



Soil

The Story of a Black Mother's Garden

By [Camille T Dungy](#)

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About The Book

A “heartfelt and thoroughly enriching” (Aimee Nezhukumatathil, *New York Times* bestselling author of *World of Wonders*) work that expands on how we talk about the natural world and the environment as National Book Critics Circle finalist Camille T. Dungy diversifies her garden to reflect her heritage.

In *Soil: The Story of a Black Mother's Garden* poet and scholar Camille T. Dungy recounts the seven-year odyssey to diversify her garden in the predominantly white community of Fort Collins, Colorado. When she moved there in 2013, with her husband and daughter, the community held strict restrictions about what residents could and could not plant in their gardens.

In resistance to the homogenous policies that limited the possibility and wonder that grows from the earth, Dungy employs the various plants, herbs, vegetables, and flowers she grows in her garden as metaphor and treatise for how homogeneity threatens the future of our planet, and why cultivating diverse and intersectional language in our national discourse about the environment is the best means of protecting it.

“Brilliant and beautiful” (Ross Gay, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Book of Delights*), *Soil* functions as the nexus of nature writing, environmental justice, and prose to encourage you to recognize the relationship between the people of the African diaspora and the land on which they live, and to understand that wherever soil rests beneath their feet is home.

About The Author



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Camille T Dungy

Camille T. Dungy is the author of the essay collection *Guidebook to Relative Strangers: Journeys into Race, Motherhood, and History*, a finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award. She has edited three anthologies, including *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry*. Her honors include the 2021 Academy of American Poets Fellowship, a Guggenheim Fellowship, and an American Book Award. She is a University Distinguished Professor at Colorado State University.

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Raves and Reviews

“*Soil* is on one level a book about the rewards of gardening. On a deeper level it’s about Black American resilience and roots. [*Soil*] insist[s] on making the domestic visible and argue[s] that an ethics of care that we often associate with maternity—whether we are mothers or not—is crucial in combating issues as large as the climate crisis. [Dungy] emphasize[s] the collective over the individual, posing old questions in fresh and urgent ways: What is our responsibility to the next generation? What does it mean to mother through perilous times of uncertainty, struggle, trauma, and change; to mother against violence, discrimination, plunder, and greed? To write “mother” as verb?” —***The New York Review***

“Fans of Dungy’s poetry will delight in her sparkling prose, and the wide-ranging meditations highlight the connections between land, freedom, and race. It’s a lyrical and pensive take on what it means to put down roots.” —***Publishers Weekly***

“Instead of the conventional nature narrative, in which an individual—most often White and well-off—communes with nature, Dungy offers a more complex, nuanced story in which the experience of nature is vital but is also entangled with race, national and family history, motherhood, and more. The text is the literary equivalent of the garden Dungy gradually coaxed into being: lively, messy, beset by invasive weeds, colorful, constantly changing, never quite under control, and endlessly interconnected.” —***Kirkus Reviews***

“In *Soil*, Dungy plants poems next to memoir next to critical analysis next to environmental history next to African American history, cultivating the radical ecological thought she wants to see more of in the world. This vibrant memoir challenges readers to look beyond the racial and scientific uniformness of most environmental literature and discover the rich wildness and hope that lies all around them.” —***BookPage***

“Definitive and singular, *Soil* functions at the nexus of nature writing, environmental justice, and prose to encourage you to recognize the relationship between the peoples of the African diaspora and the land on which they live, and to understand that wherever soil rests beneath their feet is home.” —***Harvard Book Store***

“In *Soil*, Dungy draws a connection between diversifying the plant life in her garden and diversifying the canon of nature writing.” —***NPR***

“A poignant portrait of life and its challenges, told through the beauty of nature.” —***Library Journal (starred review)***

“This book isn’t just a pastoral portrait of the American west. It’s also a window into the care and awareness we bring to the spaces we call home.” —***LitHub***

“In *Soil*, [Dungy] creates a lively space for all voices to sprout and become included in the solutions that can help build, rather than tear down, diverse communities, both human and non-human. In another testament to community, Dungy demonstrates the possibility of inspirational and informative environmental literature that calls for our family and loved ones in and throughout.” —***The Brooklyn Rail***

