

Annotated Bibliography of Gardening Books Read in 2017

As I began to annotate the gardening books read in 2017, it was immediately evident I had read a far lower number than the 29 annotated for the 2016 bibliography. I had a long period stretching from February through October when I was so occupied with gardening or traveling or recovering from a case of vertigo that my garden reading was severely curtailed. Nevertheless, I did have a productive reading sprint at the end of the year, and I'm pleased that the books on my list consistently proved to be both enjoyable and informative.

My annotations are far more detailed than they should be, but I'm writing primarily for myself, and in some cases I wanted to retain a robust sampling of what I gathered from a text. I also found myself writing about the reasons why I had read several of the books (evident, for example, in my review of Paul Tukey's book on lawn care). In my final revisions, I deleted a few of those passages, but this bibliography does slip into a recurrent pattern where the focus is more on the immediate concerns of the gardener than the contents of the book. Because these annotations for 20 books run to almost 20 pages, they are submitted as a separate pdf attachment. ~Bob Marrs

■ **Campbell, Susan.** *Cottesbrooke: An English Garden.* Century Hutchinson, 1987. Although I eventually became a fan of Downton Abbey, one inexcusable oversight in the TV series was that Julian Fellowes never showed us the Abbey's kitchen gardens nor portrayed any gardeners. I vaguely recall one scene when a gardener delivered flowers to the Abbey, but otherwise the gardens remained invisible. Susan Campbell's book attempts to fill in that gap. Her challenge was that in the early 1980s, when the research for this book was initiated, large kitchen gardens for the homes of the British aristocracy had completely disappeared. At least Susan Campbell thought they were all gone until the spring of 1984 when she discovered that a traditional garden still existed at Cottesbrooke Hall in the East Midlands. To be a traditional kitchen garden, it would need to be enclosed by high walls, with an orchard nearby. It would have hothouses capable of providing fresh fruit (e.g., figs, grapes, peaches) and fresh vegetables throughout the year, and ornamental plants and flowers for decoration of the home. The garden would need potting sheds and large storage facilities. Gardens such as these were found throughout England until the Second World War, but by the 1970s they had all disappeared –with this one exception.

The book provides a month-by-month portrait of a garden year (October 1984 to October 1985). We meet Doug (the head gardener) and his six staff. We are given some history of the kitchen garden, which dates back to at least 1628, and extensive information concerning the vegetables, fruits, and flowers they grow. We observe their techniques for starting seeds; sowing, growing, harvesting and storing their produce (particularly interesting is the construction of the potato "clamp" for storing potatoes); transporting produce (for example, sending melons to Scotland nestled in runner beans for protection); dealing with the erratic British climate (drought followed by non-stop rain and unusual stretches of cold weather). We observe the staff quietly and professionally cope with the expectations and demands of the lady of the manor (who is never described in any detail; the reader suspects she lives in a separate world and has minimal contact with the garden or its staff). The book also includes many attractive line drawings by the author and over thirty full-page color photos of the garden and

gardeners. This was a delightful book to read and a marvelous tribute to the skill and dedication of the staff who have enabled this kitchen garden to survive.

■ **Cooper, Thomas C. *Odd Lost: Season Notes of a City Gardener*. Henry Holt, 1995.** These pieces are from a monthly column when Cooper was editor of *Horticulture* magazine. Organized according to the months of the year, the 3-5 paragraph essays typically reflect on gardening issues relevant for the season. Although I never compared the book versions with their first appearance, the occasional repetition of language and themes suggests these have not been significantly revised. Cooper is a skilled writer with a genial persona, perfect for inviting readers into a new issue. Although most of his topics are treated rather superficially, Cooper is adept at reflecting on the emotional significance of small events, whether it be the arrival of seed catalogs in January or the value of a pocketknife. And he certainly has a way with words, adeptly adopting amusing analogies. Here are a few of my favorite passages:

- “The [seed] catalogs themselves arrive without fanfare; one day a single copy appears on the vestibule floor. However, like a snowstorm whose first flakes amount to nothing but build slowly to a thick blanket, the catalogs keep coming, sometimes three or four in a day. . . . I don’t read the catalogs as much as I lay siege to them. Armed with pens, pencils, Post-its, and garden notebooks from past years, I go through them time and again. As items catch my attention, I turn down the corner of the page With each pass I note new things worth having and reject things from earlier rounds. Any page might have some plants checked in pencil, others circled in pen. There are slashes through some entries, Xs on others. Finally, there are Post-its to signal significant possibilities. The result of all this looks more like a game of tic-tac-toe than a rational decision process.” (p. 2)
- “Despite three school years spent mired in Latin textbooks and another two sorting out French, I still stumble over a good many plant names. Certain of the finest old roses, for instance, bear names that confound me. I doubt that I will ever grow them, as it’s difficult to get along with plants whose names you can’t pronounce.” (p. 117)
- “If you insist on knowing the full and correct names of every plant in your garden and you have a memory like mine, you will need labels. Originally I stuck in labels all over the place. But the frost and the squirrels upended many of them, and the garden took on the look of a rundown cemetery. As I am growing plants, not labels, I decided to note the plants and their positions in my garden diary and throw out the labels. I think the place looks better for the change, though I may not remember the exact name of a cultivar, much less whether it needs an umlaut or an *accent aigu*. I may only be able to tell offhand that the shrub by the front of the garden is a cotoneaster. That is co-TONE-ee-aster, not COTTON-easter.” (p. 119)
- “The owner of a new garden probably ought to spend his first year with his hands tied behind his back and his tools locked away in the cellar. The savings in plants and time would be remarkable. Gardeners know this, but if not restrained, they forget all good sense at the sight of new soil.” (p. 133)
- “The plants in my containers give the impression that they don’t quite trust each other. It reminds me of the atmosphere at a high-school dance, the uncomfortable clusters of boys and girls dotting the floor at safe distances from one another.” (p. 142)
- “In many ways the excitement and activity of autumn resemble the wild days of spring. But there is a difference: The lessons of summer are still fresh in the gardener’s mind, giving him a

sense of realism with which to tackle the future. Fall is spring with wisdom." (p. 171)

■ **Cooper, Thomas C., Editor.** *The Roots of My Obsession: Thirty Great Gardeners Reveal Why They Garden.* Timber Press, n.d. I first saw this anthology of 30 gardener essays while rummaging through the garden books in Foyle's Book Store in London. Shortly after returning to the U.S., I sent an order to Amazon for several books I had seen in England and this was one of them. About half of the authors (15 male, 15 female) I had previously known, having read their books or articles in gardening journals: Tony Avent, Rosalind Creasy, William Cullina, Rick Darke, Page Dickey, Hellen Dillon, Ken Druse, Sydney Eddison, Fergus Garrett, Daniel J. Hinkley, Penelope Hobhouse, Panayoti Kelaidis, Anna Pavord, Anne Raver, Roger Swain, and Douglas Tallamy. As it turned out, the quality of the submissions was rather uneven—as one might expect from this kind of collection—but several of these 4-8 page essays stimulated my own reflections on the reasons why I spend so many hours either gardening or thinking about gardens. Here are a few passages that received marginal stars in my copy:

