

Fall Leaf Garden

Every spring our garden emerges from the snow
brown and plain, a crust of last fall's fallen leaves
a winter blanket. My father turns the soil with a tiller,
leaving furrows to be sown with new seed.
Slowly a green mold appears—seeds germinating south to north--
followed by leaves, stems, stalks and vines.

By summer, I walk with my father between
tall rows of corn, beans, gourds, and tomatoes
that stretch above my head, and I imagine a
deep green rain forest where roads and houses
do not exist.

Colors: Red tomatoes and peppers,
yellow corn and squash,
tan cantaloupe,
green-striped watermelons and gourds,
green pumpkins burning slowly orange,
yellow and amber-red sunflowers.

Bumble bees hover over the flowers, droning in the summer sun.
On the bottom of leaves I find orange and black lady bugs,
grasshoppers, and sometimes a green and yellow striped garter snake.
These animals are good for the garden, my father says.

He shows me which plants are weeds
so I don't pull up the ones we want to grow.
I dig in the rows between plants and pull out
earthworms and watch them eat their way back into the soil.

Summer's end I help my father "put away" the garden.
First, we pull up the plants that had begun to wither and
lose their leaves, and dump them in the compost pile. Then,
we pull up the stakes and the wire cages and the soaker hoses,
till the soil one last time.

Fall comes and drops leaves on the yard,
which we rake and lay on the garden,
a new blanket ready for the winter.