

# *History of Gardening*

## 1600-1850

**T**HE COLOR OF RIPE TOMATOES, the juicy tang of a peach, the green evenness of a lawn, the sweet scent of lilies and lilacs... Summer is the time for gardeners, and this exhibit celebrates the season with a selection of books on several different types of gardening.

From antiquity to the present, interest in gardens has generated a steady supply of books on plants, planting advice, and landscape design. This exhibit focuses on gardening in the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries, taking into account formal estate gardens, kitchen gardens, tree nurseries, and other plantings. Gardeners during this period ranged from aristocratic hobbyists and landowners to the more humbly born professional groundskeepers hired to manage estates both great and small. Hybridizers and botanists introduced exciting new varieties of fruits, vegetables, and flowers into gardens across the Europe and the Americas. In England, figures like “Capability” Brown and Humphry Repton made names for themselves as landscape architects on a grand scale, while botanists and nurserymen like William Curtis and Leonard Meager contributed to the gardener’s stock of practical information on specific plants.

From the proper way to prune fruit trees to the fashionable layout of a great estate, these books record how gardeners selected, planned, and cared for their plantings. Viewers are invited to read, enjoy, and imagine the colors, flavors, sights and smells of summers long past.

# *The Kitchen Garden*

**K**ITCHEN gardens were the heart of rural food production, where everything from the tenderest peaches and plums to the hardiest cabbage and kale were grown. In large country estates, the kitchen garden was often a sizeable tract of land surrounded by brick walls. By today's standards, all seventeenth- and eighteenth-century gardening was organic. The absence of pesticides, herbicides, Miracle-Grow and modern machinery meant that gardeners had to put a lot of energy and thought into making their plants thrive. Kitchen gardeners had to be experts in the care of a wide variety of food crops, and they developed a number of ingenious solutions to problems with climate, soils, and pests. These books offer planting instructions and advice for new and experienced gardeners dealing with a variety of challenges.

# *The Flower Garden*

FLOWERS have long been grown for cutting, for novelty, and for their useful properties. However, they were not always grown for their beauty. In the eighteenth century, William Mason, a poet and landscape gardener, revived interest in flower gardens and proposed growing them simply for the color and cheer they added to a view. His influential views ensured that flowers became an essential part of any formal garden.

The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries saw the introduction of a number of new flowering plants as botanists and nurserymen identified foreign species and developed hybrids. Although color publications such as *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* remained popular through the period, most gardeners learned about new flowers through descriptions or black and white plates. Botanical gardens such as the Royal Gardens at Kew became popular spots for the public to see exotic and colorful plants in person.

# *The Park*

**G**ARDEN design has changed dramatically from the formalized symmetry of Italian and French gardens to the informal plantings of today. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, English gardeners began to break away from the geometrical patterns called for in Renaissance knot gardens and Baroque parterres. Instead, the new garden style focused on creating bucolic, picturesque views that emulated landscape paintings. Emphasis was placed on the creation of broad, sweeping lawns, attractive groupings of trees, curving paths, and water features such as ponds and streams. Ornamental plantings were rigidly controlled and made to look as if they were natural features. Landscape architects during this period sought to shape the landscape without the outward appearance of control, creating “natural” scenery too perfect to exist in nature.

# *The Forest*

**D**UE to widespread deforestation in the seventeenth century, plantations of hardwood trees became an important cash crop for large landowners. In order to supply the Navy and national public works with a steady supply of good, straight timber, landowners hired foresters and nurserymen to oversee their plantings and make sure the trees were kept trimmed and in good health. Guides to forest and plantation management dealt not only with lumber trees, but also with the small ornamentals that would have been grown on the park-like pleasure grounds of a large estate.

Thomas Hitt (d. 1770). *A Treatise of Fruit-Trees*. London: Robinson and Roberts, 1768.

Although not much is known of Thomas Hitt's life, he was gardener to two members of the English aristocracy and published this treatise after a long career. This illustration shows a specific kitchen garden layout designed by Hitt. In the eighteenth century, a colder climate and short growing season made fresh fruit a scarce and valuable commodity. Because of this, fruit trees were trained to grow flat against hollow walls. In order to prevent frost damage, growers would light slow fires in the base of the walls during February and March, and the heat radiating through them would keep the trees from freezing. Hitt advised that specific plants be grown together to maximize the amounts of light and heat they received.

