

CULTIVATION IS CREATION

Chapter 6: Hidden Methods

There's something strangely soothing about crushing spiritual herbs in perfect geometric patterns while channeling precise amounts of energy through your fingertips. It's like meditation meets chemistry, if chemistry involved glowing plants and the occasional minor explosion.

"You're getting better at this," Lin Mei commented, watching me carefully grind Dawn Lotus petals into a fine powder. "Most people take months to develop this level of control."

Energy Control Level: Advanced Beginner

Precision Rating: 92%

Note: Systematic approach significantly improving results

"I have a good teacher," I replied, which was true enough. Between Lin Mei's practical knowledge and Azure's constant optimization suggestions, I was making progress faster than I'd expected.

My inner world now sported a modest herb garden alongside its energy circulation paths, the manifestation helping to process spiritual energy more efficiently. It wasn't the profound battle techniques Wei Lin kept trying to sell me, but it was proving surprisingly effective.

"Senior Sister Zhang asks if you're ready with today's special order," Lin Mei said, breaking my concentration.

Ah yes, my newest source of contribution points. Word had gotten around that I could process spiritual herbs with unusual precision, leading to custom orders from inner disciples. It paid better than regular gathering and kept me safely away from Zhou Ming's "training sessions."

"Almost done." I added the final touches to the mixture, watching it give off a soft blue glow. "Perfect absorption ratio for Qi Condensation stage cultivation."

Product Analysis:

Quality Rating: 95%

Energy Stability: High

Estimated Value: 30 contribution points

"You know," Lin Mei said casually, "you could probably get into the Advanced Herbalism class with skills like these. Much better points than basic gathering."

I looked up sharply. "There's an advanced class?"

"Of course! Did you think herb gathering was all we did? The real techniques involve growing and refining spiritual plants, creating custom blends, even developing new cultivation aids." She grinned at my expression. "Interested?"

"How many points?"

"That's the best part - no points required. They're always looking for disciples with talent in herbalism. Most people think it's beneath them, too focused on fancy combat techniques."

Opportunity Analysis:

Potential Benefits:

- *Advanced cultivation knowledge*
- *Increased point generation*
- *Stable sect position*

Risk Level: Minimal

Recommendation: Accept

"Sign me up," I said immediately. "When do we start?"

"Tomorrow morning. Try not to be late - Senior Sister Chen hates tardiness even more than she hates wasted herbs."

The next morning found me in a secluded corner of the herb gardens I'd never noticed before. A dozen other disciples sat in neat rows before a stern-looking woman I assumed was Senior Sister Chen. Her outer robe bore special markings indicating her status as a specialist cultivator.

"So," she began without preamble, "you think you have what it takes to be true herbalists." Her gaze swept over us. "Most of you are wrong. Growing spiritual herbs isn't like tending a vegetable garden. Every plant is an opportunity to fail spectacularly."

She gestured, and the air filled with shimmering spiritual energy. Seeds in nearby plots suddenly sprouted, growing into mature plants in moments. Then, just as quickly, they withered and died.

"Too much energy, too little control," she explained. "A single mistake can ruin months of work. Still interested?"

Nobody left. Either we were all very dedicated or very desperate for better opportunities. Probably both.

"Very well. Let's begin with the basics of spiritual agriculture..."

What followed was the most intensive morning of my life. Senior Sister Chen covered everything from soil preparation to energy infusion techniques, with practical demonstrations that left most of us dizzy from spiritual exhaustion.

New Skills Acquired:

- *Basic Spiritual Agriculture*
 - *Energy Infusion Control*
 - *Plant Growth Acceleration*
- Note: Skills require significant practice for mastery*

"Your energy control is decent," Senior Sister Chen told me during individual assessments. "But your circulation patterns are... unusual."

I tried not to look nervous. "I focus a lot on precision?"

She hummed thoughtfully. "Well, whatever method you're using, it works. You'll be responsible for the Dawn Lotus plot. Try not to kill them all on your first day."

The Dawn Lotus plot turned out to be a small garden bed containing some of the sect's most valuable basic spiritual herbs. No pressure or anything.

"Don't worry," Lin Mei said during our lunch break. "I killed my first batch completely. Turned them into spirit ash in about three seconds."

"That's not actually reassuring."

"Wasn't meant to be!" She grinned. "But seriously, you'll do fine. Your control is better than mine was when I started."

Tutorial Mode: Active

Analyzing Dawn Lotus growth requirements...

Generating optimal energy distribution pattern...

"Thanks Azure," I thought. "Try to make it look natural though. Don't need more people commenting on my 'unusual' methods."

The afternoon was pure practical work. Under Senior Sister Chen's watchful eye, we each tended our assigned plots, learning through trial and error how different plants responded to spiritual energy.

Warning: Energy input approaching critical threshold

Adjusting distribution...

Stability restored

I quickly learned to appreciate the System's warnings. More than one of my classmates ended up with smoking craters where their plants used to be.

