

Fourth Annual Annotated Bibliography of Garden Books (February 2020)

This Garden Shed posting is my 4th February annotated bibliography on garden books I read the previous 12 months. As has been true in the past, I don't do much garden reading in the spring and summer, but once the outdoor garden days become shorter and colder, I find myself more motivated for sitting in a comfortable chair and reading about the trials and triumphs of other gardeners. This year's bibliography covers 25 books, an average of two books per month, with a diversity of authors, topics, and publishers comparable to the previous lists. When I first looked at my pile of books read in 2019, I doubted I could find anything to say about most of them—other than a crude thumbs up or down. But the task of compiling these annual bibliographies does force me to re-visit these old friends, read my marginal notes and underlined passages, and refresh my memory on what this book had tried to tell me. It's time-consuming but worth doing.

Akeroyd, Simon. *100 Perfect Plants: A Simple Plan for Your Dream Garden* (National Trust, 2017).

Akeroyd is the Head Gardener for the National Trust in Devon and responsible for such gardens as Agatha Christie's Greenway, Compton Castle, and Bradley Manor. Akeroyd has chosen 100 plants based on their beauty, growability, reliability, availability (at least easily obtained in Great Britain), manageability (they don't spread aggressively or become too large for a small garden), suitability in a variety of conditions, and hardiness (not requiring exceptionally mild climates or a greenhouse). Since this book is addressed to gardeners in the British Isles, there are several plants judged hardy in England that would not survive an Iowa winter, but this is still a book well worth consulting, easily among my favorites in this year's group.

The recommended plants are sorted according to the season of the year when they provide maximum interest. For each plant, Akeroyd identifies his favorite cultivar and information on attractive alternatives. Most plants receive a full-page color photo while in bloom (as with other National Trust books I read this year, the photographs are extraordinarily well done), a one-paragraph summary of the plant's most appealing attributes, and a 4-5 paragraph commentary the plant's aesthetic and cultural properties; its preferred soil and sun conditions, and its requirements for care and maintenance. As I was evaluating Akeroyd's recommendations, my primary focus was on identifying potential plants for the Coe garden. While I was pleased to discovered that the Coe garden already has more than twenty of these plants in the garden (either the same cultivars Akeroyd recommends or quite similar), I did find several new perennial flowers and shrubs as possibilities for the future.

Anderton, Stephen. *Lives of the Great Gardeners* (Thames & Hudson, 2016). This is a collection of 6-8 page commentaries on 40 famous gardeners and their gardens. The gardeners are sorted into four groups according to Anderton's interpretation of their primary role in the history of gardening: gardens of ideas (e.g., Wen Zhengming, William Kent, Thomas Jefferson, Charles Jencks), gardens of straight lines (André Le Nôtre, Sir Edward Luytens, Lawrence Johnston, Russell Page), gardens of curves (Lancelot "Capability" Brown, Frederick Law Olmstead, Thomas Church, Roberto Burle Marx), and gardens of plantsmanship (William Robinson, Claude Monet, Christopher Lloyd, Piet Oudolf). Each portrait includes brief biographies combined with descriptions of their gardens and observations on their historical influence. Anderton's writing is clean, direct, and informative--conveying substantive commentaries that should appeal to readers with diverse backgrounds. Even on topics that have been exhaustively covered--such as Capability Brown and the 18th-century landscape movement--Anderton's succinct commentaries are thoughtful and fresh-sounding. As one might expect, over half of the gardeners are Brits, but there are a few gardeners from other parts of the world, including Japan, Australia, Brazil, China, France, Italy, Canada, Spain, and the U.S. A. Anderton's prose is complemented

Annotated Bibliography of Garden Books (2020)

by a judicious selection of photos, many occupying half of the page; the color quality is not great, but it's certainly adequate for this book's purpose. Overall, I found this to be an easy read, not profoundly thought-provoking but consistently interesting. It certainly generated a desire to visit many of these gardens associated with these gardeners. While I'm not sure this book will have any profound impact on my gardening practices, Anderton did sharpen my understanding of the character and influence of specific gardeners. I found him particularly insightful in writing about gardeners still active in the 21st century—such as Piet Oudolf, John Brookes, James Van Sweden, and Gernando Caruncho.