Samuel Fullmer. *Young Gardener's Best Companion for the Thorough Practical Management of the Pleasure Ground and Flower Garden*. London: Seatcherd and Whitaker, 1781.

As a nurseryman in Chelsea, Samuel Fullmer would have been an expert on the care of a wide variety of plants. This book is geared toward the professional gardener hired by a wealthy estate and explains how to care for and manage extensive grounds. Fullmer's lists of plants contain recommendations for flower gardens and pleasure grounds on large estates. Many remain popular with gardeners today.

John Abercrombie (1726-1806). *The Complete Kitchen Gardener and Hot-Bed Forcer*. London: J. Stockdale, 1789.

The son of a market gardener, John Abercrombie received all his knowledge through practical experience. Abercrombie wrote prolifically and published books on everything from fruit trees to mushrooms, and his manuals became the standard garden references of the eighteenth century. In this book, Abercrombie gives detailed growing instructions for each type of plant commonly found in the English kitchen garden. The plants include vegetables, fruits, herbs, and flowers, and are arranged alphabetically.

Hot beds, as Abercrombie called them, were beds of mounded manure covered with wooden frames that could be closed at night against frost. Since the manure would give off heat naturally, the beds could be used to force early crops of vegetables such as salad leaves, cucumbers, melons, "capsicums" (bell peppers), and "love-apples" (tomatoes).

Batty Langley (1696-1751). *Pomona; or, The Fruit Garden Illustrated*. London: G. Strahan, 1729.

Batty Langley was an architect and eccentric who wrote extensively on garden design and architecture. He is best known for his *New Principles of Gardening* (1728), in which he lays out plans for elaborate and sometimes chaotic estates featuring mazes, “wilderness” areas, contrived thickets and grand avenues. In *Pomona*, he advocates the use of fruit trees in the landscape, as he claims that they are attractive as well as practical. Of the cherries in this illustration, Langley advises:

*“Cherries are fit to be gather’d when they are become a very deep black... They are best being eaten from the Trees, after a Shower of Rain; but most commonly out of Spring Water after Dinner. The best Time to gather them is the Morning, when the Crudities of the Dew are evaporated, before the Heat of the Day comes on.”*

C. M. Hovey. *The Fruits of America*. Boston: Little, Brown: 1856.

A nurseryman and seed merchant, Charles Hovey maintained a lifelong interest in fruit culture, particularly that of pears, apples, plums and grapes and developed a cultivar of strawberry that is considered the cornerstone of American strawberry production. Also a successful journalist, he served as editor of two prominent American gardening journals during the mid-nineteenth century. His *Fruits of America* features chromolithographs of “the choicest varieties cultivated in the United States”, along with a silhouette of the tree shape of each fruit and notes on its culture. Of the Elizabeth Pear, developed by Dr. Van Mons of Louvain, Hovey writes, “the Elizabeth is a very fine early pear; remarkably beautiful, with a deep yellow skin and a bright red cheek,” and its flavor is “sugary, rich, and pleasantly perfumed.”

William Curtis (1746-1799), and others. *Curtis's Botanical Magazine*. London: Academic Press, 1787-present.

An apothecary and plant enthusiast, William Curtis started this botanical magazine in 1787 and edited the first several issues. The magazine featured hand-colored plant illustrations by prominent botanical artists and detailed but readable text explaining the plants' growing habits, life cycle, and uses. Its reasonable price and beautiful color plates made it an immediate popular success, and the magazine has been published continuously ever since. Now published by Kew Gardens, the magazine finally converted over to photographic reproductions instead of hand-colored plates in 1948 due to labor costs.

These two images feature American wildflowers recently introduced to Europe by explorers and botanists. Lupines grow in mountainous regions throughout North America, while "American Cowslip" is commonly known in the United States as Shooting Star, and is a native Missouri wildflower.

