

## Third Annual Garden Book Annotated Bibliography (February 2019)

This Garden Shed posting is my third set of annotations on recently read gardening books. While I did not do much garden reading the first nine months of 2018, in October—once there was a notable decline in my outdoor gardening tasks—I felt the need to rejuvenate my gardening knowledge, inspiring a substantially expanded reading schedule. The final tally of books in this year’s annual bibliography is a notable decrease from the previous two years, but several in this year’s batch are among the best gardening books I’ve ever read, including ones that will likely have a profound impact on my future gardening practices. After completing my initial tabulation, I was intrigued by the diversity of publishers, a mixture of academics (such as the University of Chicago), well-known publishing houses (Farrar, Straus & Giroux; Penguin Books), publishers specializing in garden topics (Chelsea Green; Rodale), and small, unfamiliar firms (Sasquatch Press; the 4<sup>th</sup> Estate). The diversity of publishers does suggest the diversity of topics, ranging from histories of early American gardens and gardeners (Johnson’s *American Eden*; Biggs’ *Lessons from Great Gardeners*) to botanical science (Nardi’s *Discoveries in the Garden*) to personal essayists (Fish’s *We Made a Garden*; Perényi’s *Green Thoughts*) to practical guidebooks on best gardening practices (Bonsall’s *Essential Guide*; Toensmeier’s *Guide to Perennial Vegetables*). So, without any further introductions, here is an alphabetical list by author of the books I was reading and thinking about in 2018.

- **Biggs, Matthew.** *RHS Lessons from Great Gardeners* (Mitchell Beazley, 2015). This was both a fascinating read and a disappointment, often leaving me unsatisfied. As one might expect with a Royal Horticultural Society publication, this is a physically attractive volume with appealing illustrations and photos. And Biggs does provide a series of informative 4/6-page introductions to eminent gardeners, ranging from Somai (16<sup>th</sup>-century Japanese) to Dan Hinkley (an American born in 1953). It should be no surprise that 20 of the 50 members in this hall of fame are from the United Kingdom, particularly emphasizing a sequence of influential British gardeners active from the 1860s to the 1960s: Thomas Hanbury, William Robinson, Gertrude Jekyll, Ellen Willmott, Edward August Bowles, Lawrence Johnston, Henry Duncan McLaren, Frederick Stern, Vita Sackville-West, Margery Fish, and Beatrix Havergal. While I was familiar with most of the Brits, I particularly appreciated the profiles of gardeners influential in other countries: Jacques Majorelle (Africa), Mildred Blandy (Portugal), Roberto Burle Marx (South America), Lelia Caetani (Italy), Greta Sturdza (France), Carl Ferris Miller (South Korea), Bev McConnell (New Zealand), and Jeremy Francis (Australia). Despite these positives, much of the text was rather generic and superficial. For example, Biggs provides a page of “lessons” from each gardener, but it was rare that these lessons conveyed unique or illuminating insights. For example, we are told that Vita Sackville-West believed gardeners should “choose white-flowered plants carefully” and “successive head gardeners have revised the planting schemes at Sissinghurst in the spirit of the garden, replacing old with newer, similar and better varieties. . . .” It’s just not clear such lessons are particularly insightful or revelatory.

- **Bonsall, Will.** *Will Bonsall’s Essential Guide to Radical, Self-Reliant Gardening* (Chelsea Green Publishing, 2015). I loved reading this book. Bonsall may offer some radical perspectives on gardening, but he obviously knows a lot (and I mean a lot) about his subjects and has thought carefully about the principles that underlie his gardening practices. He is also very funny: many corny jokes and clever word play, effectively using his humor to emphasize key

