for her, I had to laugh out loud.

But she had the gift of preschooler persistence. That wasn't the first time she'd asked, nor would it be the last. And perhaps because I secretly wanted a garden too, I decided this would be a power struggle that I'd “let” her win.

Long story short: she got her garden—well, she got some dirt and seeds and sunshine.

If you've read my first two books, you know that first garden was quite the disappointment. But my four-year-old never seemed to notice. Every morning after yogurt and cereal, every afternoon when she was the first up from her nap, and every evening as the sun started to set and the air cooled, she was out there, checking on her potatoes, measuring her sunflowers, and swinging back and forth from the deck, watching her garden grow right beneath her feet.

The timing was all wrong for starting that first garden. It was the middle of summer, we were renting, I was busy, and we knew so little. But at the same time, the timing was just right. We got our hands dirty, we dug in, and most of all, we learned valuable lessons that we would've had to learn the next summer if we'd waited.

What mattered that summer was not how beautiful or how productive the garden was. What mattered was that it happened.

We started. We tried. We waited. We learned. We smiled. We laughed. We promised we'd try again. And we kept that promise.

They say that you'll never *have* time for anything. If you want time, you must *make* it. And that's exactly what we did.

Looking back, I'm so grateful for that summer of bad timing. It changed the way I've spent nearly every moment since. That minute when I said yes to finding time to garden carved a new space in time for me that will always be reserved for the garden. Not because I'm less busy—if anything, life has only gotten faster—but because I'm more clear now on what the garden needs from me and what I need from the garden.

While technology and industry have their perks, they can lead to a disconnection with our food, with nature, and with the seasons that makes us think time is marked by a watch or a phone. When really, the place time counts most is outside, under the sky, where the garden grows.

If you've ever laughed out loud when someone suggested you take up gardening, or if you've dreamed of a life more connected to nature and the seasons and the food you eat but you can't seem to find the time in your everyday life to make it happen, or if you've ever used that four-letter word *B-U-S-Y* to describe yourself but you still would *L-O-V-E* some way to make a garden happen, this book is for you.

The 5-Minute Gardener isn't about homesteading, living off the land, or growing everything you eat. It's not about quitting your day job, becoming "crunchy," or whatever picture comes to mind that feels a little out of reach when it comes to gardening.

This book is for busy people, like me and you, who don't live to garden but garden to live. It's a guide that shows you how to fit the garden into your schedule in every season, each month, all 52 weeks, and even every day. It's gardening in 5-minute increments, for the fun and the delight and the gift of it.

It's gardening for the rest of us.

To make the most of your 5 minutes in the garden, head to [fiveminutegardenerbook.com](https://www.fiveminutegardenerbook.com), where you'll find Gardener Habit Trackers, journal prompts, daily tasks, and seasonal recipes.

Introduction

“All big things come from small beginnings. The seed of every habit is a single, tiny decision.”

— JAMES CLEAR

When asked, most of us say we don't garden because we're not any good at it, that we're born with a brown thumb, that we're “too busy.” But we know, deep down, that with time we could learn to grow at least a few plants.

The problem, then, is that in our current go-go-go lives, we just can't find the time to start learning or the endurance to keep a garden going.

Because what can you actually accomplish in 5 minutes?

More than you'd think. As I strive to build new habits into my life, I've noticed that the hardest ones to maintain are the ones I do on an irregular basis.

Tasks I do once a week or once a month become things I do once and never again. However, the tasks I do daily are the habits that stick: Going on a walk with my dogs every morning. Grabbing some greens for a morning smoothie. Making a cup of herbal tea and stretching before bed.

Tasks easily become part of my routine when I do them daily and when they take only a few minutes. Before long, these habits become second nature, such a big part of the way I spend my time that they start to define me as a person.

A 5-minute window may seem insignificant or “not enough,” but it's actually just right if you want to be sure a new habit—like gardening!—sticks. Five minutes is enough time to walk through the garden, to deeply water a flower bed, to thin a patch of radish seedlings, to prune a tomato plant, to make a green smoothie, or to prepare a delicious dip with freshly harvested herbs.

If you wait to start gardening until you have more than 5 minutes, you may wait forever. But if you take action *in this minute*, for just a few

minutes each day, you'll ultimately grow yourself into a gardener you'll hardly recognize.

gardener time

"I harvest greens for breakfast. After work, I check on my plants and pull any weeds. Then, after dark, I water the garden."

