

Our Favorite Garden Books

The Secret Life of a Garden

Stephen Dalton with Bernardine Shirley Smith (Overlook Press, Woodstock, NY, 1992, ISBN 0-87951-465-5)

For those of you who appreciate fine photography in your reading material, with this book you hit the jackpot! The 149 full-color photographs show Mother Nature at her best. Most of the photos are close-up, a view we don't normally see in our day-to-day living; giving you a different perspective of a garden. After reading this book, I wanted to immediately go out and investigate my yard a little more closely to see if I could find all the interesting birds, bees, and other critters mentioned.

The book is divided into three sections: morning, midday, and evening. The morning section talks about mammals and birds being most active in the garden at this time and how they go about their daily business of foraging, washing, nesting, etc. The midday section states that those animals that were up and about in the morning are now taking their "siesta", leaving space in the garden for some of the other occupants to feed. Fish, amphibians and reptiles, all of which are directly dependent on heat energy from the sun to become active, come out to eat at this time. This is also the time that bees, butterflies, and hummingbirds are most active. The evening section speaks to the fact that the setting of the sun controls light intensity and temperature, and brings about changes in humidity. Plants undergo changes at night and bats and owls come out to feed.

Do you know where your butterflies hibernate over winter, or what the "dew point" is? These and many more interesting topics, rarely spoken of in other garden books, are discussed here.

If you are a person who enjoys knowing how things work and why, you will most definitely enjoy this book.

[Reviewed by DJ Miles]

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Winter Gardening in the Maritime Northwest: Cool Season Crops for the Year-Round Gardener

Binda Colebrook (Sasquatch Books, Seattle, WA, 1998, ISBN 1570611629)

To Binda, My Mentor ...

Thank you, Binda Colebrook, for focusing an entire book on a topic that I find intriguing: growing crops to be harvested between October and May in the maritime Northwest. You captured my attention by suggesting that the nutrients which might be washed down into the subsoil by winter rains can be kept in the topsoil. How? By the root activity of overwintering vegetables or green manures. For some reason, I've never been willing to abandon

the vegetable garden after harvesting the winter squash and composting the remains of all the summer bounty, so I was ready for your book!

I bought a copy of the second edition of your book, WINTER GARDENING in the Maritime Northwest, for \$6.29 when the number of gardening books on my shelf was still a single digit. That same revered copy still occupies an important place in a much larger collection. (I know, I should buy the third - 1998 - edition. I *did* check it out from the library and take a few notes...)

With your guidance, leeks and kale were my first big successes, and I still love to have them in the garden all winter. Sometimes I get too busy starting tomatoes and peppers and eggplants in the spring and fail to get the leeks going, but I seldom fail to get kale sown in July or August. Pages 28 and 29 have a permanent bookmark, so that I can quickly check to see which winter crops you recommend sowing in a given month.

Reading your advice is as easy as talking over the fence with a helpful gardening neighbor.

"Keep your seed packets in an alphabetical file...Keep a copy of sowing dates on your refrigerator..."

"Watch the weather...keep records..."

"...use pansy plants instead of boards; more aesthetic! Slugs love the flowers and hide in great numbers under the plants. I place them in herb beds and other strategic sites around the garden."

"...it takes some time and a lot of work to develop garden patterns which work well in a given site. So don't despair, or feel guilty, or inadequate if you have some problems in your garden."

(In regard to cloches and cold frames) "Ventilation is far more important than weather tightness in a maritime climate."

"Spinach germinates well in cold soil, so try to sow in a rainy break. If none is forthcoming, sow in the afternoon and keep well misted as with lettuce."

"I assume that the first principle of gardening is that it is an art devoted to the feeding of a family by that family, and that, while you may or may not appreciate the aesthetics or routines of another's garden, if it feeds them, then how it looks hardly matters."

Of course, the book isn't just a lot of neighborly suggestions. You address wise siting of the winter garden, pest control, organic gardening methods, and using cold frames and cloches. A third of the book is devoted to an examination of each of the vegetables that are candidates for a winter garden.

The neighbor with whom one chats "over the fence" seldom backs up advice with references and resources the way you do, and I've really appreciated that, Binda. Seed companies and suppliers, organizations to join and books to read - you thought of it all, and it has helped.

How could I garden without this book? I couldn't.

(The second edition, which may be found in used book stores, was published by Maritime Publications, Everson, Washington, in 1984.)

[Reviewed by Fran Luxford]

A Clearing in the Distance

Witold Rybczynski (Scribner, New York, NY, 1999, ISBN 0-684-82463-9)

This is the story of Frederick Law Olmsted (1822 - 1903). Olmsted was a landscape architect on a grand scale before that was even known as a profession. He foresaw the need for national parks and that urban parks are essential to civilized life in a city. He described one of his largest projects as follows: "... I have all my life been considering distant effects and always sacrificing immediate success and applause to that of the future. We determined to think of no results to be realized in less than forty years."

Some of his stunning landscapes include New York's Central Park, California's Stanford University campus, Illinois's Riverside community, and Louisville's park system. Along with his stepson, John Charles Olmsted, he designed landscapes here in the northwest, including the Lewis and Clark Exposition in Portland (1903), Seattle Parks (1901-1930), University of Washington in Seattle (1902-1920), and Spokane Parks (1906-1908).

Olmsted had diverse talents other than landscape design. He cofounded *The Nation* magazine, wrote about the South and was an early voice against slavery, explored and wrote about the Texas frontier, managed California's largest gold mine, and served as general secretary to the US Sanitary Commission (precursor of the Red Cross) during the Civil War. Because of his many roles, this book also provides a good view of nineteenth century American history.

An achieved structural architect, Daniel Burnham, who worked with Olmsted had this tribute to him: "An artist, he paints with lakes and wooded slopes; with lawns and banks and forest-covered hills; with mountainsides and ocean views." After reading *A Clearing in the Distance*, I will never again be able to stroll through a public park without appreciating the artistry, dedication, and physical legacy of people like Frederick Law Olmsted.

[Reviewed by Karen Palmer]