arguments. Bonsall places a premium on self-reliance. He wants his small farm in Maine to become a food source requiring no outside input. As he says, "I prefer to avoid going anywhere or buying anything." The goal is maximum "eco-efficiency"—which means a complete dependence on plants to provide nourishment for the soil and the organisms dependent on that soil, including humans. He's a strict vegetarian; no need for any animals, and no use of any animal manure—except for human-produced night soil collected in his outhouse. The chapters I found most useful were his 70 pages on soil improvement (composting, green manures, mulch, minerals, and grasses) and his strategies for growing veggies and pulses (beans & peas). If I were 20 years younger and living on the land where I had a small farm, I would adopt many of Bonsall's practices. But even in my own limited way, this book's recommendations for enhancing the soil and developing an eco-efficient garden will have a significant impact on my future efforts as a gardener. I would certainly consider this one of the two or three best books I've ever read on raising vegetables.

- **Bronzert, Kathleen & Bruce Sherwin.** *The Glory of the Garden* (Avon Books, 1993). This is a collection of over 1,000 short passages on gardens and the natural world. The quotes are sorted into seven topics (e.g., "Season's Cycle," "Wind and Weather"), but the sequence of the passages appears quite random. Over 600 authors are represented, mostly British and American. In addition to good old Anonymous, the most frequently quoted authors are Ralph Waldo Emerson, the *New York Times* columnist Hal Borland (I think all of his quotes come from one source, his *Book of Days*), Anthony Huxley (a botanist), Thomas Jefferson, H. Peter Loewer (author of a garden almanac), Andrew Marvell, William Shakespeare, and Roger Swain (long-time columnist for *Horticulture* magazine). I did find it interesting that the anthology has two quotations from *Reader's Digest* but none from Emily Dickinson. I frequently did wonder why particular passages had been chosen, but this was still an enjoyable book to read, introducing several dozen authors and garden quotes previously unfamiliar to me.

- **Carse, James P.** *Finite and Infinite Games: A Vision of Life as Play and Possibility* (The Free Press, 1986). I read Carse's book in the 1980s, shortly after it was first published, and it had a profound impact on my attempts to understand what I was trying to accomplish in my life. For many years I used Carse's distinctions between finite games and infinite play in my work with students and with the undergraduate consultants working in Coe's Writing Center. But I had no recollection of his observations on gardens. For whatever reason, those paragraphs in the book's penultimate chapter ("We Control Nature for Societal Reasons") had no apparent impact on my thinking back in the 1980s. Twenty years later, however, I was fascinated by Carse's contrast of our culture's commitment to the machine—the mechanical rationality of technology—with the benefits of learning to become gardeners, learning to adjust ourselves to the deep patterns of natural order. For Carse, gardening is a quintessential example of infinite play. "Gardening is not outcome-oriented. A successful harvest is not the end of a garden's existence, but only a phase of it. As any gardener knows, the vitality of a garden does not end with a harvest. It simply takes another form. Gardens do not 'die' in the winter but quietly prepare for another season." Oft thought, n'er so well expressed.

- **Chatto, Beth.** *Garden Notebook* (Orion Paperback, 1998; first published in 1988). I purchased a copy of this book in Foyle's book store in London at the end of February. The next day I started reading it on the flight back to the U.S. and continued dipping into Chatto's gracefully composed journal notes throughout the year, reading the last entry a few days after Christmas. It is a wonderful book by one of England's most gifted gardeners—who sadly passed away last May, during a week when I happened to be reading her May journal entries.

In one of her January entries, she comments on her dissatisfaction with the photos in gardener catalogues, defending her decision to exclude photographs from her nursery's plant catalogue. "I am very attracted by good photographs in other catalogues but I find I easily forget them. It is the difference between watching television and listening to a good radio play. I can take the works of the best writers and gardeners, such as Vita Sackville-West, Graham S. Thomas or Christopher Lloyd to bed and be lost till midnight, reading their thoughts and seeing their plants and gardens as a musician hears music reading a score." Chatto would have been too modest to add her name to that trio, but she certainly deserves to be considered a member of that elite choir of gardening authors.

