

Episode 1. ESCAPE ROOM – *Starring: Weeds*

WENDY NARRATION – All of this started when I was doing some yardwork one Saturday morning.

(In the background: Dreamy harp transition music, then fade to the sound of snipping scissors)

WENDY – “You are the perfect-sized lawn: Just about the length and width of a king-sized bed. Big enough to sit on with a picnic, but small enough that I can still use a kitchen scissors to keep you trimmed.”

WENDY – “Yup, yup! There’s nothing more relaxing on a sunny day than cutting the... Wait, what’s that? Is that a humming sound coming from the grass?”

(Tiny voices, humming)

TINY GRASS VOICE 1 – “Don’t mind us! We love haircuts!”

TINY GRASS VOICE 2 – “Yeah, except for that one she gave us last July. I was embarrassed to be outside for weeks! Until it grew out.”

TINY GRASS VOICE 1 – “You’re doing a great job now, though.”

WENDY – “Thanks! I just need to go inside for a minute...”

(Sound of door opening and closing)

WENDY – “That was weird. Maybe I need a glass of water.”

SPIDER PLANT – *(grumpy)* “Hey.”

WENDY – “What??”

SPIDER PLANT – “I said, ‘hey.’ Over here. Your spider plant? You remember, the one you put in the dark corner by the couch?”

WENDY – “Spidey? Is that you?”

SPIDER PLANT – “Just go ahead and ignore me like you always do. I know the plants outside are more important to you.”

WENDY – “Well, it’s true I like being outside. But that’s why I have you here! To brighten up the indoors.”

SPIDER PLANT – “Flattery will only get you so far. How about some water over here?”

WENDY – “Okay! I’m sorry! I really am. Here’s some water, and look—Maybe this would be a nicer part of the living room for you to sit in. There’s some sun, and a nice view of ...the parking lot.”

SPIDER PLANT – *(grumbles, but stops complaining)*

(Quirky background music begins)

WENDY NARRATION – Who do you go to when you’ve been back-talked by a spider plant? There was only one place I could think to try: The Botanical Garden.

(Sound of a robin chirping outdoors)

WENDY – “Hi. Um, excuse me, yes, you – digging in the dirt over there? Are you a gardener?”

GARDENER – “We use the word horticulturist, but yes. How can I help you?”

WENDY – “I have a plant question. It’s a little – sort of a little strange. I was talking to my plants today, you know, when I was taking care of them. And then—”

GARDENER – “They started talking back to you?”

WENDY – “Yes! Is that ...weird?”

GARDENER – “Not at all. Most people ignore plants, but once you start paying attention to them, you become tuned in to a lot of things you never noticed before. Welcome to the Club!”

WENDY – “The Club?”

GARDENER – “The Secret Gardeners Club. Here, I’ll do your initiation. Here’s our secret handshake *(wait a beat during voice recording; insert clapping sounds here)* – and your Secret Garden club key -- There you go! Congratulations! Now, I need to get another load of compost.”

WENDY – “Wait! What am I supposed to do with this?”

(There is no answer. Quirky background music resumes)

Hi everybody, Wendy here.

I’ve always talked to plants. It’s a totally normal thing to do, right? At least that’s what I thought, until one day the plants started talking back to me. That was the day I got initiated into the Secret Gardeners Club. I was given a special key that opens doors to secret gardens all over the city – And some of those gardens? They’re pretty wild.

From the Idaho Botanical Garden, welcome to *The Secret Gardeners Story Time*. It's the podcast for people – like you! – who are tuned in to nature.

(Sound of rolling drum and cymbals)

Today, in Episode 1: ESCAPE ROOM

(TINY GRASS VOICE 2)—“Starring: Weeds!”

(TINY GRASS VOICE 1)—“That’s us!”

(TINY GRASS VOICE 2)—*laughs evilly*.

The Secret Gardener’s Club key was large, heavy and green, with a pattern of ivy leaves scrolling down its sides. Since I had no idea what door it opened, I began carrying the key in my pocket wherever I went. I also started walking around my neighborhood, and wandering through parts of the city I had never explored before.

Most of the places I walked didn’t seem very interesting at first. I hiked along busy streets with cars speeding by, and I followed the islands of grass that bordered large strip mall parking lots. Sometimes the only plants I saw were little dandelions forcing themselves up between cracks in the sidewalk.

LITTLE PLANT VOICE – “I will survive!”

One day I turned down an alley three blocks from my apartment that I was pretty sure hadn’t been there the previous week. It wasn’t much, just a narrow gravel path between buildings. As I walked, the sound of traffic from the main street faded, and I could hear birds chirping. The weeds on the path became thicker, and then, just when I thought I had reached a dead end, I saw it:

Behind an overgrown shrub, a door was just visible -- A green door, with an ivy pattern carved into its wood. There was a lock on the door, and when I took out my key, it fit the lock perfectly. With a soft click, the door opened.

I pushed my way in to a walled garden filled with sunshine. The birds were singing more loudly here, and a breeze blew against my face.

The breeze slammed the door shut. I reached down to open it again, but there was no doorknob on this side of the garden wall.

WENDY– “Aw, man. I’m locked in. But what is this? There are some words carved on this side of the door...”

*If you are seeking an escape
From garden walls, it’s not too late
Plants that neither walk nor crawl
Can go ‘most anywhere at all*

WENDY – “A clue! I don’t know how useful it is, but ...Okay. I guess I’ll look to the plants for a way out of here.”

I turned to face the garden again. It was large, circled around the edges by a steep stone wall. There were all kinds of plants inside, some that were familiar and some that, I was pretty sure, didn’t grow anywhere else in town. I reached down and picked a dandelion, blowing the seed fluff into the air. The seeds caught the breeze and flew up over the garden wall.

