"The rituals of gardening give a rhythm, even rapture, to everyday life that is apart from the routines of writing and the flows of relationships. Tending my garden became the same as taking care of myself."

When Laurie Lisle fled the city, she was in such a fever to buy a particular old clapboard house on the green of a historic New England village that she didn’t notice the awkward shape of the backyard. “When I had seen the surveyor’s map of my less than half acre,” she writes, “I was shocked at how very long and narrow a rectangle it actually was; on paper, as if seen from above, it looked to me like a fairway on a golf course, and I wondered how I could turn such an awful shape into a graceful garden.”

Thus begins this modern pastoral, in which Lisle tells us how she heaved compost, dug post holes, planted, and replanted—and how she also found herself digging into her feelings about love and loss, work and play, roots and rootlessness, solitude and sociability. Twenty years later, in these intimate essays that have sprung up around themes such as “Weather,” “Color,” “Woods,” and “Shadows,” Lisle explores the fascinating connections among one’s interior landscape, village life, and the natural world.

In “Roots,” Lisle writes about the generations of female gardeners in her family and the question of whether she has exiled herself into “a floral cage.” In “Sharon,” she traces the grand gardening history of her pre-Revolution town and notes the tensions between natives and newcomers. “Words” contrasts “the easy pleasure of gardening” with “the more elusive
satisfaction of writing,” and goes on to examine the role of the garden in
the lives of writers such as Emily Dickinson and Edith Wharton. “Woods”
tells of the “dramatic demarcation point between nature acted upon and
nature left alone.” In “Outside,” Lisle battles back the deer and
contemplates the mature garden that has grown up around her. Ultimately,
Four Tenths of an Acre is a testament to one woman’s glorious
engagement with place.

My Personal Review:
These essays are a meditation on the changing seasons in Lisle's New
England town yet they also reveal the seasons of the author's inner life.
"Four Tenths of an Acre" tells the story of a woman coming to her maturity
in the same way that a garden reaches its height after many years of
culling and with the spontaneous addition of new colors and shapes. As I
finished this memoir, I felt I had witnessed not just the transformation of the
land but the transformation of the gardener.

Lisle is the M.F.K. Fisher of the outdoor palette, describing local
personalities and gardens with wit and affection, showing us how people
reveal themselves as they get their hands into the earth.

For Lisle, gardening is not just a weekend hobby but a dialogue with life. It
is a universal endeavor that asks us to reflect on our own periods of growth
and quiescence, on the things that we choose to keep in our sphere of
influence (as we keep the livelier and more robust plants in a flower bed),
and what we must prune away in order to create a sense of harmony and
peace. Lisle’s description of an early marriage, and its ending, is part of
this sometimes painful but necessary process.

The garden is also a bridge between generations. It has deepened Lisle's
relationship with her mother, allowing the two women to share their
fundamental respect for life, despite their different roles and values.

This wonderful book is at bottom, about the way Time shapes us as it
shapes the land. It is about the mistakes we make, the choices we can't
undo -- and the interplay between human will and some Grand Design.

Lisle's memoir is a lovely companion to the classic "Gift from the Sea"
which explores the undercurrents of relationship in the context of a sojourn
at the beach.  "Four Tenths of an Acre" offers a gentle philosophy of
growth and change as it discusses planting trees, building fences and the
best way to discourage garden pests.

I shall never look at my miniature rose garden in the same way after
reading Lisle's description:  Even the tiniest piece of earth stretches
downward for four thousand miles.  I have learned not to be so ashamed of
my "stragglers" but to view them as part of an ongoing process. A garden
is never quite finished and that is one of its most important attributes--it
serves to remind us of a larger pattern of existence and of all the things in
life that are beyond our control. Whether we maintain a large property or cultivate a single flower bed, we discover that there is something beyond clock time and the "to do" list. The historical treatises on gardening, quoted here, are good affirmations for those of us too penned in by "busyness" to contemplate the progress of the natural world. Caring for the earth, Lisle shows, is a time-honored way of caring for ourselves.

For More 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price:
Four Tenths of an Acre: Reflections on a Gardening Life by Laurie Lisle - 5 Star Customer Reviews and Lowest Price!