- **Eck, Joe & Wayne Winterrowd.** *To Eat: A Country Life* (Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 2013). When I first subscribed to *Horticulture* in the early 1980s, the magazine had a superb stable of authors—and my favorite was probably Wayne Winterrowd. His submissions were consistently engaging, informative, humorous—an effective blend of practicality with attention to broader, "philosophical" issues. This book, co-written with his long-time partner Joe Eck, exemplifies all of those same qualities, but the reading was bittersweet because I knew Winterrowd had died before this book was completed and it would be their final joint writing project. In the "Afterword," Eck talks about losing his desire to garden or play the piano or do anything after Wayne's passing. But in the book's final paragraph, after describing his hospitalization due to exhaustion and dehydration, he recognizes that he must start to live again by taking some small steps forward. "And so I hoed the vegetable garden and today I will plant parsley. And now begin to fashion a separate life, one I never envisioned or wanted but I am fated to. As are we all." Fortunately, those small steps led to the publication of this delightful book, full of insightful gardening advice—focusing on what they produce in their Vermont vegetable garden—and various techniques and recipes for using their produce. Along the way, Eck and Winterrowd share their experiences with apples, brussels sprouts, cabbage, chard, chicory, onions, pigs, beets, Belgian endive, carrots, celeriac, leeks, potatoes, winter herbs, asparagus, Egyptian onions, and many more. When I did my vegetable seed orders in January, I included several new vegetables and unfamiliar cultivars recommended in this book, including a dozen packets of seeds from Seeds from Italy, Franchi Seeds' U.S. distributor—located in of all places Lawrence, Kansas.

- **Edworthy, Niall.** *The Curious Gardener's Almanac: Centuries of Practical Garden Wisdom* (Penguin Books, 2006). This is the only book in this year's bibliography that I read twice. After seeing a copy in a London book store, I ordered it shortly after our return to the U.S., read the book during the summer, and read it again this fall. This little compendium of quotations, anecdotes, recipes, horticultural advice, plant data, and nostalgic illustrations served as the

inspiration for my own gardener's almanac that became my December 2018 Garden Shed posting. Edworthy's collection of "practical garden wisdom" does have some semblance of a structure, with chapters organized by such categories as Vegetables, Garden Wildlife, Herbs, and Flowers, but many entries were chosen because of their humor. For example, we learn that Babe Ruth would "wear a cabbage leaf under his cap to keep his head cool" and the 19<sup>th</sup>-century radical agrarian William Cobbett proclaimed that Ireland's "slovenliness, filth, misery and slavery" is the result of the Irish dependence on the potato. *The Curious Gardener* has many wonderful short quotations on gardening, some old familiar sayings ("As the garden grows, so does the gardener"), and many passages new to me (George Herbert's "Every mile is two in winter"—an insight frequently on my mind as I deal with month's record snowfall). And the book does contain several gardening practices I plan to try this coming year: for example a recipe for an old-fashioned potpourri and the suggestion to "plant" banana skins—notably rich with mineral nutrients—around the roots of rose bushes and other perennials.

- **Etty, Thomas & Lorraine Harrison. *Heirloom Plants: A Complete Compendium of Heritage Vegetables, Fruit, Herbs & Flowers*** (Ivy Press, 2015). Thomas Etty is an English heritage seed merchant whose company sells seeds and bulbs of plant varieties that can be classified as heirloom (i.e., varieties available from the 17<sup>th</sup> century to the 1940s). Although written primarily for an English readership, the book has basic information on hundreds of traditional, open-pollinated vegetables, fruit, herbs, and flowers that can be grown in the United States. For example, the section on tomatoes, provides individual portraits of 40 heirloom tomatoes (identified by both scientific and common names as well as the year each was first cultivated), including several I have grown in my vegetable garden: Beefsteak, Black Cherry, Brandywine, Mortgage Lifter, Roma, San Marzano, and Yellow Pear. This is a reference book I will frequently consult as I experiment with heirloom vegetables in my vegetable garden and our efforts to expand the use of traditional cottage garden flowers and herbs in the Alumni House Garden.