WENDY – “I wish getting out of here was that easy.”

Straight across from me I saw what looked like a miniature oasis. I walked along the sandy edge of a tiny turquoise pond. Palm trees leaned over the water. With a sudden splash, a large coconut dropped from a tree into the pond.

COCONUT – “Freedom!!!”

I watched, but it was only gently washed back and forth in place. Reaching out, I gave the coconut a gentle push, sending it bobbing across the water to the beach on the opposite side of the pond. This was hardly an ocean with waves and tides to send the coconut floating away to distant shores, but the big seed seemed unconcerned, and let out a sigh of contentment as it settled in to its new sandy home.

Leaving the beach, I began to wander aimlessly around the garden.

WENDY – “Ouch! Something is poking my feet. I must’ve gotten some seeds in my socks while walking through that grass.”

CHEATGRASS – “That’s right! We’re hitchhiker seeds from that cheatgrass patch back there. We’ll take a ride on whatever is around that can get us where we need to go. Your socks or an animal’s fur – it doesn’t matter to us. Let me introduce you to the rest of the hitchhiker seed crew! That plant growing on the ground like a big mat is puncture vine, but they prefer the name goatheads.”

GOATHEADS – “Hiya!”

WENDY – “Hey! My bike has gotten flat tires from goathead seeds before. They’re really sharp.”

CHEATGRASS – “Yup. They’re good grabbers. Goathead seeds snuck into North America by catching a ride in sheep’s wool.Oh, and that plant over there, the one that’s almost as tall as you? That’s burdock. Check out its seeds—They’re nature’s original Velcro. A Swiss engineer went hiking one day, got burdock seeds on his pants and in his dog’s fur, then got the idea for a new kind of fastener.”

WENDY – “Hey, that’s pretty cool. The prickles on the seeds have little hooks on them, just like the Velcro on my shoes does.” (*insert sound of Velcro ripping*)

CHEATGRASS – “Burdock looves to brag about it.”

WENDY – *(to self)* “Well, I’m too heavy to get out of here by flying. It would be great if I could Velcro my way up that stone wall, but it’s way too smooth, and I don’t know how to rock climb. Swimming could be an option, but that pond doesn’t go anywhere. Unless…”

I looked toward the middle of the garden, where there was a tangled thicket of trees.

WENDY – “What are these trees over there, with the silver leaves and little yellow flowers?”

CHEATGRASS – “Those are Russian olive trees. They were brought to North America as ornamentals – things people planted because they’re pretty. A lot of the flowers in this garden are ornamentals waiting for the opportunity to break out of jail and escape into the wild. The Russian olive is a hitchhiker plant, too, only its seed catches a ride on the inside of animals.”

WENDY – “How can anything catch a ride inside an animal?”

CHEATGRASS – “Birds and other animals eat the fruits of the tree and poop out the seeds in new places.

WENDY – “Eww! Okay. That doesn’t help me much.”

CHEATGRASS – “Russian olive especially likes to grow near water.”

WENDY – “Now that is helpful! If I can push my way through these tree branches—There! A creek. I think I’ve found my way out. I just need to clean out my socks and I’m ready to go.” *(Starts picking cheatgrass seeds from socks)*

CHEATGRASS – “Hey! Stop that! Don’t put us back on the ground!”

WENDY – “Sorry guys, I’m not a taxi service. See you later!” *(Splashes into the water)*

I waded in and started swimming. The creek was surprisingly deep, and I found myself being pulled along quickly through the thicket of Russian olive. I just had time to hold my breath as I was washed into a dark tunnel…

(Louder water sounds)

WENDY – “Sunshine! I made it out. Where am I, though? There are farm fields here; I’m definitely not in the middle of town anymore.”

FARMER – “Hey, what were you doing in that canal? That’s not safe!”

WENDY – “I’m okay! It’s okay. How far are we from town right now?”

FARMER – “Town is about 6 miles that way.”

WENDY – “Thanks!”

I turned up the road in the direction he was pointing. I had escaped the walled garden like a plant, and now I would continue the rest of the way home like a human: by walking.

(Exit music)

Wendy here again.

It's important for seeds to travel away from their parent. Just imagine if all the coconuts from a coconut palm sprouted around the mother plant: as those seeds grew into trees, they would compete with their parent for water, sunlight, and nutrients in the ground – resources plants need for survival.

This is why seeds are pretty great at traveling. Whether it is by water, air, or hitching a ride with somebody else, seeds are going to get out there and explore. In that way, seeds aren't so different from people.

From the Idaho Botanical Garden, thanks for listening.

(Transition sound effect or music)

(Episode end notes)

Music for this episode was provided by purple planet dot com, that's purple – dash – planet – dot com.

Special thanks to Bryan, Heather, and Evie Durbin, our guest voice actors for this week's show.

Hey grownups and kids: Want to do some nature explorations of your own? Check out the show notes for links to activities related to this episode.

And kids, would you like a chance to hear your voice on the show? Here's how you can do that: Spend some time outdoors near where you live. While you're out, call us and leave a message telling us these 3 things:

1. Tell us your name
2. Tell us where you are and what you are doing outside. Are you biking? Bird watching? Walking the dog? Whatever it is you're doing, we want to know.
3. Say the following line: “It's the podcast for people – like you! – who are tuned in to nature.”

That's all you have to do! Give us your name, tell us what you are doing outside *right now*, and say our tag-line. To leave a message, call 208-275-8612. That's 208-275-8612.

(END EPISODE)