— Megan

YOUR "WHY"

Most garden books teach the "how," but this book focuses on the "why" and the "when." Because once you define why you want to garden, you can then set goals and create habits to make the most of any 5-minute window you've got.

So . . . why do *you* want to garden?

Do you want to harvest a lot of great food? Spend meaningful time with your family or neighbors outside? Exercise or reduce your stress by surrounding yourself with plants?

Spend 5 minutes right now exploring your why.

For years, my "why" has been to use my garden as a center of health, the place where I go to get outside, get my steps in, create something beautiful, learn new skills, and appreciate the sky above me. As a bonus, I get to eat really good food. I garden because, deep down, I want to be as healthy and as centered and calm as possible. Because I have a lot of other goals beyond the garden: to change the world for the better, starting with myself, and then to help other people.

gardener time

"[Gardening is] a postwork treat. I go out while the kids are playing and it's so therapeutic."

— Charlene

SET YOUR GOALS

Once you know why you're gardening, you can determine the “what” and “when” by choosing three main goals for the year and three for each season.

Your three seasonal goals can be anything, but I recommend that at least one of them be something about eating. You're growing food in this garden, after all.

Having a food-production goal works because goals that are easy to measure are often the ones that we tend to accomplish more often.

Not to mention, we're also more likely to accomplish the goals we can tie to everyday activities. BJ Fogg, author of *Tiny Habits*, calls these prompts. As he says, you can't form habits without prompts. For him, putting his feet on the floor first thing in the morning, going to the bathroom, or brushing his teeth are prompts to start new, healthy habits. Gardeners have at least three natural daily prompts, affectionately called *breakfast*, *lunch*, and *dinner*.

So before you start building 5-minute habit stacks, choose three gardening goals for the coming calendar year. These are my three goals for the year:

1. Eat from the garden every day. At least one thing I've grown should be on my plate or in my glass each day of the year. I know that if I eat more of the things I've grown, I'll be inclined to grow more things—and there's no downside to that. What I eat or drink from the garden changes with each season. But the fact that I enjoy a bite (or two or three) from the garden every day is a goal that motivates me and keeps me growing.
2. Make my world better. This broad goal covers smaller ones, like incorporating more native plants in my garden, improving my composting skills, creating less waste, and providing nectar and food for birds, butterflies, and ladybugs. It can stretch further to bringing a harvest to a neighbor, sharing a big garden meal with friends, donating food to a shelter, or showing a friend how to make the most of her space.
3. Enjoy the garden daily. This is something that a goal-setter like me can easily overlook! But studies have shown that if we don't feel good

from doing our habits, we'll eventually quit, no matter how good we believe the habit to be. Feeling good in the garden is the thing that keeps me gardening. So one of my goals is to sit, walk, and eat inside the garden as much as possible. This can include inviting friends to come hang there, spending time with my kids, husband, or puppies in this place, or simply sitting down right in the middle of the path and filling my mouth with cherry tomatoes.

With your yearlong goals in hand, break them into plans for each season. These will (and should) change as you progress through the months. As an example, here are my hopes for the first season of the year, even while there is chance of frost.

1. Eat homegrown greens every day, whether it's sprouts or microgreens grown on my windowsill, a fresh salad, or sautéed greens from the garden.
2. Prepare a daily garden drink (juice, smoothie, tea, or herb-infused water) to get me drinking more water and fill me up so I'm not tempted by soda and other drink alternatives.
3. Put cut flowers on the kitchen table every week. I want my garden to feature flowers and native plants for the bees and butterflies. I've accomplished this when I can make a weekly arrangement for my kitchen table.

Once you have yearly and seasonal goals, your only job is to work toward them 5 minutes at a time.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

I've organized this book so that no matter what time of year you pick it up, you can quickly flip to the relevant page to see what your 5 minutes in the garden can look like today, based on the season, the month, the week, the day, or even the hour. When we divide our time like this, it makes gardening more interesting *and* simpler, because it takes the mystery out of "what to do" and "when to do it."

In a nutshell, this is how the system works.

Step 1: Look up *your* current season. Are you in the cold, cool, warm, hot, or second season? (See the next chapter for a full discussion of the seasons.)