Austen, Jane. *Mansfield Park* (Kindle edition; first published in 1814). This past spring, while reading Robin Fox's *Thoughtful Gardening* (also reviewed in this bibliography), I came across his essay deriding changes made in *Emma* and *Mansfield Park* when they were transformed into movies. Fox voiced his dismay at movie producers introducing fake garden journalists into a story while ignoring the major landscape issues Austen deals with in *Mansfield Park*. Fox writes: "How would innocent viewers ever guess that the text of *Mansfield Park* contains a brilliant interplay of observations on that eternal question, the merits and stupidities of landscape gardening? The issues are still familiar: superfluous improvement at vast expense, designer's egocentricity, and the charms of an existing landscape." Fox blasts away at the failure of the TV versions to show any awareness of Austen's protagonist and her responsiveness to the direct pleasures of nature.

What TV viewer would guess that Fanny is the first person in literature to realize that by 'passing March and April in a town' she had missed all the pleasures of spring? She lost what we all recognize, 'the earliest flowers in the warmest divisions of her aunt's garden, the opening of leaves on her uncle's plantations and the glory of his woods.' She admires the evergreens in the little wilderness that contains a walk around Mansfield's nearby parsonage. She is a cardinal character in the history of the enjoyment of gardens and it is gruesome that the BBC edited out this aspect of her.

Fox proceeds to complain about the suppression of references to foxhunting, a sport that he has on frequent occasions vigorously defended.

Inspired by Fox's remarks, on several beautiful days in October I read for the first time Austen's *Mansfield Park*. While I did not find the novel as engaging as *Emma* or *Pride and Prejudice*, it was nevertheless an immensely enjoyable encounter—and I eventually stayed up long past midnight determined to find out exactly how it all ended. While Austen has many other topics to wrestle with besides gardens and landscapes, several passages did provide intriguing perspectives on these matters from one of Britain's greatest writers. Here is one of those passages, Fanny expressing her enthusiasm to a "friend" who had not imagined a country parson would ever aspire to create such an attractive garden.

I am so glad to see the evergreens thrive! Said Fanny, in reply. My uncle's gardener always says the soil here is better than his own, and so it appears from the growth of the laurels and evergreens in general. The evergreen! How beautiful, how welcome, how wonderful the evergreen! When one thinks of it, how astonishing a variety of nature! In some countries we know that the tree that sheds its leaf is the variety, but that does not make it less amazing, that the same soil and the same sun should nurture plants different in the first rule and law of their existence.

Burke, Sue. *Semiosis* (Kindle edition, novel first published in 2018). Although no librarian would ever assign this science fiction novel to a shelf of gardening books, I frequently found myself thinking about plants and gardens while reading it. The story-line describes several generations of English-speaking earthlings who are cryptogenetically frozen and shot into space, fleeing from a devastated earth and

Annotated Bibliography of Garden Books (2020)

traveling over a hundred light years from earth in hopes their rocket can find a planet amenable to immigration. What they eventually discover on their new planet is a remarkably intelligent bamboo capable of communicating—via its command of internal molecules—with most life forms, including orange trees (consistently uncooperative), tulips (very dumb), and humans. Despite the novel’s far-fetched premises, I became absorbed and was frequently thinking about the benefits of perceiving perennial plants as reasonably intelligent and resourceful. The survival of the humans depends on their learning to cooperate with and trust the bamboo—a cooperation that proves mutually beneficial. Although I doubt we will ever converse with any bamboo on earth, the novel does encourage considering the potential rewards if humans could learn how to decode the messages that plants are already exchanging with the world around them.

Last fall I started reading *The Language of Plants: Science, Philosophy, Literature*, a collection of essays edited by Monica Gagliano, John C. Ryan, and Patricia Vieira and published by the University of Minnesota Press (2017). In their introduction the editors note that “Science has recently noticed that our ‘plant blindness’ and concomitant predilection for animals over plants might be ancestrally derived, as our visual attention toward human and nonhuman animals is inherently higher than when we see plants. This extremely prevalent condition, whereby we struggle even to notice plants as being alive, clearly remains a significant source of negligence toward the botanical world and, more generally, the environment.” Burke’s science fiction has inspired me to return to the *Language of Plants* and reconsider how humans could become more attentive and responsive to those messages.

