Finding Four-Leaf Clovers and other precious things in life

by Roberta MacDonald
An Introduction

Cabot first reprinted Finding Four-Leaf Clovers in 2003 to celebrate St. Patrick’s Day in New England. In the first few days on Cabot’s website, fans downloaded more than 16,000 copies. Its author, Roberta MacDonald, Cabot’s marketing vice president, is an enthusiastic spokesperson for Cabot and its award-winning cheeses. Soon after the publication of her modest treatise, however, Roberta began to receive questions from the media about her other favorite topic – finding four-leaf clovers. So, Cabot has decided to reprint it again and make it available for free. Since its initial printing, Roberta has added a few new thoughts to this insightful little book that takes a big look at life.

Finding four-leaf clovers is really about enjoying the right now of life. Farmers have done this constantly for generations and had no idea they would be at the forefront of New Age Consciousness. After all, driving around in circles on a tractor during brilliant, sunny days is nothing less than the ultimate ‘in the moment’ meditation. For that matter, so is a first-calf heifer birthing, watching long, dark shadows recede into dusk, treasuring moonlight as it glitters on snow during early morning milking. Farming is as magical as it is tough, and this book celebrates that and more.

Roberta MacDonald has written a pleasantly whimsical tract about the art of contemplation. Her advice is specific, and its implications are as much philosophical as horticultural.

She’s correct on a pragmatic level, as well. You really will find more four-leaf clovers after reading her book. That’s a nice, extra bonus.

Tom Slayton, Editor, Vermont Life
As she stepped outside to finish buffing her remarks, the irony was not lost on Roberta. It was an exquisite Vermont day – blue skies, fluffy white clouds, bright warm sun, a refreshing chill in the air. The new grass was dazzling green, and out of habit, Roberta began to look for four-leaf clovers. Right off the bat, she noticed three. As she looked closer at this space where she had paced every day for weeks, she was amazed she had not noticed the fours before. Within minutes, Roberta found 33 four-leaf clovers in a patch no bigger than one foot square. Even she was stunned. There had been none there yesterday or earlier that morning.

Tickled by the count, and wanting to arrive early at the service, Roberta brought her special cache along.

At the church, Laura Brown greeted Roberta and thanked her for participating in the ceremony. All at once, Roberta realized the clovers had to be a gift to Laura from Joe. Laura smiled softly and informed Roberta that it was their 33rd anniversary. Joe was always so sentimental and such a romantic when it came to his wife, and these 33 four-leaf clovers were testament to his abiding love and spirit.

For his service, Joe’s wife, Laura, asked Roberta to represent the Cabot employees. It was Roberta’s honor and pleasure to do so. In order to do Joe’s memory justice, and to polish her preparation on the day of the service, Roberta polled employees about their favorite Joe stories. One stands out because it led to such a special gift.

At Cabot’s original offices in Cabot, Vermont, the entire administration worked in one 500 square foot space with a big center beam in the middle. One day, while chatting up one of the customer service reps, Joe reached for an oddly placed light switch on the beam and asked, “What’s this for?” Before the rep could stop him, Joe flipped the switch. Joe’s curiosity shut down the power throughout the entire plant. Immediately after Roberta was told this story, the lights, air conditioning, computers – everything in Cabot’s newly renovated administrative offices in Montpelier, Vermont – shut down. It was DARK.

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Then there was the time Roberta searched her farm for hours and found 80 four-leaf clovers for her dear friend to celebrate her 80th birthday. In fact, she found 98. “For your birthday, I went looking for 80, but found 98 clovers instead,” said Roberta. “Oh,” her friend replied, “That’s nice. I guess I have a few more years left.”
What to Wear
Comfortable clothing helps considerably. Sweat pants, a loose fitting shirt and soft shoes allow for free movement and are highly recommended. At least at first. Soon you will discover you can find four-leaf clovers no matter what kind of clothing you prefer. From formal to casual, business suit to bathing suit, anything goes! All you need is the willingness to look along the way.

Where & When To Look
Once dressed comfortably for your first foray, start by looking in the largest clover field you can find. If you live in a city, you are most likely to find the healthiest clover clusters on grassy areas near highway interchanges.

Parks are nice, of course, but the most prolific clover patches tend to be found in thicker, grassy places off the beaten path. Finding new places to explore is half the fun of discovery.

Recently mowed fields should be avoided for obvious reasons. Front yards offer the novice four-leaf clover explorer a protected place to begin – so do school yards and church lawns.

Sunny days make the quest that much more pleasant. You are at once soothed by the warmth and assisted by the light. But drizzly days can be relaxing, too, though such weather can make the search a bit more challenging.

Search Tip
Only daylight hours are suitable for clover searching. Fours have a habit of going to bed early and close their leaves at dusk.

Another Thing To Consider
When you begin to look, in whatever weather, be sure to consider your tolerance for public scrutiny. If you are highly visible during your search, curious people will inquire about your activity. Cultivate an attitude of adventure and always maintain the determination to succeed. Your rewards will be many.