- **Fish, Margery. *We Made a Garden*** (Random House Modern Library Edition, 2002; first published in 1956). Three years ago I purchased used copies of four of Margery Fish's books, but it was only this fall that I opened one and began reading. In this gardening memoir Fish focuses on the late 1930s when she and her husband moved into the Somerset countryside and began transforming a former farmyard and rubbish heap into one of Britain's most famous cottage gardens. The book is a delightful read, often quite humorous, particularly when Fish recounts various tensions with her husband, Walter—who had died before Margery composed this tribute to their collaborative project. As she reveals in almost every chapter, they had quite different ideas about how to create an ideal garden, and it's fascinating to follow their negotiations while adjusting to each other's preferences. Although Margery is often quite blunt in identifying Walter's limitations, she also celebrates the wisdom of his insistence that a good garden depends not on pretty flowers but on a strong "bone structure" and an "intelligent use of evergreens" to ensure that the "garden is always clothed, no matter what time of year."

The 125-page book is organized according to a series of 25 short essays, each capturing some aspect in the creation and maintenance of their garden: "The Lawn," "Making Paths," "Staking," "Composting," etc. Fish's book is full of sensible, practical advice (for example, the

importance of precise and recurrent deadheading of flowers, the elimination of air pockets in the soil when transplanting), but the book's most rewarding pleasure is listening to Margery recall those years when she and Walter were making a garden together. Here's one small sample: "My borders combine all aspects of gardening—shrubs, bulbs, foliage plants, even little patches of annuals to fill any bare spaces. Quite unorthodox, perhaps, but being a greedy woman I want something of everything, and in this way there is always something in bloom. My husband deplored this habit of mine, and could not understand the real excitement of finding something unexpected coming into flower when everything else has gone to sleep."

• **Forkner, Lorene Edwards & Linda Plato.** *Hortus Miscellaneous: A Gardener's Hodgepodge of Information & Instruction* (Sasquatch Books, 2007). The word "hodgepodge" really does convey the structure and contents of this book. Entries are in length from one line to 1 ½ pages and offer no rhyme or reason for their order. Here, for example, is a sequence of ten entries on pages 82-89:

- Paragraph describing the world's smallest park (452 square inches) in Portland, Oregon.
- Explanation of why New Jersey is the Garden State.
- Weights of the lightest landscape timber (cedar) and the heaviest (white oak).
- Explanation of Scofield Heat Units for registering the intensity of hot peppers.
- The scientific name for Tobacco Mosaic Virus (19 lines of text).
- A list of flowers in Vita Sackville-West's White Garden at Sissinghurst in England.
- Information on plants that flew on the Apollo 14 NASA mission to orbit the moon.
- The association of asters with Roman and French sacred traditions.
- The definition of Quincunx spacing.
- How to make a rose emoticon: @}->--

As a lover of commonplace collections, I enjoyed periodically dipping into Forkner and Plato's collection. And there were a few items that might prove useful. For example, in one entry they describe a garden in New Jersey specifically designed for the blind and disabled: a series of raised, waist-high beds containing plants chosen not for the visual appeal but for their fragrance and textural qualities. I thought that could be an interesting addition to the Coe garden—perhaps a collection of potted plants placed on the patio for easy access.