- "January 2. . . . I have been occupying myself with ordering plants for the garden—an activity that brings me considerable distraction and satisfaction. I have also been catching up on labeling the 15,000-odd images I took this year. It is a fitting pastime for an inmate, spending hours gazing at friends and family. Happy times. For fun I just looked at images I took late last July when the lilies, hydrangeas, and daisies were all at their peak and tried to put myself back into the frame of mind I was in when I wrote the entry above. It is funny because although I remember it like I remember the plants themselves, I cannot for the life of me recapture that lazy, self-satisfied feeling of mid-summer. It is as if I am gazing on a painting of a moment done by someone else. I see it, I can relate to it, but I cannot live it. ~William Cullina, "Spring Fever" (Note that Cullina is the author of *Understanding Perennials*, another book reviewed in this year's bibliography.)
- "My garden is my time machine. Unlike a clock telling the passing time with relentless precision, the garden is a complex instrument capable of marking time and also of influencing the apparent passage of time. Just as experiencing the landscape by bicycle reveals more than travel by car, and walking reveals more than bicycling, simply being in one's garden provides an opportunity to expand moments into minutes or incidental events into catalysts for contemplation. . . . I welcome any device which motivates me to slow down." ~Rick Darke, "My Time Machine"
- On similarities between her new life as a gardener and her former life as a drama teacher and set designer: "It occurred to me that the landscape was a stage, and that a garden could function as a set with entrances, exits, and traffic patterns, a framework for action and drama." ~Sydney Eddison, "Pentimento"
- "You plant the seed, you nurture it, it nurtures you. That's it. That's everything. The deepest mystery, the most irresistible thrill, just there, outside your door." ~Susan Heeger, "Homegrown"
- "I like a slight sense of order . . . for it is this that separates gardens from what lies over the wall. Order does not necessarily infer [imply?] tidiness or lack of weeds. It implies a comfortableness with the way that things are disposed around you, a natural inevitability in the lines that the paths take, a design that is not so much imposed on as released from the site." ~Anna Pavord, "Value Added"

- “It is no wonder so much of gardening is done on one’s knees: the practice of horticulture is a wildly humbling way to pass the days on Earth.” ~Margaret Roach, “Saving Graces”
- “In the workaday world, distractions are a nuisance—focus is paramount—but in the garden, every distraction is a delight.” ~Marty Ross, “Right This Way”
- “Gardening produces something I can reflect on, sometimes with satisfaction, sometimes with frustration, but always there is something by which to measure progress. I garden for the physical joy of it, for the pleasure of the rhythms of the process. I dance for the same reason. Both gardening and dancing are physical reactions and interpretations. In dancing I make music personal; in gardening I make my surroundings personal. I may not be great at either; but through the process I experience myself. I have a sense of self and creative expression. But dance, perhaps fortunately in my case, is a fleeting manifestation, while gardening leaves an observable trail to revisit.” ~Claire Sawyers, “Sightings”
- “‘Garden’ is a verb, not a noun. A garden is not a thing you can buy or own or ever possibly finish. No, ‘garden’ is something you do.” ~Amy Stewart
- “Most people garden because they love plants, but I garden because I love animals. . . . I garden the way I garden—with a heavy bias toward plants that have been part of local food webs for millennia—because that is the only way the natural world I love is able to thrive in our yard. When we moved to our property—part of an abandoned hay field—it was overrun with invasive Asian plants. I knew that in order to see local animals, we would have to restore their habitat and the food webs that sustain them. Hence, our use of plants that share the sun’s energy with other creatures.” ~Douglas W. Tallamy, “The Web”

■ **Cullina, William. *Understanding Perennials: A New Look at an Old Frontier*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2009.** Cullina is the plant and garden curator of the Coastal Maine Botanical Gardens and the author of previous books on orchids, wildflowers, native trees, shrubs, vines, ferns, moss, and grasses. This book is a marvelous compendium of botanical information mixed with personal insights into the structures and physiology of perennials. Cullina is a skilled writer who expertly explains technical terms—often with amusing analogies—and enables a reader to see why it’s useful to understand why plants behave the way they do. The text is complemented by many excellent close-up photos of flowers and parts of flowers, most of them shot by Cullina with his Nikon camera. Neatly organized into chapters, the book examines such topics as the definition of a perennial (and such fundamental terms as bulbs, corms, tubers, rhizomes); the structure and physiology of roots, leaves, stems, flowers, and seeds; the value of accurate, scientific nomenclature; techniques of propagation; the benefits of developing an ecological perspective concerning perennials; and basic information on pests and diseases (and why one’s goal should not be a garden free of all pests and diseases). Here’s a short sample of ten passages that were—at least for me—particularly insightful:

- Here Cullina attempts to explain the nature of soil (and its constituents parts of sand, silt, clay, and organic debris): “Imagine a 10 by 10 by 10 foot room stuffed to the ceiling with upholstered furniture. Because all those sofas, ottomans, recliners, and loveseats are big and angular, there is quite a bit of free space in and around each unit no matter how carefully you pack them. In fact, a small child could probably squeeze through the spaces to get from one side to the other if a candy reward were involved. Now picture the room filled with toaster ovens of various makes. Because the ovens are smaller and all roughly the same size, the spaces between

them are smaller and impossible for a person to navigate, though a spider or maybe even a mouse could do it. Finally, fill the room with stack upon stack of computer paper. Now, there is very little wasted space in what is quite nearly a solid 1,000 cubic feet of paper. Sand, silt, and clay particles behave much the way in the soil. Sand particles are large and irregular enough that the large pore spaces between them coalesce into channels that allow water to percolate through very quickly. . . . The large pores are difficult for water to fill even temporarily, so the soil does not hold much moisture but instead facilitates rapid gas exchange, bringing in the oxygen roots need and allowing out the carbon dioxide before they suffocate. Silt particles, like the room full of toasters, have smaller channels so they drain more slowly, holding much more water and less air. Still, the gaps between them are such that some air can move in and out, except when the soil is completely saturated with water after rain, snow melt, or flood. Clay particles stack up like sheets of paper, so the pore space is very limited and the pores that are present are tiny.” (pp. 191-2)

- “Bulb-eating rodents have a more difficult time smelling and excavating deep bulbs, so most wild bulbs grow surprisingly deep in the earth. Even tiny trout lily or crocus bulbs are often six to eight inches below the surface, and large lilies may settle a foot or more down. If your bulbs are dormant and your soil is not heavy, wet clay . . . do not be afraid to set them at least six inches deep. I have even planted larger lily bulbs 12 inches deep in an area frequently ravaged by voles, and these have survived beautifully because the critters give up when they get only half that deep. Deep planting also shelters tender bulbs from the worst of the cold. As a rule, temperatures a foot deep in the ground are 10 to even 20 degrees F warmer than they are just below the surface.” (p. 17)