Crawford, Stanley. *A Garlic Testament: Seasons on a Small New Mexico Farm* (Edward Burlingame Books, 1992). This memoir focuses on the experiences of an Anglo novelist who raises garlic and flowers on a six-acre farm in northern New Mexico and has learned how to make a living selling his organic produce in Santa Fe and Los Alamos. While reflecting on these experiences, Crawford does provide substantial information about his farm’s practices for raising and harvesting garlic, but the garlic business is often a starting point for his reflections on various issues, ranging from the dangers of nuclear armaments to the value of learning how to construct a home from home-made adobe bricks. I found Crawford’s narrative voice quite appealing, someone who emerges as an intriguing mix of liberal idealist and pragmatic realist. The book contains many passages quietly and effectively evoking the New Mexico landscape. Here is one passage from the chapter “December Light”:

Until again you reacquire a taste for the ripening winter landscape, for the light and smoky grays of tree trunks, the black traceries of intertwined branches against a brilliant blue sky, the reds of clays and grays and blues of gravel on the surrounding cliffs and hillsides; the umbers of fallen, curling leaves, the dry grasses; the textures and glints of rocks in the low inspecting beam of the sun in midafternoon on a south-facing hillside, where there can be warmth even in the depths of January. There is an encyclopedia to be composed on the patterns of snow melting, those shards of cloud fallen to the ground beneath a tree or behind a clump of grass or in the furrows of a field, over the course of weeks of slowly rising sun after the winter solstice; of icicles forming and dissolving in the exposed roots of a bank cut away from the flower of the river; or of the months-long collapse of the stalks of weeds and grasses.

Edwards, Ambra. *The Story of the English Garden* (National Trust, 2018). Edwards provides a fairly straightforward history of English flower gardens, dividing 750 years of garden history into 10 chapters, loosely adhering to century divisions, at least prior to the 20th century: medieval period, 16th-century Tudor era, 17th-century Stuarts, two chapters on 18th-century Georgian gardens, 19th-century Victorians,

Annotated Bibliography of Garden Books (2020)

and four chapters covering from the end of the 19th century to the beginning of the 21st (Arts & Crafts, gardens between the two world wars, kitchen gardens, and the “New Millennium” gardens since WWII). Interspersed with commentaries on specific gardens and historical figures, Edwards provides 1-2 page inserts on important developments that often stretch across multiple eras. For example, in the chapter on Medieval Gardens, there is a two-page interlude discussing trellises, noting their appearance in medieval illustrations and their usage in gardens designed by Gertrude Jekyll and George Carter. Other special topics include deer parks, earth sculptures, gardening books, bee hives, the ha-ha, grottos, hermits, menageries, allotments. This is not a great book, but the writing is clean and informative. Edwards does a nice job mixing general overviews with information on specific examples. As with other recent National Trust books, the photographs are superb and all the featured gardens exquisitely beautiful.

Ellacombe, Henry. *In a Gloucestershire Garden* (Kindle edition, originally published in 1895). In my first garden bibliography in 2017, I provided an annotation on Ellacombe’s *In My Vicarage Garden and Elsewhere* (a Kindle edition of a book first published in 1901). Although the writing style is a bit dated, Ellacombe comes across as a friendly fellow gardener, full of practical, common-sense suggestions still relevant 100 years later. He has little to say about garden design, but he has an extensive knowledge of and a deep love for flowers. He is a great example of someone committed to values we might associate with Robinson/Jekyll tradition of gardening at the turn of the century. I was thoroughly enjoying this book until the text on my Kindle became progressively unreadable. Whatever scanning program was used was totally unreliable, and it seems no one bothered to check and discover the text was all screwed up. Some words I could decipher (for example, “r&se” for “rose”) but many words, phrases, and sentences appeared as totally gibberish (®//,/,**//). Since I only paid \$0.99 for my Kindle version, the monetary loss is not huge; I just need to spend the extra \$10 and get a good used print copy.