• **Jenkins, Allen.** *Plot 29: A Memoir* (4<sup>th</sup> Estate, 2017). When I finished reading this book last spring, I was not sure what I had read. It's composed in the form of a journal over an 18-month period, but Jenkins frequently includes texts from earlier in his life. And the author admits that he is bewildered by the text he is producing. He thought the book was "to be about gardening, a year in the life of a piece of land, with personal stuff added in. The tone has taken me by surprise. It is lacking in laughter, the growing the only light to balance shade. When I read it back, my voice softens, becomes smaller. Writing it is like dropping down a mine. I head out to the seam and see what's to be found. It's not properly planned like my other work, with quotes, a beginning, a middle, an end. It's more like my gardening." Jenkins' mother had seven children by seven different fathers, and the book records his effort to sort out the connections he has with his family, particularly trying to figure out who was his mother? Who were the different fathers in his life? Who was his brother Christopher? Gardening an allotment plot

serves for Jenkins as a source of therapy, escape, community, stability, the pleasures of sensual immediacy. It's interesting to watch Jenkins use his writing to help him explore and reflect on his past, but at the end the published text remains a bit too raw and uncooked, more notes than a polished text.

• **Johnson, Victoria.** *American Eden: David Hosack, Botany, and Medicine in the Garden of the Early Republic* (Liveright Publishing, 2018). Although I assume I must have previously encountered David Hosack (pronounced "Hozzick") in my studies of American history, before reading this biography I had no idea who he was nor anything about his contributions to medicine, botany, or gardens in the first decades of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Johnson does an excellent job presenting this physician's remarkable and wide-ranging contributions to diverse fields. And it was a remarkable life. He seemed to know and have a friendly working relationship with virtually all the big names in his era: Washington, Adams, Jefferson, DeWitt Clinton, Charles Wilson Peale, Benjamin Rush, Aaron Burr, Alexander Hamilton, as well as such notable figures in Europe as Joseph Banks. In fact, Hosack was present at the Burr-Hamilton duel, serving as the physician in attendance for both men. Of most interest to me was Hosack's role in founding the Elgin Botanic Garden in New York City. Hosack was a vigorous proponent for the potential benefits of plants as a source for practical medicines, spending substantial amounts of his own money to establish the garden and create for a few years America's premier botanical garden. Unfortunately for Hosack, his efforts never received any long-term institutional commitment, and the garden and its collection of plants from all over the world eventually fell into ruin. Fortunately for Hosack, his second wife was very wealthy, and they purchased Samuel Bard's Hyde Park mansion and estate along the Hudson River. He hired Andre Parmentier to redesign the estate grounds. The result was one of the first examples in America of a "modern style" English landscape design in the tradition of Capability Brown.

• **Leighton, Ann.** *Early American Gardens: "For Meate or Medicine"* (University of Massachusetts Press, 1986; originally published in 1970). In her foreword Leighton announces her intent in this book, the first in a three-volume history of American gardens in the 17<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, "is to make the gardens of the early settlers of New England, founders of our country, grow again." The problem is that we do not have much firm documentary evidence about those gardens, what they looked like, what was planted in them, how they were used. As a result, substantial portions of this first book rely on historical material that is more contextual than directly revelatory. For example, chapter 4 is an introductory history of the Puritans, of their emigration to America, of their most important leaders and authors—but it provides virtually no commentary on their gardens. Despite these limitations, we do know the gardening manuals they relied on, we do have a comprehensive plant list created by John Josselyn, a skilled and knowledgeable observer of plants; we have occasional references to garden plants in the books, journals, and letters of Cotton Mather, Samuel Sewall, William Endecott, William Bradford, and John Winthrop (senior); and we have a detailed seed order sent to England by John Winthrop, Jr.. Half of the book is an appendix, listing every vegetable, fruit, flower, shrub, and herb that Leighton believes would have been found in at least some New England gardens in the 17<sup>th</sup>

century. Most of these are plants that could provide either food and/or medicines, but the list does include a few ornamental flowers—some coming from seeds that would have been brought from Europe, others that were transplants from the North American wilderness. Leighton's conclusions about how the Puritans' perceived and adapted these plants for their private gardens is based primarily upon what we can gather from studying the Puritans' primary gardening manuals and reference works: Parkinson's *Paradisi in Solve Paradisus Terrestris* (1629), John Evelyn's *Acetaria, a Discourse of Sallets* [Salads], Culpeper's translation of the *Pharmacopoeia Londonensis* (the *London Dispensatory*) of 1683, Geoffrey Grigson's *Englishman's Flora*, and Gerard's *Herball*, edited by Thomas Johnson (1633).