- “Bulbs, corms, and tubers are ephemeral yet precious, as if their little stores of energy resonate with our instinct to hoard and save. Clumping species are neat, reliable, and cautious—their knuckled core the perennial equivalent of a wizened old oak’s trunk. Wildly rhizomatous species are inquisitive, carefree, but perhaps a bit higher maintenance, like that happy-go-lucky younger brother you are always bailing out of jail. These characteristics certainly set the tone for a garden, and we can use different plants and different patterns to set the mood. In a very real sense, a bulb garden’s fleeting show encourages us to appreciate the moment. A garden full of rhizomatous perennials has a sort of carefree, nature-gone-wild exuberance, while one filled with clumping species is more formal and rhythmic.” (p. 25)

- “Just as we have a bias toward things that move, we have a bias for things above the ground. Life under the soil is as mysterious to me as life in the ocean, and in many ways just as far out of reach. I can turn over the earth and peer into the teeming clod my shovel has dislodged, but it tells me only slightly more about life underground than the contents of a fishing net tells me about life underwater. At least I can don scuba gear and visit the watery realm for an hour or so, but I would need a wizard to shrink me to the size of a period at the end of this sentence before I could hope to dive in to the duff just under my feet. The world under the soil is a kingdom in miniature filled with tiny creatures deftly navigating the microscopic caves, channels, and crevices between tiny particles, roots, and stones. It is a tremendously complex, three-dimensional environment akin to a limitless castle with countless rooms and myriad floors on which life’s subterranean microdramas progress unseen by all of us stomping around on the roof.” (p. 26)

- “A square yard of healthy forest soil might contain as many as 1,000 species of invertebrates,

roots from 50 species of plants, 5,000 species of bacteria, 25 species of mites, 100 different insects, 40 different nematodes, and 300 species of fungi—and the list goes on (in contrast, the soil from a chemically addicted suburban lawn probably has only about one-tenth this diversity). That is perhaps a 10-fold increase in biodiversity over the square yard just above the soil surface. You would have to go to a rich, tropical rainforest to find life in this abundance and density aboveground. The main reason for this amazing diversity is that life is more stable in the soil than it is aboveground because temperatures underground vary much less than air temperatures, and water is much more plentiful and reliably available. Furthermore, all those little bits of rock and organic debris provide a highly varied landscape for species to colonize.” (p. 27)

- “Nectar, excess pollen, and sugary fruits are produced by the plant to attract birds and the bees for pollination and seed dispersal, and sugars, vitamins, and amino acids are exuded by roots to nourish fungi and bacteria that in turn digest organic materials for the plant while also protecting the roots from disease. It is estimated that between 15 and 50 percent of the sun energy captured through photosynthesis by the plant is purposely exuded into the rhizosphere (the hair-thin zone just outside the root) to nurture microorganisms that in turn benefit the plant (for comparison, nectar secretion by flowers has been estimated to use only 2 to 20 percent of the plant’s energy over the course of a year). It was a revelation to me that *up to half the plant’s energy* is simply leached out into the soil—like pouring sugar water into a pitcher with a hole in the bottom. I have always known that the soil flora and fauna depend in large part on plants for their sustenance. . . . but the notion that plants actively pump food into the zone around their roots is very odd indeed. Unlike the passive recycling of death and decay, exudation is an active process in which the plant lures beneficial organisms to its roots, cultivates them, and reaps the rewards.” (pp. 40-41)

- “Most hairs, glands, or glandular hairs [on leaves] are designed to discourage herbivory. You can imagine how unpalatable a fuzzy leaf would be, so not surprisingly, all leafy grasses we consume are hairless. Glandular hairs contain chemicals that are either foul smelling, irritating, or poisonous. The chemicals are released when the leaf is damaged and the shaft of the gland is broken. Leaves are certainly tempting targets for all manner of herbivores, but they are not powerless to resist.” (p. 60)

- “It is amazing and humbling to realize that plants can communicate with other plants, as well as insects, using pheromones such as methyl salicylate. I liken these aerosol warnings to burglar alarms set off by a plant to alert neighbors to the danger and call the police to apprehend the suspect. It also raises the possibility that a garden collection of plants from all over the world may be the horticultural equivalent of a tower of Babel, where plants cannot communicate with each other or the beneficial insects they evolved with and are instead prey to other insects that are deaf to their chemical cries. It is no wonder we spend so much of our garden time fighting fires, killing intruders, settling border disputes, and attending funerals.” (p. 64)

- “Perennial plants go through three stages of winter dormancy: acclimation, midwinter hardiness, and deacclimation. During the summer, even very winter-hardy species that can withstand -50 degrees F in January may be killed by just a touch of frost. Decreasing day length and then decreasing temperatures (especially night temperatures) spur the production of ABA [abscisic acid] and ethylene to ready the perennial for winter. Stem growth slows and carbohydrates are redirected to roots as leaves begin to wither. Mature tissues are more

resistant to frost than young, tender ones, so this is a good first step. Excessive fertilization and watering in late summer raises auxin levels that counteract the effects of the dormancy hormones and delay the onset of early acclimation, making your perennials more vulnerable to early frosts as well as more extreme cold further on. During early acclimation, the plants can weather light frosts, and these light frosts as well as temperatures below 40 degrees F trigger further cold tolerance to develop. In this later stage of acclimation, temperatures just above freezing, rather than day length, are the important trigger. Ice is of course the big danger to plant cells. Since water expands when it freezes, ice crystals can blow cells apart. Cold-mediated increases in ABA induce plant cells to lose some water and increase concentrations of sugars and other cryoprotectant proteins and alcohols. Like antifreeze in your car, these lower the freezing point of water to 20 degrees F or even 10 degrees F. This corresponds to USDA hardiness zones 8 and 7, and many perennials are hardy to these temperatures. After completing this acclimation process, they are able to withstand hard freezes without harm. If we experience a period of cold in fall followed by two to four weeks of unseasonably warm temperatures, plants can actually lose some of their cold tolerance.” (p. 91)

- “It appears likely that during the earlier years of floral evolution, pollen was the primary reward for the visitor. When compared with seeds, the energy investment a plant sinks into pollen is relatively low, so each flower can afford to offer some as an incentive. It is a protein-rich foodstuff that bees and other insects depend on to nurture their bodies or those of their young. However, insects cannot live by protein alone, so plants also produce sugary nectar to lure them in.” (p. 115)

- “In the United States, we have developed a legal and ethical system surrounding environmental issues that puts the burden of proof on the victim or their agents. One must prove beyond any reasonable doubt that global warming is real, genetically engineered crops are hazardous, or that toxins in certain plastics will cause your gonads to shrivel. Until then, the carbon dioxide is free to flow, the gene splicing can proceed apace, and the toxins may continue to leach out of the teething ring your infant is now mouthing. It is a system that unabashedly puts the rights of the individual or corporation above the rights of the citizenry and the environment,” (p. 117)

■ **Dickey, Page. *Embroidered Ground: Revisiting the Garden*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2011.**