Floud, Roderick. *An Economic History of the English Garden* (Allen Lane, 2019). Over the last five years, I’ve read several dozen books on the history of English gardens, but perhaps none more informative than this recent publication. While the book lacks the stunning garden photographs that make so many garden books so irresistible, Floud compensates by his in-depth, scholarly examination of the economic role that public and private gardens have played in England. Floud argues that previous historians have undervalued the economic impact of the nation’s gardens because of failing to adopt appropriate indices for registering the economic value of the gardens and their contribution to the country’s GDP. These historians have not appreciated how the garden industry and the public spending on royal, public, and aristocratic gardens have spurred such wide-spread economic development. Housing patterns, for example, have been profoundly influenced by government authorities restricting housing density so people would have space for private gardens. The innovations in gardening have stimulated major advances in technological and industrial development: central heating in green houses led to central heating for human beings, the introduction of steam engines for these greenhouses helped lead the way to the industrial revolution, the application of iron and glass in conservatories had a profound impact on urban construction projects, and the development of commercial canals derived from techniques developed to make possible the vast landscaping efforts in the 18th century.

Floud presents an impressive body of evidence that British gardens—even gardens ostensibly focused on growing vegetables for consumption—have been primarily driven by non-utilitarian concerns. He painstakingly demonstrates that vegetables have played a remarkably minor role in the British diet, and people could have saved substantial amounts of money if they had dispensed with their vegetable

Annotated Bibliography of Garden Books (2020)

gardens and purchased all their fresh vegetables and fruit at a local market. Floud concludes his book by noting that the English have a deep, resilient relationship with their gardens and this connection is inseparable from the re-establishment of the English monarchy in the 17th century, the expansion of the national debt, the industrial revolution in the 18th century, and the emergence of new housing schemes in the 19th and 20th century. The history of English gardens turns out to be the history of England, which should come as no surprise “to the millions of people who now, like their predecessors over many centuries, toil, curse, enjoy and celebrate the glory of the garden.”

Fortier, Jean-Martin. *The Market Gardener* (New Society Publishers, 2014). This was the most informative vegetable gardening book I read this year. Fortier uses his extensive experiences as a successful truck gardener in Southern Quebec to offer readers pragmatic advice operating a successful low-tech, high-yield organic farm. While I have no intention to become a professional vegetable gardener, the book describes many gardening practices that should prove applicable to my small acreage. Fortier does an excellent job describing how his small market garden can feed more than 200 families utilizing just 1.5 acres. This farming, done without a tractor, relies on a few hand tools and minimum tillage practices. The book contains detailed guidance for increasing crop yields by introducing sensible weed and pest management techniques. In one chapter Fortier describes their growing practices for specific crops with recommendations for preferred cultivars, each vegetable’s spacing requirements, fertilization needs, germination and transplanting practices, and number of days in the garden prior to harvest. I was surprised how frequently Fortier recommended unfamiliar cultivars (for example, Sweet Success and Jewell cucumbers). Here are several passages that could be applicable to my own vegetable garden:

- “Every time a harvest is done with, we immediately cover it. Depending on what crop is next in line of the schedule, the tarp will remain on the bed for anywhere between two to five weeks, leaving our minds worry-free. Passively, we are preparing the soil for the next seeding.” In several other passages, Fortier stresses the need to keep the soil and a vegetable bed dormant.
- “Generally speaking, biological activity is very low or even nonexistent when the temperature is below 50F (in the soil, not in the air). Therefore, when the soil is still cold in the springtime, we need to compensate for the potential lack of nitrogen by adding fast-acting natural fertilizers. This ensures that the crops will get a good takeoff. Blood meal, fish meal, or pelleted chicken manure are examples of different natural fertilizers that will release nitrogen faster than compost.”
- Fortier recommends not becoming obsessed about a commitment to rigorous crop rotation, but he does offer these recommendations
 - Crops in the Brassicaceae, Lilaceae, and Solanaceae families should not be grown again in the same spot in less than four years.
 - Heavy feeders are followed by lighter feeders.
 - Root vegetables are alternated with leaf vegetables.
- “Our primary weed control strategy is pretty simple: hoe the garden as often as possible and never let weeds in any plot go to seed.” Fortier quotes Eliot Coleman, the organic gardener who has been the single most important influence on their gardening strategies: “Too many growers consider hoeing to be a treatment for weeds, and thus they start too late. Hoeing should be understood as a means of prevention. In other words: Don’t weed, cultivate. . . . Large weeds are competition for both the crops and the grower.”
- “. . . floating row cover is one of the all-time greatest technological innovations in horticultural industry. . . . When spread over crops, row cover increases the soil temperature by 2-3 degrees while also