Here is a list of the most important vegetables, fruits, flowers, and herbs portrayed in Leighton's appendix. The list demonstrates that a substantial majority of the vegetables, fruit, and herbs we might encounter in a 21<sup>st</sup> century home garden in the Midwest could have been found in a New England garden at the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century.

apple – beans – borage – bouncing bet (soapwort) – bugloss – cabbage (colewort, culiflower) – camomile – carrots – catmint – celandine (swallow wort) – cherries  
chervil – chicory (endive) – clove gillyflowers – comfrey – corn – corn sallet – cress –  
cucumber – dandelion – dill – dittander (pepperwort) – featherfew (feverfew) – fennel  
– ferns – flower de luce – garlic – goats-beard – hellebore – hemp – hollyhock –  
hops – hyssop – Jerusalem artichoke – lavender – leeks – lettuce – licorice – lilies –  
liverwort – loose-strife – lovage – madder – mallows – marigolds – marjoram –  
maudelein – musk melon – spear mint – monkshood – mullein – mustard – nettles –  
onions – parsley – parsnip – patience (monks rhubarb) – peaches – pears – peas --  
penny royal – peony – plantain – plums – pompion (pumpkin) – poppy – potato --  
purslane – radish – rocket – rosemary – roses – rhubarb – rue – sage – saint  
johnwort – sarsaparilla – savory (summer & winter) – scabious – shepherd's purse --  
skirret – smalledge (water parsley) – solomons seal – sorrel – sparagras (asparagus) --  
speedwell – spinach – stocke gillofloures (snowflakes) – strawberry – sunflower –  
tansy – tarragon – thyme – toadflax – tobacco – tormentile (*Potentilla erecta*) – turnip –  
valerian – vervain – violets – wallflowers – wormwood – yarrow.

• **Mabey, Richard.** *The Cabaret of Plants: Forty Thousand Years of Plant Life and the Human Imagination* (W. W. Norton, 2015). Mabey has for many years been one of my favorite garden writers. His book on weeds, reviewed in last year's annotated bibliography, remains one of my all-time favorites, a work that has profoundly influenced my view of gardens and gardening. Although *The Cabaret of Plants* is another beautifully written book full of new (at least for me) and fascinating information, I had difficulties sensing how the various chapters linked together. The choice and sequence of subjects always felt a bit random. Despite my lack of appreciation for the book's undergirding structure, I found the chapters consistently revelatory and thought-provoking. But my favorite moment in the book occurred simply because of an accidental parallel with an experience in my own life. Two years ago, we were in Cumbria's Lake District and did a day hike up to Easedale Tarn, just above the village of Grasmere. On the way back to the car park, we ended up walking through a stretch of wet, boggy terrain. As I was searching

for a dry island for my next step forward, I spotted a small sundew. Stooping down for a closer inspection, I soon realized we were surrounded by a large colony of sundews with hundreds of carnivorous landing pads. Thus, it was a special moment when I turned to page 28 of Mabey's *Cabaret* and read his description of an evening trek near Grasmere and finding "what I can only describe as a sundew meadow. Where the hill flattened out into a patch of bog, about a hundred square yards of these insectivorous plants were swarming amongst barrows of red-tinged sphagnum moss, and the whole ensemble was glowing in the setting sun." I find it fascinating how a passage can become so dramatically transformed and memorable once I—as the reader—am able to make a direct personal connection, his words recording so precisely in location and hour my own experience.