This collection of essays focuses on how Dickey’s ideas about her Duck Hill garden in upstate New York have evolved during her 30-year tenure on this estate. The essays are an effective blend of practical advice with philosophical reflections, attractively complemented by William Atherton’s quiet illustrations. Dickey often reflects on her ideas about this garden’s evolution over the years, frequently noting errors she has made in choice of plants or design. She also understands she is in her 70s and needs to develop a garden that is less labor-intensive. The essays are divided into twelve sections, with groups of essays on such topics as an overview of the garden, the impact of a second husband as a gardening partner, the remodeling of their buildings, an increased commitment to native and organic gardening, the importance of fragrance in gardening choices, and the challenges of a “mature” garden. Several essays provide practical advice on favorite shrubs, including viburnums and lilacs. Here are two of my favorite passages from the book:

- “When I started gardening passionately as a young married woman, I too was engrossed in

the growing and tending of plants, a pleasure that absorbs me still. But I had an artist's background, having drawn and painted all my life and studied the history of art, and a temperament that was more expressive, more romantic, than practical. Very quickly I wanted to paint pictures with plants. I began, almost unconsciously, to think of the garden as a series of canvases, combining color and texture, mass and silhouette. Several decades later, I am still trying to achieve pleasing vignettes in the various parts of the garden, a succession of delightful moments captured, no matter how fleetingly, through the days and weeks and months of the garden's year." (p. 62)

- "A garden should be your own private joy, your own delight, no matter what others think. Perfection is captured in a leaf, in an unfurling flower or a ripened fruit—that is enough. Our gardens are imperfect, ever-changing works of art, but, in the best of worlds, they are the results of a passion, our joyous individual efforts of expression in color, pattern, and texture, woven with leaves and flowers, in partnership with nature." (p. 248)

■ **Fenton, James. *A Garden from a Hundred Packets of Seed*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2001.**

The allotment vegetable gardener starts each year with a simple question: what do I want to grow this year? And what the gardener chooses to grow this year (zucchini, eggplants, and green beans) might be completely different from last year's choices (tomatoes, cucumbers, and onions). Fenton, an English gardener and at one time a professor of poetry at Oxford University, recommends that flower gardeners adopt a similar freedom of mind, inviting a "reckless coming together of plants." One need not worry about choosing perennial plants and shrubs that may well burden the garden for years to come. Instead, enjoy the opportunities that come using your own seeds each year to produce new crops of annuals (including perennials that can be treated as annuals). Fenton argues that design "has become a terrible, stupid, and expensive tyrant." The emphasis should be on content, the garden saying in no uncertain terms, "This is what I felt like having this year."

Fenton proceeds through a series of chapters (such as "Flowers for Cutting," "Useful and Decorative Herbs," "The Micro-Meadow," "Poppy Festival," "Climbers on Impulse") to recommend 100 seed choices, each flower receiving at least one sentence describing its primary horticultural and aesthetic attributes. The book was great fun to read and led me to consider new options in the Alumni House Garden—beyond simply using annuals to fill holes in beds dominated by established perennials. In looking through the marginal comments in my copy, I was surprised to discover we have already adopted so many plants that Fenton advocates, including the following:

- *Tropaeolum majus* (Nasturtiums)
- *Tithonia rotundifolia* 'The Torch' (Mexican Sunflower)
- *Nigella damascena* (Love-in-a-Mist)
- *Nicotiana glauca* (Tobacco Plant)
- *Helianthus annuus* (annual Sunflowers)
- *Salvia sclarea* Clary
- *Lychnis chalcedonia* (Maltese Cross)
- *Allium schoenoprasum* (Chives)
- *Calendula officinalis* 'Indian Prince' (have not tried this calendula)
- *Cosmos bipinnatus* 'Purity'

- *Cleome spinosa* (Spider Flower)
- Zinnias
- *Scabiosa atropurpurea* (Sweet Scabious)
- *Alchemilla mollis* (Lady's Mantle)
- *Lobularia maritima* (Sweet Alyssum)
- *Petroselinum crispum* (Parsley)
- *Lavandula angustifolia* 'Hidcote Blue'
- *Ocimum basilicum* (Basil)
- *Foeniculum vulgare* (Sweet Fennel)
- *Leucanthehum vulgare* (Ox-Eye Daisies)
- *Thunbergia alata* (Black-eyed Susan Vine; a self-seeder started two years ago in the "I" bed)

Here are Fenton's seed suggestions that might be desirable additions to the garden:

- *Adonis aestivalis* (Pheasant's Eye: a "flower with the force of a concentrated blood-red anemone"; a small Eurasian herb not listed in my Taylor's Encyclopedia or the AHS Encyclopedia but does have a short descriptor in *Hortus Third*)
- *Centaurea cyanus* (Cornflower)
- *Eschscholzia californica* (California Poppy; three times I've planted poppies in the "D" bed and all efforts have failed, but I have not tried California poppies; other poppies Fenton recommends include *Papaver rupigragum*, *P. sendtneri*, *P. somniferum*, *P. nudicaule*, *Meconopsis cambrica*, and two Mexican poppies: *Argemone mexicana* & *A. pleiacantha*)
- *Delphinium grandiflorum* 'Blauer Zwerg'
- *Salvia viridis* 'Blue'
- *Aquilegia alpina* 'Hensol Harebell'
- *Lathyrus matucana* ('Cupani's original' sweet pea)
- *Digitalis purpurea* (common Foxglove)
- *Asperula orientalis* (Oriental Woodruff)
- Several climbers: *Tropaeolum peregrinum*, Canary Creeper; *T. ciliatum*; *Eccremocarpus scaber*, the Glory Flower; *Rhodochiton atrosanguineum*, Purple Bell Vine, producing blood-black flowers; *Dicentra scandens*, a climbing version of Dutchman's Breeches; *Aconitum hemsleyanum*, a Chinese climbing monkshood; and *Phaseolus coccineus*, a scarlet runner bean that I have grown in my vegetable garden.

■ **Francis, Mark & Randolph T. Hester, Jr., Editors.** *The Meaning of Gardens: Idea, Place, and Action.* MIT Press, 1991. This was one of the most thought-provoking books I read this year. The 30 essays are divided into six topical sections that explore how gardens are connected with Faith, Power, Ordering, Cultural Expression, Personal Expression, and Healing. I found the pieces under the first three headings significantly more insightful, but the last three sections do provide useful reminders of how contemporary cultures and individuals employ gardens in such diverse ways. When I began working on my 2017 garden journal excerpts for the 2018 Kalendar blog postings, I decided to include in those quarterly postings a sample of excerpts from this anthology. Since I was reading this book over a nine-month period, many of these texts were in my mind while I was gardening. The Kalendar will include over 30 passages from the book, so I'll limit this annotation to one paragraph from the editors' introduction:

“Gardens have special meaning. They are powerful settings for human life, transcending time, place, and culture. Gardens are mirrors of ourselves, reflections of sensual and personal experience. By making gardens, using or admiring them, and dreaming of them, we create our own idealized order of nature and culture. Gardens connect us to our collective and primeval pasts. Since the beginning of human time, we have expressed ourselves through the gardens we have made. They live on as records of our private beliefs and public values, good and bad.”