Annotated Bibliography of Garden Books (2020)

keeping in moisture, thereby protecting the plants against frost. Installing row cover over direct-seeded crops speeds up germination; installing it over transplanted drops protects the seedlings from harsh weather. . . . On our farm, we use 0.55 cu/ft² row covers in spring and fall [and] use heavier ones, which are about twice the thickness, over fall crops to act as a thermal screen on frosty nights." In the spring, all beds are under a row cover.

Fox, Robin Lane. *Thoughtful Gardening* (Basic Books, 2010). Fox has an intriguing double career at Oxford University: he is a University Reader in Ancient History (and author of award-winning books on Alexander the Great and myths in the age of Homer) and he oversees the grounds at New College. This book is a collection of 80 essays based on his garden column in the *Financial Times*, a column stretching back 40 years to his first submission in 1970. These 3-5 page essays are sorted into groups according to the four seasons. As for the essay topics, Fox casts a wide net, discussing famous British gardeners (such as Rosemary Verey, Nancy Lancaster, Valerie Finnis), important gardens (Jardin Majorelle, Peckerwood Garden in Texas, the gardens at Altamont in Ireland, Herterton House in Northumberland, Schynige Platte in the Bavarian Alps, Tivoli Garden in Rome), famous authors associated with gardens (Katherine Mansfield, John Clare, D. H. Lawrence, Jane Austen), favorite garden plants (snowdrops, fritillaries, rhododendrons, red poppies, Chinese wisteria, Mount Etna broom, fuchsias, and his six favorite irises), and gardening techniques (deadheading, biennial sowing, how to take cuttings, dealing with badgers and rabbits).

On occasion Fox reminds me of Christopher Lloyd: both are self-confident gardeners with strong opinions and never hesitant to share those opinions. Fox, however, strikes me as more narrow-minded than Lloyd, less flexible, less knowledgeable, less skilled in explaining the reasons for his prejudices. For example, in an essay describing a visit to the Phukae Botanic Garden outside of Bangkok, Fox informs us that "I detest almost every form of ornamental grass," but he makes no effort to explain or support that quick generalization. I suspect he enjoys such announcements, demonstrating his pleasure resisting current fads in garden design and remaining committed to a more traditional style of gardening. I did appreciate how he brought a critical perspective on recent gardening fashions, but I had difficulties appreciating his facile dismissals of organic gardeners hesitant to make their gardening easier by using insecticides or pesticides ("without prudent chemical weaponry, gardening and farming would degenerate into chaos").

On the other hand, Fox can be an amusing story teller, such as this passage retelling a story told to him by Christopher Lloyd about Lloyd's first encounter with Helen Dillon and her garden in Dublin. She let him go out alone into her stunning garden at the back of her town house in Sandford Road and watched while he went down on one knee, ignored its brilliant planting, and merely looked over the garden wall. When he came inside, he told her, "Helen, your neighbor has a very interesting kind of holm oak." She was not deterred: "Christopher," she replied, "I have a friend in America who has two dachshunds. He has named one 'Christopher' and the other 'Loyd.'" Christopher loved dachshund dogs and made the reputation of his own beloved Tulip through fond references to him in his writings. "I am very honored," he replied. "So you should be," she retorted. "They are both bitches."

Fox informs us this exchanges was the beginning of a "much-appreciated friendship" between Lloyd and Dillon. As for my developing a comparable relationship with Fox, that probably won't occur. I'm glad I read this book. I found his writing engaging and insightful, but he is not yet one of my favorites.