What To Bring Along
If you expect to be out looking for four-leaf clovers for any extended period of time, take along a cup or pail of water. Clovers stay fresh floating on the surface – stems down. If held in your hand, they will wilt.

The more colorful the water-holder, the better. After extensive roaming, it’s easier to bring fours back to a bright, easily seen container. In dense fields, you might lose sight of it altogether. While this can be a distraction, and sometimes a slight aggravation, don’t let this interrupt the fun. Search for fours at the same time you search for your bucket!

Pressing Matters
You may choose to bring a book along and press your treasures right away. Your choice of book is particularly important. Size determines the stamina required for toting. Selection of subject matter, though an esoteric consideration, essentially infuses the four-leaf clovers with the spirit of the page. Poetry, dictionaries and classical fiction seem to make the best pressing beds. Be advised that once inserted, clovers should be left alone for at least two weeks to ensure proper dehydration. You can expect wrinkles and a pleasing, delicate parchment effect on the pages where the clovers have dried.

Now that you know the ground rules, you are ready to set out on your first four-leaf clover adventure. Your search provides a wonderful opportunity for discovery and relaxation. So, start looking. Be prepared for wondrous results.
How to Find Four-Leaf Clovers

Sit, squat or enjoy a sublime recline in the middle of a clover patch. Don’t look at each clover – ultimately it’s boring, and it might make you impatient since there are hundreds of clovers to consider.

Instead, un-focus your eyes. This means rather than seeing one clover clearly in the center of your vision, take all of the clovers within a one-foot square range into view. Do this with evenly blurred sight. This relaxed way of looking puts the clovers on a flat plane. Your field of vision becomes two dimensional and lacks depth perception. This is the secret to detecting fours. A generalized overview, not specific inspection, makes the precious four-leaf clover vibrate distinctly among the common threes.

Suddenly, the fours will stand out conspicuously, among the threes, as if red in a field of green! When you relax your eyes, you encourage the four-leaf clovers to magically appear. Please note, squinting does not qualify as relaxed!

Here’s Another Revelation

Once you find one four-leaf clover, others are not far away. Four-leaf clovers seem to grow in clusters, perhaps proving that all flukes are surrounded by supportive, loving families.

Soon you will notice that even five- and six-leaf clovers can be found! The author’s record stands at one seven-leaf found among 64 fours within one hour. (Note for novices: This came after lots of patient practice and search experience.)

The knack to finding four-leaf clovers is that simple. At heart, it is a way of looking at things differently from how you have been taught to see traditionally.

In fact, success is a matter of bucking all those years of elementary education when you were told to focus your attention on a letter in a word or on a word in a paragraph – or even exclusively on the teacher in front of the class. Now you’re being challenged to look beyond the small details in the center of your sight. Forget convention. Let your focus go. Relax your eye muscles, and you will succeed. Have fun. The discovery is about to begin.

Once you master this reformed use of your eyes, you will feel detached and pleasantly lightheaded. A state of calm will slowly settle around your consciousness. A soothing, silky fog will polish off the edges of all you see and calm whatever runs through your mind. This is a heightened state of bliss. Sounds and smells become alive, too, as sight relaxation helps to sharpen your other senses.

Through this method of finding four-leaf clovers, the mind seems removed from the process of seeing, suspended from all consideration of sight. Instead, the mind receives unconscious information and a form of extrasensory perception gently takes over to separate the extraordinary from the ordinary. In this suspended state, you will find the fours stand out from the threes without requiring the usual attention to detail. When you learn to look less precisely, the fours literally will jump out from the threes.

And Touching Begins To Tickle

Pass your hands over the clover field as you search. As your hands glide above the little green umbrellas, barely stroke them. This is a palm and finger massage of the subtlest order. Your hand’s flight helps separate the clovers one from another and, in fact, triggers another element of four-leaf identification. Gentle manipulation of the clovers enables your new, improved eyesight to discriminate among the layers of clovers, particularly those beneath the older or larger ones.

If you exercise your new sight technique properly, you will find a four-leaf clover within 12 minutes.
Other Things You Discover When Looking for Fours

While searching for fours, use this opportunity to turn your thoughts inward to examine what means the most to you. This provides an ideal opportunity to consider your job or romance or future plans. Pray or count quietly. Explore any thought that allows you to maintain your unfocused vision on clusters of clovers. Whatever you think about, wherever your mind takes you, expect to discover new insight into things meaningful. Finding fours can be an agricultural I Ching. A question held privately that offers several possible answers can be solved by noticing which answer you were considering when you found a four.

Silence, Please
Only you should hear your thoughts. Give them time to be heard. If you tend toward self-examination out loud, this is the perfect time to change that habit.

Relish
Cherish the heightened sensations that accompany your search. Take pleasure in the warmth of the sun on your shoulders or forehead. If it is raining, feel the gentle lick of the drops on your skin. This sensory sensitivity tends to propel your search into a higher realm, and remarkably enough, helps yield a significant increase in the number of fours found. While it is not necessary to savor your immediate environment to be successful – it does make the search more effective and rewarding.