"Acceptable," Senior Sister Chen announced, inspecting my Dawn Lotuses at the end of the day. "The growth rate is unnaturally consistent, but the results are stable. Continue this level of performance and you may survive the course."

Coming from her, that was practically a ringing endorsement.

"Not bad for your first day," Lin Mei said as we walked back to the outer disciples' quarter. "Want to get dinner? I know a quiet spot in the dining hall where we can compare notes."

Social Event Detected

This tale has been pilfered from Royal Road. If found on Amazon, kindly file a report.

Relationship Progress Possible

Recommend accepting invitation

"Thanks Azure, I know how dinner invitations work," I thought dryly.

The "quiet spot" turned out to be a corner table partially hidden behind one of the dining hall's support pillars. Perfect for private conversations about cultivation techniques or, as it turned out, sect gossip.

"Heard the latest?" Lin Mei asked between bites of rice. "Three more outer disciples got 'reassigned' to support duties this morning. Apparently they couldn't meet the new evaluation standards."

I paused mid-chew. "Three? But the evaluations aren't for another two weeks."

"These were special cases. They tried to curry favor with Inner Disciple Zhou by offering to spar with him." She shook her head. "Ended about as well as you'd expect."

"Let me guess - healing pavilion?"

"Worse. Their cultivation was actually damaged. Something about 'excessive spiritual pressure disrupting their foundations.' They're lucky they only got reassigned instead of expelled."

I winced, remembering my own encounters with Zhou Ming. If not for the System's assistance...

Combat Analysis UpdatedThreat Assessment: SevereRecommended Action: Continue avoiding direct confrontation

"Good call, Azure," I thought. "Any other brilliant insights?"

Social Analysis indicates subject Lin Mei has additional information to share

Recommendation: Ask about recent sect developments

Sometimes having an AI wingman was actually useful.

"Any other news I should know about?" I asked casually.

Lin Mei glanced around before leaning closer. "Well... there's a rumor that the real reason for the increased evaluation standards isn't about resources at all. Some say the sect is preparing for something big, something that requires identifying the most promising disciples quickly."

"What kind of something?"

She shrugged. "No one knows for sure. But have you noticed how many inner disciples have been returning from outside missions lately? And those closed-door meetings the elders keep having?"

Come to think of it, the sect had seemed busier than usual lately. More senior disciples in the corridors, more whispered conversations cutting off when outer disciples approached.

Pattern Analysis: Unusual activity detected in:

- *Elder movement patterns*

- *Resource allocation*
- *Security protocols*

Conclusion: Significant event likely within 3-6 months

"Should we be worried?" I asked.

"Hard to say. But it might explain why they're pushing us so hard. If something big is coming..." She trailed off as a group of inner disciples passed nearby.

I spent that evening's meditation session staring at my Seed of Creation, which had evolved from its initial rice-grain size to something closer to a marble. Still tiny in the grand scheme of things, but progress is progress, right? The blue glow had intensified too, and now little streams of energy flowed around it in mesmerizing patterns.

Azure materialized beside me in my mindscape, clipboard in hand because apparently even spiritual assistants need office supplies. "Your herbalism practice is showing interesting effects on the seed's development," he noted, watching as I carefully channeled the day's harvested herb energy into my circulation paths.

The new techniques Lin Mei taught me were like finding cheat codes for a game everyone else was playing on hard mode. Instead of brute-forcing growth with expensive spirit stones, I was weaving together energies from different herbs, creating this intricate web of power that seemed to make my seed practically purr with contentment.

Current Projects:

- *Energy Circulation Optimization (Progress: 63%)*
- *Space Expansion Preparation (Progress: 28%)*
- *Seed Development Status: 1.5x base growth rate (up from 1.3x!)*

"Your efficiency ratings are improving," Azure commented, though I noticed he didn't mention we were still shy of that dreaded 2x requirement. "The herbal integration method seems particularly effective at stabilizing the seed's foundational matrix."

I watched as another strand of herb-enhanced energy merged with my seed's outer layer, making the whole thing shimmer like a tiny galaxy. Maybe Lin Mei was right - sometimes the scenic route is actually the shortcut in disguise.

Though I still wouldn't say no if Wei Lin's Dragon Heart Pills suddenly went on clearance sale.

"Any thoughts on the rumors she mentioned?" I asked Azure.

The little spirit made a face as though trying to look thoughtful. "Sect-wide preparations often indicate either external threats or significant opportunities. Given the focus on rapidly identifying promising disciples, I'd lean toward the latter."

"What kind of opportunity requires pushing outer disciples to their breaking point?"

"In cultivation sects? Usually either newly discovered resources or upcoming competitions. Both tend to favor those who can advance quickly."

Great. More pressure to accelerate my cultivation. At least the herbalism track offered a different approach than just brutally forcing my way through power levels.

A knock at my door interrupted my musings. I opened it to find Wei Lin, looking uncharacteristically serious.

"We need to talk," he said, inviting himself in. "About your cultivation method."

My heart skipped a beat. "What about it?"