Goldman, Amy. *Melons for the Passionate Grower* (Workman Publishing, 2002). This book's color photographs by Victor Schrager are stunning. Many photographs are full page, often pairing an uncut melon with one that has been opened to reveal the flesh and seeds. The 100 heirloom melons represented in this book are all from two branches of the Cucurbitaceae family of plants: the melons (*Cucumis melo*) and the watermelons (*Citrullus lanatus*). All are open-pollinated plants, producing seeds that will in turn produce plants that will grow, look, and taste like their parents. Although most melons are fervent interbreeders, Goldman uses a classification system in this book that sorts melons into eight traditional subgroups:

- **Cantalupensis:** true cantaloupes, not to be confused with muskmelons; the majority of these desert melons come from France, including Noir des Carmes, Early Frame Prescott, and Petit Gris de Rennes.
- **Reticulatus:** Muskmelons and Persian Melons, distinguished by the netlike tissue that covers the rind; usually ribbed and sutured, sweet and orange-fleshed; featured reticulatus include Jenny Lind, Minnesota Midget, Muscatine, Schoon's Hard Shell, and Fordhook Gem.
- **Inodorus:** Winter melons, which include Canary, Casaba, Crenshaw, and Honeydew; labeled winter melons because their hard rind helps preserve them into the winter, a characteristic that can make it difficult to determine when they are ripe for harvest; notable melons in this group include Orange-Fleshed Honeydew, Crane, Santa Claus, Pie de Sapo (my personal favorite), Amarillo Oro, Bidwell Casaba, and Collective Farm Woman.
- **Conomon:** Two Asian, non-sweet varieties, Makuwa Uri (bland taste, rather bitter) and Tsuke uri (popular in Japan; used as salt pickles).
- **Flexuosus:** known as the Snake Melon or Armenian Cucumber; these melons are members of the cucumber family, but they are distinct species and do not interbreed with cucumbers or other melons.
- **Chito:** Mango Melons; also known as Garden Lemon, Melon Apple, or Vine Peach; these Central American melons are neither sweet nor aromatic.
- **Momordica:** Phut or Snap Melons are not seen in the U.S. and are primarily grown in Asia; the white flesh is dry, mealy, almost crystalline.
- **Dudaim:** Queen Anne's Pocket Melon, a beautiful melon with marvelous fragrance but "flavor is not its strong suit."
- **Watermelon, *Citrullus lanatus*;** featured watermelons include Carolina Cross, Golden Midget, Tom Watson, Sugar Baby, Ali Baba (my most productive watermelon last summer), Blacktail Mountain, Georgia Rattlesnake, and Moon and Stars ("the poster child of the heirloom seed movement")

At the end of the book, Goldman provides detailed information on each of the 100 featured melons, including typical size, weight, sugar content on the Brix scale, maturity date, common names, seed sources, and in some instances the melon's history. Goldman has also assembled an excellent list of seed sources with information on websites, addresses, telephone numbers, catalog availability, and relevant background information on some companies. Although this list would now be almost 20 years old, the information on the sources I use appeared to be surprisingly up-to-date. For example, here is the description of Baker Creek Heirloom Seeds, located in Mansfield, Missouri: "Free catalog. Sells only nonhybrid seeds. Specializes in heirloom seeds, including many rare types and Asian and European varieties. Outstanding melon collection. Mainly retail, but catalog includes a page of wholesale offerings." As far as I can tell, that information is still accurate.

Annotated Bibliography of Garden Books (2020)

Hamer, Marc. *How to Catch a Mole: Wisdom from a Life Lived in Nature* (Greystone Books, 2019). The copy I read was a Christmas gift and the last book I read in 2019. Hamer, a recently retired professional mole catcher in Wales, has written a book that defies categorization: combining prose and poetry (though his lyrical prose tends to be sharper than the poetry), memoir (including recollections as a vagabond wanderer through the countryside for 18 months in his youth), a handbook on how to catch moles (and lamentation on his discomfort as a mole killer), frequent philosophical ruminations (humans are animals functioning in many ways no different from moles), and expressions of his love for family and wife (Peggy in the book, in honor of Robbie Burns' "I love my Peggy's angel air"). Although Hamer's perceptions of the world can be rather bleak ("the only permanent things about man are his waste"), I admired his direct, stark approach to the world ("nature doesn't care about a single individual"). Despite Hamer's discomfort with his career as a mole-catcher, he acknowledges that mole catching has intensified his relationship with nature and provided him with deeper insights into what it means to be a human. The book has marvelous information on moles and adeptly demonstrates the necessity of learning how to think like a mole in order to kill one--while also adopting a "certain amount of magical thinking." Hamer has no doubt the moles will be the victors in this confrontation with humans. The UK currently has 30-40 million moles, and it's time for farmers and gardeners to learn how to co-exist with these blind, underground worm eating soil tillers.

