

What Seeds Want

by Susan Yoder Ackerman art by Dana Regan

“Pretty!” Scarlett squealed. She bent down to pick up a gray feather.

“Here’s another,” Zeke said, handing his little sister one that was blue and white. “I guess the birds are back ’cause it’s spring.”

Dad looked up from the pile of soggy leaves he was raking. “The robins are back because the earthworms are back. In winter worms stay buried beneath the frozen soil. Now that the ground’s defrosted, they’re wiggling their way up. With all the rain we’ve had, you might even see a few above ground. They like it wet.”

Just then a robin flew down to their yard. It hopped across the lawn, tilting its head.

When it spotted an earthworm, it pecked and pulled until it had gobbled up its worm dinner.

“Greedy! Don’t eat all our worms!” Scarlett yelled.

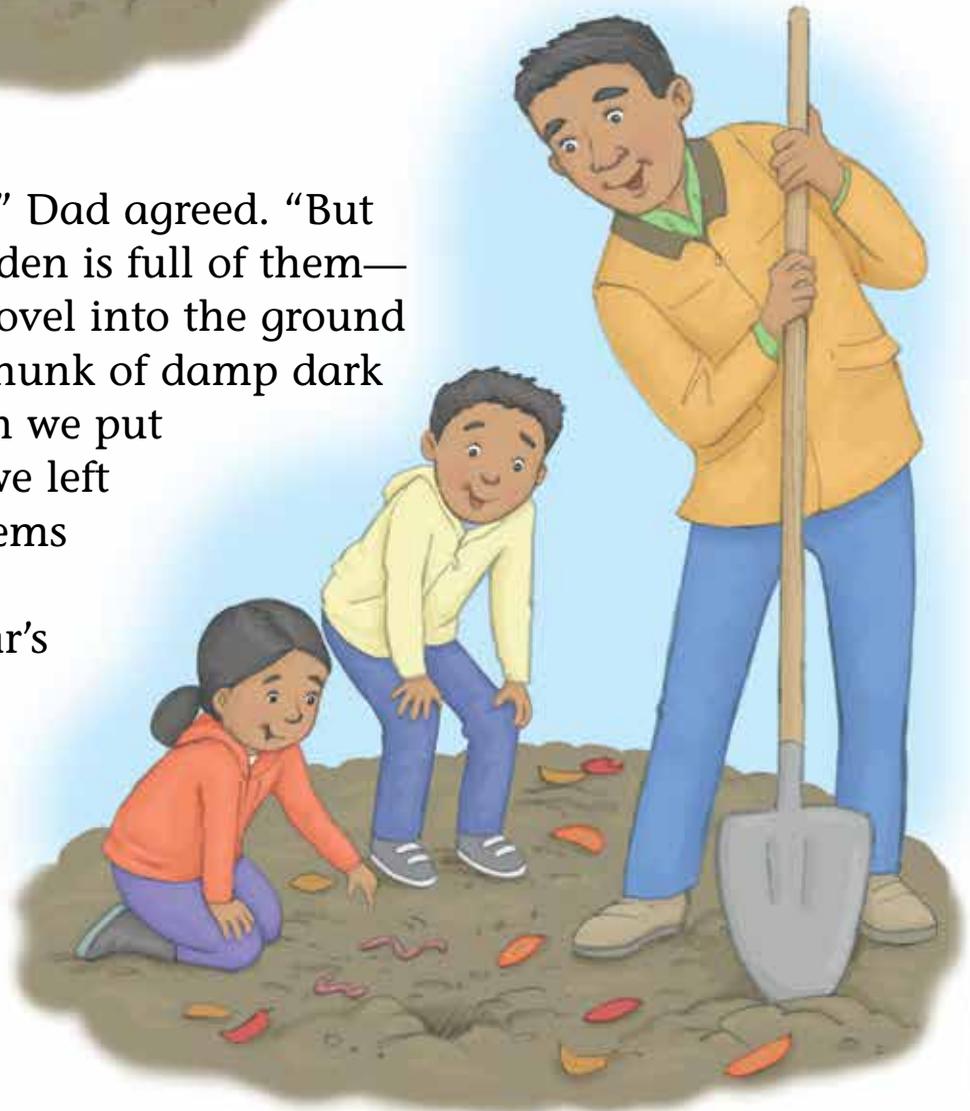
Zeke laughed. “Why not? Do you want to eat some too?”