■ **Hills, Lawrence D. *Fight Like the Flowers*. Green Books, 1989.** This autobiography is by one of the 20th-century’s most influential organic gardeners. At times the book is rather slow reading because Hills was frequently changing jobs in the first decades of his gardening career, and he provides us many minor details about where he lived and the nurseries he worked for. One recurrent theme running through the book is Hills’ battle with celiac disease, which caused him terrible physical discomfort, a problem not successfully addressed until his wife placed him onto a gluten-free diet. For me, the most valuable part of the book involved Hills’ discovery of the horticultural benefits of comfrey foliage to create a liquid manure, rich in potash and nitrogen. He also describes his discovery of Henry Doubleday, a Victorian gardener, and the establishment of the Henry Doubleday Research Association—which became the largest society of organic gardeners in the world.

Hills’ writing style is usually direct and to the point, but he does have many humorous passages that often play with literary echoes. He has an appealing persona in his writing, demonstrating why he was a successful garden correspondent for several British publications, including *The Observer* and *Punch*. Both his passion for organic gardening and his stylistic habits are evident in the book’s concluding paragraph: “Those who think organically are united by their respect for the future. They think ahead to the fossil fuels and fertilizers running out, the toxic metals and industrial wastes in our rivers, seas, and soils, and the persistent pesticides and other pollutants adding up to danger in the bodies of all the life with which we share one world. We are all married to that world, which is one world because it shares a single atmosphere and seven polluted seas, for better for worse, for energy-richer for resource-poorer, in nuclear war or man-made catastrophe, till the death of our Sun shall us part. Ours is a good world, with the right moisture, temperature range, and atmosphere for our kind of life to enjoy. It is ours to love and to cherish through the sunlit centuries.”

■ **Hobhouse, Penelope. *Plants in Garden History*. Pavillion Books, 1997.** I started reading this book in the fall of 2016 and I’m still not finished—though I’ve now rounded the 16th pole and only have about 20 furlong pages to go. One challenge has been that the book covers a wide swath of history, trying to provide an illustrated history of plants and their influence on garden styles from ancient Egypt to the end of the 20th century. A second factor slowing me down is the book’s impressive collection of beautiful color reproductions of maps, paintings, portraits, illustrations, photographs, and drawings to supplement the text. Having visited Hampton Court earlier in the spring, I spent an evening studying an 18th-century painting of Hampton Court, comparing the gardens at the height of their glory with their current design. Throughout the book, Hobhouse provides a dense, detailed discussion of specific gardens and the garden schemes of historical periods. She brings to the task an impressive combination of personal experience as a master gardener (and garden designer) with a sophisticated command of

information on historic gardens. My primary reservation about the book is that Hobhouse is so insistent on presenting such detailed information on individual bits of garden history that readers such as myself lose sight of the big picture: getting lost in the forest because we are so focused on individual trees. Substantial chunks of the book are presented in a sequence of short dissertations with minimal connective bridges. For example, in her chapter on the origin and development of French formality (resulting in the Sun King's Versailles), Hobhouse presents the following sequence of two-page commentaries and accompanying illustrations: "The French Parterre," "Plant Architecture: Palisades and Arbours," "Planting at Versailles," "The Grand Trianon," "Plants in the Morin Nursery," "The Formal Garden at He Loo," and "The French Influence in Europe." It all makes perfectly good sense, but it does require the reader to step back periodically and reconstruct how these segments fit together. So far my reading has involved a lot of re-reading, and perhaps when I do pass the finish line I may need to return to the starting gate and make another run around the track.

■ **McDowell, Marta.** *Emily Dickinson's Gardens: A Celebration of a Poet and Gardener.*

McGraw-Hill, 2005. The "E" bed in the Alumni House Garden is named after Emily Dickinson, a poet whom I have long admired. When I discovered this book existed, I immediately ordered a copy and last spring began reading it. We had made plans for a trip to Amherst in October, and I was eagerly looking forward to my first visit to Dickinson's home. Despite my initial enthusiasm, I initially found McDowell's book disappointing. Although she has done an impressive service providing her readers with the texts of Dickinson's poems and passages from relevant letters, McDowell offers virtually no analysis of any of the poetry. The poems are simply mixed in with various anecdotes about Emily, her family, and Amherst—and in some instances the explanation of local references are enlightening. The book is much more a "celebration" than a "study," and McDowell rarely illuminates how these poems connect with each other. On the other hand, she does provide several interesting lists of plants related to Dickinson's gardening practices:

- Catalogue of late spring flowers in Emily's garden: Bleeding Heart, Columbine, Crown Imperial, Daffodil, Primrose, Lily of the Valley, Myrtle, Forget-Me-Nots, Lilac
- Annuals in Emily's summer borders: Snapdragon, Sweet Alyssum, Mignonette, Stock, Sweet Sultan
- Dickinson roses: Damask Rose, Greville Rose, Hedgehog Rose, Blush Rose, Cinnamon Rose, Calico Rose, Sweetbrier Rose
- Perennials: Pinks, Sweet Williams, Poppies, Daisies, Lilies, Tiger Lily, Foxglove
- A catalogue of plants in Emily's conservatory (Cape Jasmine, Oleander, Fuchsia, Daphne)

What I found most disconcerting was how frequently McDowell inserts passages that turn her book into a gardening manual. For example, after discussing Austin Dickinson's interest in planting native trees, she gives us three pages of step-by-step instruction on how to transplant a tree. Several pages later she provides three pages of information on how to raise figs in a northern climate.

In November, after our trip to Amherst, I re-opened McDowell's book and tried again. My second effort proved more satisfying. I was not so frustrated by its omissions and failure to be the kind of book I was seeking. It also helped that I had been in Amherst, had been in Emily's bedroom, had taken photos of the restored vegetable garden. And, finally, I was content to read

the poems as presented in the text and not expect any substantive critical commentary. McDowell wanted the poems to speak for themselves, and I was finally willing to go along with her approach. In the process I discovered that while I have spent 40 years studying Dickinson's poetry, I was not prepared for the richness of the garden images that run through her poetry. To see so many of these poems brought together does change them, giving familiar poems a new resonance. Here's just one example, a four-line poem that I felt as though I was reading for the first time because it was now evident how frequently Dickinson's imagery relied on flowers (which in McDowell's words, "appear in force") and how rarely she refers to vegetables—in this case, the "maize."

On the Bleakness of my Lot
Bloom I strove to raise –
Late – my Garden of a Rock
Yielded Grape – and Maize –

■ **Michel, Carol J. *Potted and Pruned: Living a Gardening Life*. Gardenangelist Books, 2017.**

Michel is an Indiana gardener who maintains a garden blog (www.maydreamsgardens.com) and writes articles for *Indiana Gardening*. This book is a collection of short garden columns that have been "potted and prune" for republication. While I didn't feel I gained any great insights from the book, her friendly, easy-to-read essays were consistently humorous and pleasurable. My favorite essay was a piece describing her gardening equation for determining a gardener's satisfaction with gardening: $(S+P+C) \times D + To + Ti + CU = GE$

S: Rate your soil (10 pt scale)

P: Rate your plants (10 pt scale)

C: Rate your climate (10 pt scale)

D: Rate your design (2 pt scale)

To: Rate your tools (10 pt scale)

Ti: Rate your gardening time (10 pt scale; just the right amount of work earns a 10)

CU: Rate your chemical usage (10 pt scale; no chemicals earns a 10)

Michel's scale for interpreting your score:

100: "You lied."