As I was reading, I found myself frequently underlining passages that struck me as particularly eloquent or insightful. Here's a small sample:

- "Words have a different existence to things they name: they live in different places, have different lives."
- "I don't know how far I walked because if you are measuring you are not walking." (I can imagine this sentence appearing in one of Thoreau's journals.)
- "I spent the spring, the summer and the autumn of my sixteenth year walking. The seasons travel at around 2 mph from south to north. If I kept walking north I could have been forever in spring."
- "Robins have learned that people disturb the soil, so they follow us looking for food."
- "Growing older is a process of shutting down. In decay I see the beginning of growth, because that is how I choose to see the world, because it makes the world elegant and poetic; because I have no religion; because I am a gardener and I see it every day."
- "I have come to like things that are left unfinished. It's the question that shines the light, that seeks. The answer's often just a dim reflection of the vastness of the question. There are no answers that satisfy."
- "A tool responds to the way it is used."
- "Some things can only be expressed through interaction with others; without them there can be no humanity. Only humans show compassion. I am tired of spending my days alone. I am tired of this labyrinth, this solitary walk."
- "Looking back on my fragmented, misty and incomplete history of broken family, relationships and incomplete events, there was this path to wholeness, a kind of gravity dragging me toward self-repair."
- "There is no certainty, only experience."
- "The truth hides in tiny things."
- "A fine-looking garden is a sterile place. A perfect green lawn is only kept that way by continually dosing it with chemicals. A lawn that is not treated will naturally become home to a massive number of species of birds and worms and native wild plants, crane-fly larvae, beetles, invertebrates."

And, finally, a paragraph on gardening:

- "Most of the life in the earth is in the top few inches, the place where the moles and the worms and the

Annotated Bibliography of Garden Books (2020)

larvae and the beetles and millions of other organisms do their work. Below this is the subsoil, which is often dense and nutritionally poor, as it has had its nutrients leached away and been compressed under creatures walking and layers of organic matter that has fallen on top. As a gardener I do not dig any more. I hoe off the weeds and top-dress the gardens in the autumn with compost just as nature does with falling leaves and grasses. This keeps the moisture in and the weeds suppressed; it allows the worms to break up hard soil and increases microbial activity, allowing life to expand its range, and lets air and water into the soil. Moles do this for us.”

Holloway, Jane, editor. *The Language of Flowers: Poems* (Alfred A. Knopf, Everyman’s Library Pocket Poets, 2017). I read most of this anthology while on a Rhine boat cruise in October. Thus, it’s hard to separate my positive impression of this collection from the glorious experience of reading these poems while sitting on a sun deck, quietly gliding through the European countryside from Basel to Amsterdam. I liked how Holloway grouped the poems according to simple classifications: Spring, Lilies and Roses, Summer, Autumn, Winter, the Language of Flowers. This sorting strategy meant the reader would encounter a series of poems on the same flower, such as a sequence of poems on daffodils by Al-Sanabari, Abdallah Ibn Al-Mu’Tazz, William Wordsworth, U. A. Fanthorpe, Robert Herrick—juxtapositions that helped me see familiar poems by Wordsworth and Herrick in a new perspective. Another personal effect of this anthology was discovering how many of the poems were inspired by flowers that grow in the Alumni House Garden. This inspired my November Garden Shed posting, which combined photos of flowers at Coe with poems I read on the Rhine. I also discovered many poems previously unknown to me, such as Denise Levertov’s “In Praise of Allium.”

No one celebrates the allium.
The way each purposeful stem
ends in a globe, a domed umbel,
makes people think,
'Drumsticks,' and that's that.
Besides, it's related to the onion.
Is that any reason
for disregard? The flowers—look—
are bouquets of miniature florets,
each with six elfin pointed petals
and some narrower ones my eyes
aren't sharp enough to count,
and three stamens about the size
of a long eyelash.
Every root
sends up a sheaf of sturdy
ridged stems, bounty
to fill your embrace. The bees
care for the allium, if you don't—
hear them now, doing their research,
humming the arias
of a honey opera. Allium it's called,

Annotated Bibliography of Garden Books (2020)

gold fur voluptuously
brushing that dream mauve.

