

Learning leadership from my garden

By [Steve Taylor](#)

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A few nights ago we ate ratatouille. We sweated the onions over a low heat for 45 minutes. We added basil, garlic, and Italian parsley—all fresh from our garden here in New Zealand. Over time, we added the vegetables: pepper, eggplant, courgette, tomato. Finally, we mixed cheese and bread crumbs together.

The eggplant grew from seed ([heirloom from Diggers Club](#)) in the garden. In the growing, I've been challenged about leadership.

I planted the seeds back in October and to be honest, they struggled. Only a few germinated. Those that did grew very, very slowly. It was a constant battle to protect them from snails. They were rapidly overtaken by broccoli. When we left for holiday in mid-December, only two plants remained, about two centimeters high.

When I returned to work, two plants remained, but still only two centimeters high. To be honest, I was pretty disappointed. One month and no sign of progress. However, at least they were alive. Much else in the garden, ravaged by a run of 42-degrees-Celsius days, had wilted.

I removed what was large and competing (the broccoli) and began to water. Slowly the two eggplants grew. First flowers appeared.

Now, the fruit hangs heavy and black, a gorgeous sheen amid the green. The first fruits were delicious last night and we face the prospect of more ratatouille, along with eggplant dips, in the weeks ahead.

I've reflected on leadership as I've tended to these eggplants over the summer. It would've been easy to buy seedlings, but there is something deeply satisfying about planting from seed. It would've been easy to give up in the face of little growth, but I've realised the value of patience and persistence. As I've watered, I've pondered those with whom I'm relationally connected. I've wondered what it will mean for them to keep growing, and how I might participate in that. This has begun prayer and introspection.

I've needed to remove the broccoli. That was really difficult. It was large and impressive. But it was actually harming the growth of another. I've begun to inspect my own life, wondering what habits and attitudes are, in fact, choking the life of something else. I've begun to realise that the loss of a key person, a key leader, as essential part of the team, might in fact be an opportunity for another person to begin to fruit—differently, uniquely. Which has provided a different perspective on the current movement within the team at Uniting College.

Last week I spoke on [theological education in leadership formation](#). It was an academic paper that drew forth a range of academic challenges.

Perhaps I should have just told them about my eggplant. That theological education in leadership formation means planting, watering, removing, and enjoying.

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