What separates Mabey from most garden writers is the thoroughness of his historical research. While frequently referring to his personal experiences as an explorer and gardener (as evident by the passage on the Cumbrian sundews), Mabey brings into his essays extensive, detailed information on his subjects. As the book cover indicates, Mabey "ranges through the work of writers, artists, and scientists such as da Vinci, Keats, Darwin, and van Gogh and across nearly forty thousand years of human history: Ice Age images of plant life in ancient cave art and the earliest representations of the Garden of Eden; Newton's apple and gravity, Priestley's sprig of mint and photosynthesis, and Wordsworth's daffodils; the history of cultivated plants such as maize, ginseng, and cotton; and the ways the sturdy oak became the symbol of British nationhood and the giant sequoia came to epitomize the spirit of America." And fortunately for me, in the last sentence of the book's final essay, Mabey does provide an explicit statement of his book's primary thesis: ". . . plants are never simple victims, passive objects, but vital, autonomous beings, and that listening to and respecting their vitality is the best way we can co-exist with them, and in their difficult times, learn to help them." Great advice for all of us to keep in mind.

- **Nardi, James.** *Discoveries in the Garden* (University of Chicago Press, 2018). Although I certainly am no expert on garden botany books. I found this recent publication by James Nardi, a biologist at the University of Illinois, the most enlightening and insightful I've ever read. Because of the plant experiments he introduces in each chapter, I'm guessing that Nardi's intended audience is teachers hoping to introduce supplemental biology experiments in the classroom and/or home-school students studying plant science free of a traditional classroom. Although I did not do any of the experiments—and thus I was not always sure what lesson was to be gleaned from particular experiments—I found Nardi's introductions and explanations of basic plant science extraordinarily clear and informative. Not only does he introduce useful techniques for observing plant structures and mechanisms, but his commentary provides important clues on techniques for improving one's own garden. For example, his chapter on the ways in which plants acquire energy from the sun and nutrients from the soil includes a passage explaining why C4 plants (such as dandelions and crabgrass, which effectively re-use their own carbon dioxide) are able to outperform during periods of low moisture, high temperatures, and high light intensity the more common C3 plants (such as the cool-weather grasses we try to keep alive in our lawns). Nardi clarifies why in the middle of a hot, dry

summer, the C4 pigweed and purslane are vigorously growing while the beans and tomatoes are looking haggard and exhausted. In the chapter "Plant Odors and Oils," Nardi recommends planting mustard greens because their glucosinolate oils attract leaf-chewing flea beetles (a recurrent pest attacking my eggplants). Interspersed among the eggplants, the mustard greens could serve as a "trap crop," allowing the eggplants to develop free of the flea beetles. Although my previous efforts at companion planting have not been particularly successful, Nardi's scientific explanations for cooperative planting have convinced me that I need to investigate these options more conscientiously—and to recognize the logical goal is not the elimination of the problem but a reduction in the seriousness of the problem. I won't eliminate the flea beetles but I can minimize their damage on the crops I care about.

• **Perényi, Eleanor.** *Green Thoughts: A Writer in the Garden* (Random House, 1981). I started reading this collection of short essays, arranged alphabetically by subject, in the spring of the year and I finished the last essay eight months later. I knew this was Perényi's only book on gardening, and I simply did not want it to end. The night after reading the last essay—the author's reflections on the history of women in gardening—I wrote a short note inside the front cover: "Delightful, engaging, opinionated—a Hungarian-American version of Christopher Lloyd. One of the best garden essay books I've ever read." Perényi certainly had her opinions on a wide range of topics, and like Lloyd she did not hesitate to share them. I do not know what it would have been like to have dealt with Perényi in person, but I found our encounters in her text consistently refreshing and thought-provoking. Because of those characteristics, I decided to use *Green Thoughts* as the source of quotes that I would mix into this year's quarterly garden journal blog postings. Here are two of my favorite short passages from her marvelous essays:

- *A garden entirely stocked with the newest, showiest hybrids is as depressing as a woman with a face-lift: the past is erased at the expense of character.*
- *The Impressionists saw nature as color swimming in light, but in most of the world's great gardens color has counted for very little. Masses of brilliant shrubs and flowers are a modern idea and not necessarily a good one. Subtract the color from a garden and it can prove to be an ill-planned scramble.*