Scarlett made a face. “No way!” she said.



“We need worms,” Dad agreed. “But don’t worry, our garden is full of them—look!” He stuck a shovel into the ground and turned over a chunk of damp dark soil. “Last year when we put our garden to bed, we left lots of leaves and stems to decay so that the worms and next year’s seeds would have something to eat.”

Scarlett knelt down to touch the pink squirmy worms crawling in the dirt.





“I thought you piled all those leaves on the garden bed to make a blanket, to keep the ground warm in winter,” said Zeke.

“You’re right,” said Dad. “Lots of good reasons for leaves in the garden. Here’s another—look where I’ve raked the leaves back. Do you see any weeds growing?”

“No,” said Zeke. “It looks all ready to plant.”

“A layer of leaves keeps the sun from getting to the weed seeds, so they don’t sprout. Easy-peasy in the spring. We don’t have to pull tons of weeds before we plant.” Dad hoed and smoothed the soft earth as he spoke. “Now we move the leaves to the side so our seeds can feel the sun and sprout and grow.”



Scarlett tucked the worm she was holding back into some soft dirt. “So can we plant now?” She reached into Dad’s bucket for a handful of seed packets. “Can we plant sunflowers?”

“Hold on,” Dad said. “Look at us. We’re all wearing jackets. It’s spring, not summer. Sunflowers won’t grow if their feet are cold. We’ll plant them later when the ground warms up.”

Zeke said, “How about sugar snap peas? I love picking and eating them right off the vine. It says here to plant them in spring.”





Dad answered, “Yes, they don’t mind chilly nights. Let’s get a row ready for them over here against the fence. Sugar snap pea vines want to climb on something.”

“I love carrots! Can we plant carrots?” Scarlett picked up a pack of carrot seeds.

“Yes,” Dad said. “Carrot seeds like cool, moist spring soil. Let’s make a row of them next to the sugar snap peas.”

Zeke was puzzled. “How in the world do you know what seeds like?”

Dad laughed. “You read the back of the seed packet. It tells you there. Also, Mom and I have been gardening for years. We’ve made some mistakes. Like planting tomatoes under a tree. Way too shady. They needed full sunshine. They didn’t grow. After that, we always found the sunniest spot for them. That’s how you learn.”



“I get it!” Zeke said. “You have to do whatever the seeds want, and they don’t all want the same things. They’re picky! It’s like when I want bananas on my cereal and Scarlett wants blueberries.”

“That’s right,” said Dad. “With the right sunshine, water, and soil, a plant is a happy camper.”

Zeke turned and saw Mom walking toward them. She was carrying a plate of cheese and crackers. “Snack time in the garden!” she said. “I’m so happy spring is here!”

A white butterfly suddenly fluttered around them. It flew this way and that, as if it too was very happy spring had arrived.

“A cabbage white!” Mom said. “The first butterfly I’ve seen this year. It’s looking for the first blossom.”

“I think these will be first!” called Scarlett. She was down on her knees. “You can already see them!”

Scarlett had taken the feathers she’d collected and stuck them in the dirt. She patted the earth around them so that they stood straight up. “I planted bird blossoms!” she said, giggling.



“Sorry, but I think birds are as picky as seeds about where they grow!” Zeke said, laughing.

Mom pointed to a tree branch. “There’s a robin carrying dry grass in its beak. It’s building a nest where the mama bird will lay eggs. That’s the way to get new robins. But, here—let’s eat, and then we’ll plant what we can.”

Zeke and Scarlett sat on the grass with their parents to enjoy the snack, while sunflower, carrot, and sugar snap pea seeds waited in their colorful packets. Their time would come.