Crispijn van de Passe (d. 1670). *Hortus Floridus* (The Flower Garden). Arnheimij: Ioannem Ianssonium, 1614.

Crispijn van de Passe was a member of a famous family of Dutch engravers and went on to have a distinguished career as an artist and professor. *Hortus Floridus* belongs to a genre of books called florilegia, or books of flowers. Unlike earlier botanical works, florilegia do not expound on the medicinal or culinary uses of plants but instead simply provide images and descriptive text. Van de Passe's work is distinguished from other seventeenth-century examples in that it illustrates the plants naturalistically, in many cases with botanical accuracy. In *Hortus Floridus* the flowers are arranged by seasons, and special attention is given to tulips, as the book was printed at the height of the tulip craze. This illustration provides a glimpse of a seventeenth-century parterre, a flower garden laid out to form a regular ornamental pattern.

Leonard Meager (1624-1704). *The English Gardener; or, A Sure Guide to Young Planters and Gardeners*. London: P. Parker, 1670.

Meager's book on gardening was popular during the late seventeenth century and into the eighteenth, going through several early editions. Although his work provides detail about early gardening and agricultural practices, much of the information he supplies is based on long-standing local lore and may not have actually been practiced during his lifetime. The pages at the back of the book contain plans for several ornamental parterres, in which plants would be placed in beds to form geometric and symbolic patterns. This style of gardening was at its height of popularity during the late sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, prior to the fashion for landscape gardening that developed in the eighteenth century.

Humphry Repton (1752-1818). *Observations on the theory and practice of landscape gardening*. London: T. Bensley for J. Taylor, 1803.

Humphry Repton (1752-1818). *Fragments on the Theory and Practice of Landscape Gardening*. London: T. Bensley for J. Taylor, 1816.

After failed experiments in business, Humphry Repton used his artistic talents to become England's first self-proclaimed "landscape gardener," a term he coined himself. Following in the footsteps of the famous Lancelot "Capability" Brown, Repton designed the park-like gardens that became typical of English country houses in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. He reintroduced formal elements such as balustrades, trellises, and flower gardens, and also became known for themed and novelty gardens. While Brown was known for large-scale overhauls of entire estates, Repton became famous for his fine-tuning and attention to detail.

When Repton designed a garden for a client, he usually presented them with an illustrated manuscript of his plans bound in red morocco. These "Red Books" and their watercolor illustrations became the basis for the text and engravings in his *Observations* and *Fragments*. The illustrations show the current landscape before its redesign, and an overlay demonstrates how it would look after modification

Thomas Whately (d. 1772). *Observations on Modern Gardening*. London: T. Payne, 1771.

Whately's *Observations on Modern Gardening* was among the first comprehensive works on the theory and practice of English landscape gardening. Reprinted and translated many times, the book provided a starting point for the gardener or landowner who desired a picturesque landscape. In fact, Whately writes:

*"Gardening, in the perfection to which it has been lately brought in England, is entitled to a place of considerable rank among the liberal arts. It is as superior to [landscape] painting, as a reality is to a representation..."*

John Evelyn (1620-1706). *Silva, or, A Discourse of Forest-Trees*. London: J. Walthoe, 1729.

In *Silva*, the writer, thinker and aristocrat John Evelyn argues for the renewal of England's forests, which suffered badly during the Civil Wars and interregnum. By instituting carefully planned and maintained plantings, Evelyn proposed that a reliable stock of timber could be grown for use by the navy and public works. However, Evelyn also celebrates the spiritual and historical significance of the forest, expressing an appreciation for nature that went beyond contemporary forestry.

Uvedale Price (1747-1849). *Essays on the Picturesque, as Compared with the Sublime and the Beautiful*. London: J. Mawman, 1810.

Uvedale Price was one of the major theoretical contributors to the picturesque school of English landscape design and disagreed with Repton over his insistence on smoothness and beauty in landscape design. According to Price,

*"Beauty and picturesqueness are indeed evidently founded on very opposite qualities; the one on smoothness, the other on roughness; the one on gradual, the other on sudden variation; the one on ideas of youth and freshness, the other on those of age, and even of decay."*

Price's ideal landscape contained real or contrived ruins, natural ponds and marshes, and contrasts between wild and cultivated areas.