One Note Of Caution
This activity may be addictive and injurious to those who normally appear staid and whose professional posture is somewhat impervious to silly behavior. Remember, abandoning pretext and leaving traditional behavior patterns behind is what looking for four-leaf clovers is all about – at least initially.

Gradually
You will discover you can spot fours from a standing position. This aerial view is as effective as stooping or reclining, but appears much more impressive to an uninitiated on-looker. Soon you will develop a “sixth sense” toward fours – instinctively feeling their proximity – and will be able to pluck them while in stride.

The presence of an audience brings up a significant point about what to anticipate with four-leaf clover searches. You should be prepared to share your skill with others. When observing you bent over in a field, most people will ask if you have lost something. Once you explain, responses typically range from a curious look, or utter disbelief, to a request for instructions. Most often lessons are sought by parents on behalf of, or in spite of, their children. Show off, if you are in the mood.

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How To Make Clouds Disappear

A Special Note: Years after the following anecdote, in the movie Father’s Day, Robin Williams, a bum, lies down in a park with Billy Crystal and tries to explain this phenomenon.

A Similar Technique To Making Four-leaf Clovers Appear

I first knew I could make clouds disappear at a meeting of all the opera directors in the United States. It was at a glorious resort in New Mexico on a bright, sunny day in January. It was a typical board meeting, and I was bored. I was listening, but I just could not keep my eyes focused on anything or anyone in the room. As I looked out the tall, paneless windows, the bright sunlight and the cotton white, billowy clouds entranced me. It was pure Magritte in motion.

The more my consciousness was pulled out of the room and into the clouds, I realized my stare actually had stopped the cloud caught lightly in my gaze. The cloud was NOT moving. While the clouds above and below continued by, it held perfectly still, as if my gaze had some crazy, super power ray. As soon as I realized what I had done, the frozen cloud began to move. Then I lightened my gaze, made it softer, and the cloud stopped again. Then I squinted, and by squinting, the cloud slowly dissipated and I began to see the blue through the cloud and then, magically, the cloud disappeared. I tried again and again, and each time I softened my focus, I could hold the clouds still. And when I squinted, and saw ‘through’ to the blue behind the cloud, I realized I could make a small cloud disappear or punch a hole in a great big one. Really, it’s true. Though I am not quite sure what this talent affords the world, I can tell you it is a lovely thing to do on a sunny day, lying on your back in a meadow or in hammock, looking up at the clouds. Children under seven can do it easily. Pre- and early teens freak. It is way spooky, apparently. And now you four-leaf clover fans also know the technique. Maybe one day soon, some Cabot cheddar lover will let me know what to do with this unusual gift.

The Joy Of Discovery

Once children are taught the technique, inevitably they easily beat adult novice four-leaf finders.

Of all the people untrained in finding four-leaf clovers, women artists and male farmers seem to have the most natural success. Though it’s hard to prove, it seems they already use their eyes differently from most people. Generally, they can be counted on to take the time to appreciate an open field on a sunny day or pastures nurtured by gently falling rain.

Finding four-leaf clovers leaves you with a refreshed spirit of renewal and achievement. The search is a splendid way to spend an afternoon or lunch hour. It becomes a cultivation of grace and sensibility and can lead to provocative encounters with your own imagination or with strangers, or both.

Finding four-leaf clovers also makes excellent cocktail party conversation. Others will marvel as you relate your prowess and success. Some will ask to accompany you on your next journey.

To find a four-leaf clover is to discover the most distinctive talisman available to all of us.

Look, and you will believe your luck.

A small discovery can bring great rewards.
What a few Vermonters have to say about “Finding Four-Leaf Clovers”

This refreshing, little book of wisdom shows us how to celebrate the simple things in life, engage in the moment and embrace the adventure of discovery. As you find the fours, smell the clover!

Elinor Earle
Stowe

I found more than fours – I discovered a heightened sense of awareness in this paradoxically blurred condition we call life.

Marie Frohlich
Williamstown

The fours are there all along... but we believe in their rarity so deeply that we can’t see them. In life, our preconceptions and expectations serve to limit our thinking and creativity. Here’s one way to learn to let them go.

Glenn Ravdin
Grand Isle

A joy to read! My spirit felt at once tickled and grounded, my perspective more expansive, inclusive, focused and unfocused!

Laurel Barbieri
Worcester

About the Author

Roberta MacDonald was born an army brat in Fort Sill, OK, at the apex of the twentieth century. She graduated from Mary Washington College of the University of Virginia and spent 15 years exploring urban life in New York City, San Francisco and Washington, DC. Roberta now resides in Vermont.

The original edition was drafted during the midnight hours afforded Roberta during her children’s infancy. She has updated the original, but the message of discovery and rejuvenation remains the same.

By day, Roberta devotes her boundless energy and experience to spreading the good word about Cabot Creamery, maker of the World’s Best Cheddar.

Date Found
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Location of Clover
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Special Notes
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Find what’s really meaningful in life