Step 2: Look up the current month of the season. Each season is divided into 3 months (even though some may be a little shorter or longer). The first month of every season is focused on planting, the second on tending, and the third on harvesting.

As a gardener, you are only ever doing one of three things: planting, tending, or harvesting. If you have seeds or new plants to install, or there's digging involved, it's planting. If you need to prune, water, trellis, or protect, it's tending. And if you're picking, cutting, cooking, preparing, or eating, it's harvesting. Planting, tending, and harvesting tasks can (and most likely will) happen each day, but it's helpful to know the priority for any given month, week, or day.

Step 3: Look up the current week of the month. In our system, week 1 of the planting month is for planting big plants, week 2 is for planting seeds, week 3 is for tending, and week 4 is for harvesting. The tending month is divided into weekly focuses like watering, supporting, and pruning. There are weekly assignments for the harvesting month as well. In the first week, you'll harvest herbs and greens; in the second, you'll focus on root crops; and in the third and fourth, you'll turn your pruners to the larger fruit harvests.

Step 4: Find the current day of the week. You can assign each day with a key task, making sure that the day you have the most time available is the day you spend on that month's focus. So, for example, day 1 is usually for planning the week, days 2 and 3 for planting, day 4 for watering, day 5 for feeding, day 6 for harvesting, and day 7 for cooking. If you only have one day a week for the garden, just prioritize the task that's most important for that week and month.

Step 5: Look up the time of day. Each day is naturally broken into three parts—morning, noon, and evening—that can be assigned tasks, such as planting in the morning, tending at noon, and harvesting in the evening. You'll also find in each chapter an example of what an ideal day could look like. You'll build your 5-minute habits for the coming week from there. Reminder: I don't expect you to be in the garden every morning, noon, *and* night for this habit-stacking practice to be effective. (I'm certainly not!)

Simply select one of those times of the day to be your “for certain” moment with your plants.

Then, when you have a few free moments, open to the page of this book for the current season, month, week, and even day. You’ll immediately find a plan for how best to use your 5 minutes.

As you read through these suggestions, think about what time of the day would work best for you and commit to just one practice. You don’t need to do all of the tasks mentioned or even most. But with a picture of the months and weeks of possibilities, it will be easier to imagine what a day could look for you, as a 5-minute gardener, based on the three tasks of a gardener: plant, tend, and harvest.

Remember, you only need 5 minutes—whenever you can find them.

One reason so many of us fail to develop a new habit is because we can’t answer the question, *What should I do right now?* This book answers that question by showing you how to categorize your garden tasks and keep them simple so you never have to guess what to do next.

As a busy mom and business owner, trust me when I say that having a plan means I’m much more likely to go out to the garden whenever time allows. On any given day, I already have an idea of what’s most important.

So if it’s a Wednesday in the third week of July, I know I’m in the harvest month of my warm season, I’m in the tending week, and this is the day that I focus most on planting new seeds in vacant spots in the garden. With this plan, I can make the most of my minutes.

In another season, I might think, “Oh, it’s the first month of the cool season, so I focus on planting. It’s the second week; I’ll focus on medium-size plants. It’s the beginning of the week; I’ll focus on planning the week ahead. And it’s lunchtime, so I’ll just step outside and observe what the weather is like today.” For those of us who’ve never experienced gardening as an everyday routine, this book becomes our new calendar—a place to find what to do anytime we’ve got a moment to do it.

If you’re ever lost or confused, or just need some clear direction, you can refer to the “Give Me Five” lists throughout the chapters as well as the “Quick Picks” list at the end of each season. There’s always something you can do in a short amount of time that can make a big difference in your garden. Those minutes of progress add up faster than you think. The trick is to not waste a free second when you’ve got it, and this book makes that possible.

And for extra inspiration, turn to the Gardener Time quotes and tips throughout this book from other 5-minute gardeners. You'll also find recipes plus meal ideas under the "Real Fast Food" headings—simple yet tasty dishes you can quickly pull together with your fresh-picked produce.

Now that you know how the 5-minute gardener system works, it's time to work the system. Begin by learning your seasons in the next chapter, and then start your first 5-minute practice right away.

To make the most of your 5 minutes in the garden, head to fiveminutegardenerbook.com, where you'll find Gardener Habit Trackers, journal prompts, daily tasks, and seasonal recipes.