He sat on my meditation cushion, expression grave. "I've been watching you. The way you process spiritual energy, the precision of your techniques... it's not normal. Even with secret family methods, no one is that consistent."

Warning: Secret at risk of exposure

Recommend:

- *Partial truth strategy*
- *Deflection tactics*
- *Preparation for contingencies*

"I told you, I just focus on the basics," I said carefully.

"Right. The basics." He pulled out a jade slip - a high-grade storage device for cultivation techniques. "Like how you perfectly replicated the energy circulation pattern of the Azure Peak Foundational Method without ever seeing the advanced diagrams?"

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"Really? Because I paid good money for these reference materials, and your energy flows match them exactly. Too exactly." He leaned forward. "So either you've got access to resources you're not sharing, or there's something very strange about your cultivation."

Well, this was bad.

Analyzing Options:

1. *Complete denial (Success probability: 17%)*
 2. *Partial truth (Success probability: 62%)*
 3. *Limited disclosure (Success probability: 83%)*
- Recommendation: Option 3 with carefully controlled information*

"If I tell you," I said slowly, "you have to swear to keep it secret. And I mean really swear - spiritual oath level serious."

Wei Lin's eyes widened. "That important?"

"That important."

He considered for a moment, then nodded. "Alright. I swear by my cultivation to keep your secret, so long as it doesn't threaten the sect."

Good enough. I took a deep breath.

"I have a... unique perception ability. I can see spiritual energy patterns very clearly, which lets me replicate them perfectly. It's why my techniques look so mechanical - I'm literally copying exactly what I see."

It wasn't entirely a lie. The System did give me perfect visualization of energy patterns. I just left out the part about where that ability came from.

Wei Lin whistled softly. "A spiritual perception talent? Those are incredibly rare. Why keep it secret?"

"Because people tend to get weird about talents they don't understand. And I'd rather not attract more attention than I already have."

He nodded slowly. "Fair enough. But... you know this could be incredibly valuable, right? My family has connections who would pay very well for access to someone with your abilities."

"Which is exactly why I'm keeping it quiet. I'd rather focus on steady progress than become someone's research project."

"Always with the basics," he said, but his tone was understanding now rather than mocking. "Well, your secret's safe with me. But in return..."

"Let me guess - you want me to look at some techniques for you?"

"Got it in one! I've got this new method I've been working on, but something's not quite right with the energy flow..."

I ended up spending the next two hours helping Wei Lin optimize his cultivation technique, using the System's analysis capabilities under the guise of my "talent." In return, he provided some genuinely useful insights into sect politics and power structures.

Relationship Update: Wei Lin

Trust Level: Increased

New Status: Confidant (Limited)

Note: Subject's merchant background provides useful resource connections

"Thanks Azure," I thought. "I definitely needed a relationship status update right now."

"Just maintaining optimal information organization!" the spirit replied cheerfully.

As I drifted off to sleep, I couldn't help wondering about Lin Mei's rumors. What could make a major sect like Azure Peak rush its disciples' development? And more importantly, would my unique advantages be enough to keep up with whatever was coming?

Daily Report:

Cultivation Progress: +15%

Resource Efficiency: 92%

New Skills Acquired: 3

Relationships Improved: 2

Overall Status: Advancing steadily despite increasing external pressure

"Very helpful, Azure," I muttered. "Wake me if anything tries to kill me in my sleep."

System Note: Initiating sleep mode...

Maintaining minimal alert status...

Processing daily experiences...

Good night, Master!

At least someone was optimistic about our chances.

The next few days fell into a new routine. Mornings were spent in Advanced Herbalism training, where I slowly built a reputation for reliable if oddly precise work. Afternoons alternated between tending my assigned plots and processing special orders for contribution points. Evenings were for cultivation practice and occasional technique analysis sessions with Wei Lin.

Through it all, Azure kept helping me optimize and improve, turning what could have been overwhelming challenges into manageable tasks. Having a systematic approach to cultivation might not have been the most orthodox method, but it was keeping me alive and advancing.

And in a sect where the standards seemed to rise every day, that was no small achievement.

"You know," Azure commented during one evening's cultivation session, "for someone who died tripping over their own shoelaces, you're adapting remarkably well to cultivation life."

"Was that a compliment or an insult?"

"Yes!"

I really needed to teach him about mutually exclusive categories.

But as I watched the Seed of Creation grow within my inner world under careful tending, I had to admit he had a point. Death and reincarnation aside, I was starting to find my place in this strange new world.

Now I just had to survive whatever crisis was making the sect push its disciples so hard. Because if there's one thing I'd learned about cultivation life, it's that there's always another crisis just around the corner.

At least this time I had a systematic approach to dealing with it.

End of Day Status: Optimistic But Cautious

Recommendation: Continue current trajectory while preparing for inevitable complications

Note: Master should really get some sleep now

"Good night, Azure."

Good night, Master! Try not to die again!

Sometimes I wondered if the System's sense of humor was a feature or a bug.

Probably both.