• **Sales, John.** *Shades of Green: My Life as the National Trust's Head of Gardens* (Unicorn, 2018). John Sales began working at Great Britain's National Trust in 1971, serving as an assistant to Graham Thomas, the Trust's Chief Gardens Adviser. Two years later Sales replaced Thomas (in a position subsequently retitled "Head of Gardens") and held that position until his retirement 28 years later. This book blends memoir with a historical study of the Trust's administration of 50 gardens in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland. Included are some of Britain's most famous, iconic gardens: Blickling Hall, Chartwell, Hidcote, Powis, Sissinghuurst, Stourhead, Studley Royal. Sales typically provides 4-6 pages of texts and photos on each site. He recounts the history of each garden (usually connected with a home of historical importance), the Trust's participation in the garden's preservation and improvements, Sales' own personal involvement in each garden's evolution, and brief portraits of the owners, residents, and/or gardeners who significantly influenced the garden's current condition. Sales is an engaging

author, incredibly knowledgeable, and a master in rendering sympathetic portraits of people who could be difficult to deal with. This was one of the most enjoyable gardening books I've ever read and certainly has inspired me to arrange our future travel plans so some of these gardens are included in our next trip to Great Britain.

- **Toensmeier, Eric.** *Perennial Vegetables: From Artichoke to 'Quiki' Taro, a Gardener's Guide to Over 100 Delicious, Easy-to-Grow Edibles* (Chelsea Green Publishing, 2007). I discovered this book in a chronological list of books which have won the American Horticultural Society Book Award. I've always had a special affection for perennial food sources that don't need to be replanted each year, but I was also aware how few plants in my garden are in that category—one vegetable (asparagus), several fruits (raspberries, gooseberries, strawberries, blackberries, currants, and rhubarb—a plant we treat as a fruit), and a bunch of perennial herbs (oregano, sage, chives, lovage, several mints, and rosemary bushes—which have to be brought indoors during the winter). Although many of the perennials that Toensmeier introduces could never handle Iowa's Zone 4/5 winters, he does offer several vegetable options that I may try introducing: Japanese yams, Good King Harry (Lincolnshire asparagus), Egyptian onions (walking onions), sea kale, garden sorrel, skirret, Jerusalem artichoke (which I grew for many years in a previous garden), scorzonera (which I did grow several years ago but did not realize it could be treated as a perennial), and maybe even stinging nettles. Having been burned by nettles on several occasions, I'm still having problems viewing the nettles in our backyard as an attractive food source. Toensmeier provides clearly written, detailed portraits of each vegetable, including excellent distribution maps, each perennial's history and ecology, potential pest and disease problems, propagation and cultivation tips, harvest and storage advice, and different ways the crop can be used in one's diets (and, in some instances, practical recipes). Toensmeier often includes his own experiences with these foods, identifying both his preferences and the ones he found less appealing.

- **Yankee Books.** *Yankee Magazine's Panty Hose, Hot Peppers, Tea Bags, and More—for the Garden* (Yankee Publishing, 2005). As a long time subscriber to Rodale's *Organic Gardening*, I had often seen advertisements for this book, and so last winter I finally ordered a copy. The title page claims that it will offer "1,001 ingenious ways to use common household items to control weeds, beat pests, cook compost, solve problems, make tricky jobs easy, and save time." Although I knew that not all of these 1,001 ingenious ways would fit with my needs, I was disappointed that when I had finished the book, I had only marked four suggestions worth serious consideration: (1) use old rubber tires for creating a raised bed for potatoes, (2) clean out vine-borer holes in squash stems with rubbing alcohol and stuff the holes with small wads of cotton, (3) use old newspapers as a weed-control mulch (this one I started using in my vegetable garden last spring and so far I am impressed with the benefits), and (4) setting out old onion bags with dryer lint that birds can use for building their nests.