“This is a smart, beautiful, wide-ranging book that will draw you in and change how you look at the world around you.” —***The Southern Bookseller Review***

“In her new book, *Soil*, [Dungy] takes her trowel to the issues of justice, wilderness, brutality, and neighborliness, and the garden that blooms through her sentences is both captivating and sobering.” —***The Millions***

“A heartfelt and thoroughly enchanting tribute to family and community. Dungy shows us how to tend a garden, and how to tend a full and fragrant life.” —**AIMEE NEZHUKUMATATHIL, NYT Bestselling Author of *World of Wonders: In Praise of Fireflies, Whale Sharks, and Other Astonishments***

“The green of growing things calms me. Plants stabilize me,” Camille Dungy writes in this brilliant and beautiful memoir of her deepening relationship with the earth that necessarily demands she consider questions of family, history, race, nation, and power. Soil demands we witness what erodes or frays or severs the stabilizing roots between us. Let us put our hands in and try to listen.” —**Ross Gay, NYT Bestselling Author of *The Book of Delights***

“Gardening, poetry, motherhood, history—dirty and beautiful, difficult and sublime, the agony of failure, the exhalation of a spring bloom. . . Dungy’s poetic ear illuminates her language, whether listing botanical names or reflecting on the tumult of the 2020s. A significant, beautiful, meditative, and wholly down-to-earth memoir with high appeal for book groups and nature lovers.”—***BOOKLIST (Starred Review)***

“Camille Dungy’s SOIL is an instant classic. Provocative, beautifully written, and also wildly informative, this memoir cum manifesto asks us to contemplate our responsibility to our land – and each other. I felt transformed by this graceful and generous book.” —**((Jami Attenberg)))**, Author of *I Came All This Way to Meet You*

“With this book Dungy shows, by comparison, how unrooted so many of us are – ecologically, historically, and socially – and makes a poetic case that home is where you know the plants. This poignant, lovely work will make you want to nurture a garden, and all life.” —**Ayana Johnson, Co-founder, Urban Ocean Lab**

“In *Soil*, Camille Dungy welcomes us into an abundant, intimate, unfurling space — the exterior landscape of her garden and the interior landscape of her sapience. To dig in the dirt, we learn, is also to dig up and into history, identity, ecology, hope. Dungy shows, by example, how to honor the pain and the possibility of whatever fraught, holy ground we each call home. A deeply life-giving book.” —**Katharine Wilkinson, Executive Director of The All We Can Save Project**

“Camille Dungy is one of the greatest American writers, period. And *Soil* is her finest work yet. In prose that is personal, political, urgent, and honest, Dungy lays bare the perils of homogeneity—in our gardens and in our communities—and offers powerful reminders of why diversity—that watered-down, defanged buzzword—matters. Soil is a delicate and resilient exploration of gardening, motherhood, memory, love, and what it means to thrive as a Black woman tending her garden, her family, and her career in a white supremacist ecosystem.” —**Kate Schatz, NYT-Bestselling author of *Rad American Women A-Z and Do the Work: An Antiracist Activity Book***

“We are all of the soil. Whether clay, sand, loam or rocky till, each of us arises from it. Camille Dungy’s *Soil*, is the new ground work for growing an illumination of our ties to to the precious earth lain under our feet. From what suffers to grow in her Rocky Mountain backyard, through sketches of Black folk’s ties to seed, furrow, mule and hoe, she digs into our soul solum with an artfully conversational style, that’s bound to a personal and conversational vulnerability, which firmly links everything important to us, to the fertility underfoot. Herein, Dungy winds Earth’s care into human justice and wildness, then tends the story of connections to nature past, present and to come, upward around an awareness of how root, tendril, blossom, bird and bee, make us who we are. Camille is our perennial flower, bloomed again in *Soil*.” —**J. Drew Lanham, Author of *The Home Place -- Memoirs of a Colored Man's Love Affair with Nature (Milkweed 2016)***

“What an intoxicating book. Dungy’s words smell of rot, roots, and blossoms. She brings proof that incantations for nature can come from a yard in a subdivision, and that a family can turn hard soil into life.” —**Craig Childs, Author of *House of Rain: Tracking a Vanished Civilization Across the American Southwest***

Resources and Downloads

High Resolution Images

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