80-99: Wow. "Good for you."

60-79: Swell. "You are doing a good job."

40-59: All right. "You are in good company with most gardeners."

20-39: Uh oh. "I'm worried about you and your garden."

0-19: Sorry. "Have you considered stamp collecting or paint-by-number kits?"

■ **Pollan, Michael. *Second Nature: A Gardener's Education*. Laurel Paperback, 1991.** For 25 years I have been waiting to read this book. My copy is a gift from five senior Writing Center Consultants (Audrey, Lisa, Kara, Susan, and Crista) who graduated in the spring of 1992. In their inscription is a note of appreciation, thanking me for teaching them some things about the "nature of people" and "helping us grow." Perhaps I delayed starting Pollan's book because I viewed it like a bottle of fine wine stored in the wine cellar library, waiting for the right occasion. Having encountered many references to the book and having previously read many magazine articles and two other books by Pollan, I expected this to be an enjoyable reading

experience. Finally, last spring, as a 25th-year anniversary present, I pulled my copy from the shelf, uncorked the bottle, and began reading. Despite my positive expectations, I still was not prepared for how enjoyable I found this book. Without question, it is one of the best gardening books I've ever read. Several courses I taught at Coe dealt with the tensions between culture and nature, and this book's advocacy for the development of a garden ethic goes right into the center of those classroom conversations. Here's a small sample of passages that received my underlining and/or marginal comments:

- [From a passage discussing his father's refusal to mow his front lawn.] "The front lawn symbolized the collective face of suburbia, the backyard its private aspect. In the back, you could do pretty much whatever you wanted, but out front you had to take account of the community's wishes and its self-image. Fences and hedges were out of the question: they were considered antisocial, unmistakable symbols of alienation from the group. One lawn should flow unimpeded into another, obscuring the boundaries between homes and contributing to the sense of community. It was here in the front lawn that 'like-mindedness' received its clearest expression. The conventional design of a suburban street is meant to forge the multitude of equal individual parcels of land into a single vista—a democratic landscape. To maintain your portion of this landscape was part of your civic duty. You voted each November, joined the PTA, and mowed the lawn every Saturday."
- "Much of gardening is a return, an effort at recovering remembered landscapes." (p. 40)
- "The transcendentalists . . . considered the American landscape as 'God's second book' and they taught us to read it for moral instruction. Residues of this idea persist, of course; we still regard and write about nature with high moral purpose. . . . We may no longer spell it out, but most of us still believe the landscape is somehow sacred, and to meddle with it sacrilegious. . . . Once you accept the landscape as a moral and spiritual space, ornamental gardening becomes problematic. For how can one presume to remake God's landscape. . . . Allen Lacy reports that, in combing American garden writers for his recent anthology (*The American Gardener*. . .), he found no discussion before 1894 of color or fragrance. We gardened for a variety of reasons—moral, spiritual, therapeutic, and economic—but aesthetic pleasure was not one of them." (p. 50)
- "I became convinced that lawn care had about as much to do with gardening as floor waxing, or road paving. Gardening was a subtle process of give-and-take with the landscape, a search for some middle ground between culture and nature. A lawn was nature under culture's boot." (p. 74)
- "Are we, finally, speaking of nature or culture when we speak of a rose (nature) that has been bred (culture) so that its blossoms (nature) make men imagine (culture) the sex of women (nature)?" (p. 115)
- "Cooking, canning, freezing, acidifying, smoking, salting, sugaring—the culture's time-tested prophylactics against nature's rot, ingenious tools of the 'kitchen garden.' Some of our most satisfactory methods of preservation, in fact, work on the same principles as gardening. In making wine or hard cider or various kinds of cheese, we don't so much battle nature's microbes as pick and choose among them and then let them work to our benefit. We harness the processes of decay, garden rot itself." (p. 169)
- "It is to the romantic idea about trees, and nature in general, that we owe the invention of the wilderness area, one of America's great contributions to world culture." (p. 197)

- “By narrowing the genetic base of our agriculture we have made it much more vulnerable and, in turn, more dependent on chemical defenses. It is no coincidence that several of the big seed houses are now owned by chemical companies. The same uniformity that smooths capitalism’s way also contradicts one of nature’s cardinal principles, which is genetic diversity.” (pp. 259-260)

■ **Petrie, Ruth, Editor. *Notes from the Garden: A Collection of the Best Garden Writing from The Guardian*. Guardian Books, 2009.** This collection of articles from the Manchester *Guardian*, stretching from 1838 to 2009, was often my bed-time reading through the summer and fall. My copy was originally purchased for a Cambridgeshire Library, and still has the security strip to ensure I don’t try to steal the book when the librarian is distracted. As one might expect, the quality of the submissions is uneven, and many of the items have been included primarily because of local interest or amusement (such as a one-sentence entry from December 2003 stating that “Households in Derbyshire with gnomes in their gardens have been sent bogus letters from Amber Valley borough council, warning the ornaments are against planning rules and threatening prosecution”). The *Guardian* did publish many pieces by gardening experts I had known previously—including Anonymous (none of the articles published in the 19th century are signed), Arthur Ransome, Margery Fish, Michael Hyde, Christopher Lloyd, Ronald Blythe (who reviews *Fighting Like the Flowers*, an autobiography by Lawrence D. Hills, a book also annotated in this bibliography), John Vidal, Martin Wainwright, Beth Chatto, and Jenny Uglow. But most of the authors were new to me. And there were many surprises, reading wonderful short pieces by unknown authors and wondering how many other equally appealing pieces might be hidden away in newspapers and journals across Great Britain. Here are three of my favorite passages from voices new to me:

- “The autumn garden is always both a rich and ragged place, and never more so than in this year [1941] whose drenching August rains made for a richness of a miscellaneous growth instead of for quick ripeness of the grain and fruit. With labour everywhere scarce and domestic hands too busy to add nettle grasping to their other labours, the gardens have run amok. The eternal tendency of flowerbeds to display a shaggy foison in October and the unshakeable resolution of the weeds (what an ethical example!) have been confirmed by climate and by circumstance. The autumn’s special symbol, the chrysanthemum, the golden flower, burns beside the sere and stooping veterans of the vegetable jungle, the pea-sticks and the bean rows of our war-time larder gardening.” ~Ivor Brown, “The Autumn Garden” (October 4, 1941)
- “One of the Earls of Pembroke was described by a contemporary in 1623 as ‘a true Adamist, toiling and tilling in his garden.’ By 1923, PG Wodehouse had built several stories around fervent Adamists, befuddled old earls in corduroy trousers who would have sprayed their own grandmothers to death if they found them clinging to the underside of a rose-leaf. Gardens change but gardeners do not. To call gardening a leisure activity is to forget five centuries of warfare; real gardeners are not enthusiasts, they are madmen. From Henry VIII at Hampton Court to the old codger in the local allotment who refuses to return your ball, they have struggled against impossible odds, trying to turn this damp, cold island into the Garden of Eden.” ~Waldemar Januszczak, “The Artistry of Calling a Spade a Spade” (May 26, 1979)
- “In The Obstacle Race Germaine Greer suggests that one of the reasons that women have historically been less successful painters than men is that painting required systematic training