Samuel Hayes. *A Practical Treatise on Planting, and the Management of Woods and Coppices*. Dublin: Wm. Sleater, 1794.

Not much is known about Samuel Hayes, but he was one of the first authors to deal with the subject of trees to be planted in rural Ireland. This book includes a chapter on specific outstanding specimens to be found in the country.

Walter Nicol (d. 1811). *The Planter's Kalendar; or, The Nurseryman and Forester's Guide in the Operations of the Nursery, the Forest and the Grove*. Edinburgh: D. Willison for A. Constable, 1812.

Walter Nicol was a prominent landscaper who designed the grounds of two large Scottish estates and spent most of his career as the head gardener for an English estate in Seyfolk. He returned to Scotland in 1797 and published several other garden books, including works on greenhouses, forestry, and horticulture. This book focuses on plantations of trees grown for timber and discusses the duties of tending the trees for each month of the year. In the preface, Nicol states, "the Kalendar has this particular advantage over every other book, that it exhibits, at a glance, the business or duty of the Gardener at every moment."

This illustration features the types of tools Nicol advised every tree planter and nurseryman to have. The mouse trap features a bait stick that supports a slate or heavy brick designed to fall when the bait is taken. Nicol advises, "The best bait is oatmeal made into dough by butter, and tied on the bait-stick with a little flax: after being tied on, it will be of use to burn the bait a little, to make it smell."

John Aikin (1747-1822). *The Woodland Companion; or, A Brief Description of British Trees*. London: J. Johnson, 1802.

John Aikin was an English doctor and writer and the brother of poet Anna Laetitia Barbauld. Although most of his writings are literary or political in nature, he also wrote this field guide to British trees. The book includes growing information as well as plates of leaves, bark, and seeds to help the reader identify wild trees in his or her own forests. This plate features one of the national trees of England, the oak.

Moses Cook. *The Manner of Raising, Ordering and Improving Forest-Trees*. London: E. Bell, 1724.

Moses Cook was gardener to Lord Essex and laid out a woodland garden at his estate at Cassiobury Park in Herefordshire, England, in the late seventeenth century. The original edition of this book was published in 1676, making it a very early treatise on garden design and forestry. It was reprinted many times and became a popular forestry manual. Cook gives various formulas to estimate the amount of timber a forest will produce, and also offers advice on when to fell trees:

*"December and January is the best time to fell timber, but the oak in April; if you would have the bark, when the moon is decreasing and the wind not east."*

James Lee (1715-1795). *An Introduction to Botany*. London: J. and R. Tonson, 1760.

James Lee was the gardener at Syon House and a partner in a nursery business in Hammersmith. This book is a translation of Carolus Linnaeus' ideas about the classification of plants based on their reproductive structures. Lee actively collected plants from other parts of the world, and he corresponded with Linnaeus about botany. The engraved plates in this book help to clarify the Linnaean system of classification as they make clear the various parts of the plants and flowers.

Philip Miller (1691-1771). *The Gardener's and Botanist's Dictionary*. London: C. Rivington, 1807.

Philip Miller was the son of a gardener and was trained as a botanist and horticulturalist. He became Chief Gardener at the Chelsea Physic Garden in 1721, and the first edition of his *Gardener's Dictionary* was published in 1731. This work became the standard reference on gardening through the rest of the eighteenth century and was translated and updated many times. Miller is responsible for introducing over 200 species of foreign plants to England, and also sent the first cotton seeds to the American South.

William Withering (1741-1799). *An Arrangement of British Plants According to the Latest Improvements of the Linnaean System*. Birmingham: M. Swinney, 1796.

William Withering was a botanist and physician and is credited with being the first to recognize the medicinal properties of digitalis, or foxglove. This four-volume set is a third edition of his most important work, which was unique for focusing on plants native to Great Britain. It is interesting to note that this book was heavily used by an amateur botanist or gardener; it contains pressed leaves and many marginal notations such as this one, next to *Vaccinium*: "Found on the east side of Gavel in flower on the 27<sup>th</sup> of June, 1804."