(thought unsuitable for women). It also was immensely competitive and required considerable patronage. The same could be said for music. Gardening, however, like novel writing—both arts which women do well—is essentially a domestic, uncompetitive and solitary art which can be pursued at home. It also requires great patience and of that most women agree we have much more. It is notable how many women, like Rosemary Verey, turn to gardening once their children have grown. For a garden is always a fragile achievement, easily destroyed. Penelope Hobhouse points out that historically much of the differences in approach between men and women can be explained because women were rarely trained and so approached gardening from an instinctive interest in flowers rather than as trained designers.” ~Felicity Bryan, “The Female Garden” (May 26, 1982)

■ **Richardson, Barbara, Editor. *Dirt: A Love Story*. University Press of New England, 2015.**

This is an odd, disparate, uneven collection, mixing essays by 36 different authors who approach the subject of dirt from a diverse range of perspectives: some pieces are highly personal memoirs recounting childhood experiences, others are quite technical and informational; some pieces stress our spiritual connections with the soil, others are intensely political. My favorite pieces—the majority written by the 16 female contributors—were submitted by the following authors:

- Linda Hogan (“we are not thinkers of deep earth and what lives there”)
- Janisse Ray (“Praise to the dirt . . . our true home, our destiny”)
- Jolene Barr (the author notes that—having been raised in Kansas, a state “impervious to tourists”—of the “four classical elements—earth, air, fire, and water—earth, or dirt, is the one I knew most intimately”)
- Kayann Short (reflecting on the distinctions between “dirt” and “soil”)
- John Keeble (“it’s garden dirt made into soil . . . not unlike writing novels”)
- Marilyn Krysl (“ground level is human level. . . . sitting in the dirt, without instruments, we begin to see”)
- Liz Stephens (“it’s not the planting of seeds that one gardens for; it’s the tending of lives”)
- Bernd Heinrich (my favorite author on the subject of birds, in this essay quoting Thoreau and his relationship with beans: “they attached me to the earth and so I got strength like Antaeus”)
- Tyler Volk (a biologist new to me; his contribution, “The Soil’s Breath,” was a succinct but remarkably informative commentary on the role of microbes in healthy soil and the incorporation of carbon into land plants and the soil; “on average, soils brought under cultivation lose about a fourth of their carbon pool before settling into a newly steady state”)
- Deborah Koons Garcia (“ninety percent of the microorganisms in soil have not been identified, much less understood as to how they function”)
- Carl Rosen (“it is estimated that one gram (about one teaspoon) of soil from a garden or a natural prairie may contain one billion bacteria and more than five thousand species of bacteria. . . . and this is only bacteria”)
- Tom Wessels (“dirt may be the least understood ecosystem on our planet”)
- David R. Montgomery (“fertilizer-intensive agriculture is as addictive as heroin”)
- Bob Cannard & Fred Cline (on the expressive nature of plants: “every physical manifestation indicates conditions of the soil life colony, its scale and civility”)
- Laura Pritchett (“fostering humus is fostering humanity”)

- Wes Jackson (“in the earliest writings we find that the prophet and scholar alike have lamented the loss of soils and have warned people of the consequences of their wasteful ways”—and yet we still have not created “a set of values capable of promoting a sustainable agriculture”)
- Vandana Shiva (“living seeds and living soils are the foundation of living and lasting societies”; what we need is more “guerrilla gardening”)
- Karen Washington (“the fight to end hunger and poverty. . . . all starts with dirt”)
- Atina Diffley (essay title: “Soil Versus Oil—Kale Versus Koch”: “organic farms use 45 percent less energy while sequestering 15 to 28 percent more carbon—with equivalent yields to non-organic farms”)

■ **Royer, France & Richard Dickinson. *Weeds of the Northern U.S. and Canada*. University of Alberta Press, 1999.** In my attempt to identify and understand the weeds in the Alumni House Garden, I decided to work my way through this reference book, page by page, and note each time Royer and Dickinson introduced a plant that I felt reasonably sure has been in the Coe garden—and in most cases is still there, hiding out, waiting for the return of warm weather. I like how this book is organized: two pages on each plant with taxonomic family name, genus/species name, and a comprehensive list of common names; most important ID factors; areas of distribution and list of states and provinces where plant is designated as a weed; detailed descriptions of seed, seedling, leaves, flower, plant, and fruit (including excellent, close-up color photos); reasons for concern; and information on similar species.

Below is a list of 35 Alumni House Garden weeds I found in this manual. The list does not include several weeds that I have not yet identified, nor does it include three invaders that are not included in the Royer and Dickinson book: crown vetch, ragweed, and Peruvian daisy (*Galinsoga quadriradiata*). These 40+ plants I hope either to eradicate or in a few instances (such as the tansy and ox-eye daisies) to control. Perhaps later this year I will post to the website a more detailed commentary on these weeds, the organic techniques used to control them, and how things are going. The list copied below introduces the weeds in the order they appear in the manual; in addition to the primary common name, according to Royer and Dickinson, I’ve inserted in parentheses other common names that I know them by or names that may be amusing or historically interesting.

- *Arctium minus*: common burdock
- *Chrysanthemum leucanthemum*: ox-eye daisy (field daisy, dog daisy)
- *Cirsium arvense*: Canada thistle
- *Senecio vulgaris*: groundsel
- *Tanacetum vulgare*: tansy
- *Taraxacum officinale*: dandelion (wet-a-bed, lion’s tooth, Irish daisy)
- *Polygonum lapathifolium*: green smartweed (pale persicaria, knotweed)
- *Daucus carota*: wild carrot (Queen Anne’s lace)
- *Ranunculus acris*: buttercup (gold cup, butter-daisy)
- *Oenothera biennis*: yellow evening primrose
- *Chenopodium album*: lamb’s-quarters (pigweed)
- *Digitaria sanguinalis*: crabgrass
- *Equisetum arvense*: common horsetail (mare’s tale, pipe weed, scouring-rush, snake-grass)

- *Abutilon theophrasti*: velvetleaf (Indian mallow, butter print, button-weed, elephant-ear)
- *Malva rotundifolia*: round-leaved mallow (running mallow, blue mallow, cheeses)
- *Lamium amplexicaule*: henbit (blind nettle, bee nettle)
- *Glechoma hederacea*: ground-ivy (creeping charlie)
- *Convolvulus arvensis*: field bindweed (corn bind, devil's-guts, creeping Jenny)
- *Capsella bursa-pastoris*: shepherd's purse (toothwort, shovel plant)
- *Hesperis matronalis*: dame's rocket
- *Lepidium densiflorum*: peppergrass
- *Solanum nigrum*: black nightshade
- *Melilotus alba*: white sweet clover
- *Trifolium repens*: white clover
- *Silene cucubalus*: bladder campion
- *Stellaria media*: chickweed
- *Plantago major*: plantain (whiteman's-foot)
- *Plantago lanceolata*: ribgrass [Not 100% sure of ID accuracy for this weed]
- *Portulaca oleracea*: purslane
- *Amaranthus graecizans*: prostrate pigweed [Not 100% sure of ID accuracy for this weed]
- *Cyperus esculentus*: yellow nutsedge
- *Euphorbia glyptosperma*: thyme-leaved spurge
- *Urtica dioica*: stinging nettle
- *Oxalis corniculata*: creeping woodsorrel (yellow woodsorrel)

■ **Sabbagh, Karl.** *A Rum Affair: A True Story of Botanical Fraud.* Da Capo Press, 1999. This is unlike any other botanical book I've ever read. Sabbagh begins his tale by discussing how he became interested in the story of John Raven, an amateur botanist, who in the 1950s investigated claims made by John Heslop Harrison, a famous British botanist, that a significant number of plants on the island of Rum, off the west coast of Scotland, had survived the last Ice Age. Harrison vigorously defended his claims against professional botanists, who were certain no plants had been able to survive that era of extreme cold. Harrison asserted that he had proof, having discovered on the island the plants and grasses in question. In an attractive mixture of memoir, biography, botany, and history, Sabbagh resurrects the forgotten story of John Raven, a botanical Sherlock Holmes investigating Harrison's claims. Although his findings were never published, Raven's research almost conclusively demonstrated that Harrison's evidence was fraudulent, that he had transplanted his "evidence" from other locations. This was certainly among the most entertaining books I read in 2017.

■ **Tukey, Paul.** *The Organic Lawn Care Manual.* Storey Publishing, 2007. Truth be told, I've never had much interest in lawn care. When we moved into our current home in 1978, we came into the possession of a substantial lawn, and it was for many years left to its own devices. Occasionally, I would give it some Scotts fertilizer and a dose of chemicals to kill the dandelions and creeping charlie, but the futility of those techniques eventually became apparent, and I migrated to other practices. With regard to the front lawn, I removed all the grass and replaced the lawn with hostas, daylilies, and ornamental grasses. As for the back yard, the lawn is in the midst of a slow transformation into a meadow of native grasses and wild flowers surrounded

by flower beds. I will still keep my lawnmower, but its primary function will be to cut a few paths through the meadow in the summer and for leaf mulching in the fall.

The reason why I read this book is because earlier this fall I assumed responsibility for the grass quad that surrounds the fountain in the Alumni House garden. One primary motivation for this decision was that I wanted the entire garden—not just the flower beds—to be dealt with organically, without the use of commercial herbicides and pesticides. Since I did not know much about maintaining an attractive, ecologically responsible lawn, I thought I should do some research. Thus I turned to Paul Tukey’s book. I’m not sure all his techniques will work, but beginning this spring we will try to follow his guidelines and create a low-maintenance, drug-free lawn that will require minimal watering.

Our initial focus will be on enhancing the quality of the soil. According to Tukey, creating a soil with the right microbes will provide an environment that will invigorate the grass we want to grow (primarily fescue) and make it difficult for weeds and pests to compete. Tukey strongly argues for the benefits of compost and compost tea, and that will be our primary strategy for improving the soil. We will also do several rounds of re-seeding (both spring and fall) and try to find some friendly but persuasive techniques for keeping the squirrels from digging up the sod. I’m inclined to believe that Tukey’s book will provide us with a workable plan for this lawn transformation. Time, patience, perseverance, and luck will determine our success.

■ **Vogt, Benjamin. *A New Garden Ethic: Cultivating Defiant Compassion for an Uncertain Future*. New Society Publishers, 2017.** Here’s a paragraph from my December garden journal (posted in the December ‘17 Garden Shed blog), commenting on this book I read while on a trip to Washington, D.C.: “This proved to be one of the most thought-provoking garden books I’ve ever read. Owner of a garden design business in Nebraska, Vogt is a passionate advocate for gardens that exclusively rely on native plants. He believes a gardener’s primary commitment must be to healthy ecological relationships. We must do everything possible to enhance the health of the soil and the lives of untold millions of plants and microbes dependent on that soil. We should not be introducing plants to the Midwest simply because they are pretty. Although I was often frustrated with Vogt’s argument (absence of citations for his sources, absence of any reference to vegetable gardens), the author raises important issues about the purpose of an ornamental flower garden and whether it is possible to create an ecologically intelligent garden that effectively blends native forbs with non-native ornamentals.”

Vogt develops his “garden ethic” by explicitly building on Aldo Leopold’s “land ethic” as presented in *Sand Country Almanac*. Fundamental to Vogt’s argument is the assertion that plants do not exist for the purpose of serving us and looking beautiful in our constructed landscapes. All plants--indeed, all organisms--are not here on earth for us but rather they are here to be with us. We are making a fundamental error in attempting to create a world of perfectly arranged plants, aligned in precise rows. “We clean up our gardens like they are living rooms after the children have gone to bed.” We have become cultural oppressors. The chaos we perceive in nature is really a “supreme cosmic order,” an order about which we know almost nothing.

Vogt points out that “a patch of bluestem of one square yard has 130 feet of roots, and that same square yard one foot deep holds three to five million nematodes which consume twice as much grass as a herd of cattle. One teaspoon of virgin prairie soil contains five billion microbes.” We have made a terrible mistake by replacing the bluestem with plants such as

hostas, daylilies, miscanthus, Russian sage, feather reed grass, and butterfly bushes—“plants that have no shared evolutionary history with wildlife in any area of North America.” Vogt argues that by committing ourselves to a gardening paradigm focused on native plants (defined as plants that were in an area before the industrial revolution), we will inevitably confront “the deeper issues of why we garden, how we garden, and who we garden for.” Once we begin to understand that gardens are sites of complex, ecological relationships involving multitudes of diverse forms of life, we will understand that our “built landscapes should be as close to 100 percent native plants as possible, and achieving this goal is logistically, practically, and economically viable in every way we can imagine.”

■ **Von Glasow, Kirstin.** *111 Gardens in London That You Shouldn't Miss*. Emons, 2017. This book is part of a series of at least thirty “111 Places” travel books with such titles as *111 Places in Hong Kong That You Shouldn't Miss* and *111 Places in Province That You Must Not Miss*. I don't know how they distinguish between the “Shouldn't Miss” and the “Must Not Miss” titles. The German-born Von Glasow, who lives in London, has written two other books in the series, extolling the 111 shops in London you “shouldn't miss” and the 111 London Coffee shops you “must not miss.” As for the London gardens book, I purchased it because we had an upcoming trip to London, and I was interested in visiting some gardens we have missed or forgotten. While I have visited over twenty of Von Glasow's choices, her one-page descriptions (accompanied by a one-page color photo) has inspired me to check out new gardens that should be relatively easy to find. My list for an upcoming trip now includes Fenton House Museum and Garden (a short walk from where we will be staying in Hampstead), Brown Hart Gardens (close to the Wallace Collection, one of my favorite galleries), and the Kensington Roof Gardens (which I last visited over 50 years ago). Von Glasow's descriptions are intended for a general audience, deftly mixing historical backgrounds with current attractions. Fortunately, the guide also includes specific street addresses, website information, transportation connections, hours when the gardens are open, and hints about other important options in the neighborhood—including references to several local coffee shops.