Hudson, Jules. *Walled Gardens* (National Trust, 2018). Since the Alumni House Garden was designed as an English-style walled garden, it seemed sensible to read a book on the history of walled gardens in Great Britain. Although walled gardens began as relatively simple medieval enclosures, by the 17th-century they had become a socially important means for wealthy land-owners to raise rare and exotic plants. The gardens in the 18th century expanded their function and reached their pinnacle of success at the turn of the twentieth century, using elaborate heating systems and greenhouses to become a valuable source of vegetables, fruits, and flowers for their owners. Hudson, however, probably errs in stressing how these gardens “were a wholly practical addition. . . . a vital food source expected to repay the investment required to build them.” On this issue, Roderick Floud in his *Economic History of the English Garden* is certainly more accurate in his argument that the primary motivation between the aristocracy’s walled gardens was to impress their peers. These walled gardens never made good economic sense. As Hudson acknowledges, these gardens were prohibitively expensive to maintain, and by the 1950s most walled gardens were either abandoned or destroyed. A primary goal of Hudson’s book is to celebrate the examples of important walled gardens that have been revived in recent years, many now properties managed by the National Trust.

Hudson has organized his historical review according to five chronological stages of walled gardens, with examples in each chapter of surviving gardens that best represent each period:

- (1) Early walled gardens (Blickling Estate in Norfolk and Easton Walled Gardens in Lincolnshire);
- (2) 18th century gardens of the revolution and the emergence of heated glass houses (Attingham Park in Shropshire and Llanerchaeron at Ceredigion);
- (3) 19th century gardens in the age of empire (Cumber Park in Nottinghamshire, Tatton Park in Cheshire, Knighthayes Court in Devon);
- (4) The decline, fall, and restoration of walled gardens in the 20th century (Plas Newydd in Anglesey, the Lost Gardens of Heligan in Cornwall, Winston Churchill’s Chartwell in Kent);
- (5) Three recent restorations that suggest the future of walled gardens in the 21st century (Newport House in Herefordshire, Gravetye Manor in Sussex, and Gordon Castle in Moray).

Although the hundreds of photos (including many marvelous aerial shots) in this book are often more eloquent than Hudson’s rather pedestrian prose, he does provide information on many topics that I had not previously encountered: use of sheltered belts, slip gardens, brickmaking and brick design, brick and glass taxes, serpentine walls, use of tanner’s bark and frost gates, types of glasshouses, Robin Hood boilers, and mushroom houses. At the back of the book, Hudson lists 48 walled gardens, most in the National Trust, that have survived and can be visited. Since I have only seen two of the gardens on his list (Fenton House and Osterley Park), I have plenty of options to consider during my next trip to Great Britain.

Lancaster, Roy. *My Life with Plants* (Royal Horticultural Society, 2017). I must be one of the few readers of this book who opened the first page without any idea who is Roy Lancaster. As I discovered in this autobiography, for four decades Lancaster has been a regular TV and radio personality on garden shows in Great Britain. In 1981 he appeared on BBC TV’s *Gardener’s World* (working with such notable garden icons as Clay Jones and Geoff Hamilton) and through the 1980s also did two shows of his own for Granada Television (one show titled *In Search of the Wold Asparagus* and a longer-running show called the

Annotated Bibliography of Garden Books (2020)

Garden Club). In 1998 Lancaster became a regular panelist on BBC Radio 4's *Gardeners' Question Time*. But prior to his career as a garden consultant, free-lance journalist, and media personality, Lancaster worked for 18 years at the world-famous Hillier Nurseries in Hampshire. Throughout all these diverse employments, he has been pre-eminently an ornamental plants person. Except for a few comments on the garden at his home, he rarely mentions garden design or vegetables. His primary focus was always on ornamental perennials, particularly hardy shrubs and trees.

Lancaster's autobiography amply demonstrates that during his remarkable gardening career, he has known virtually all the major English gardeners and writers about gardens active in the past 50 years. He comes across as a friendly, engaging, self-deprecating personality. His comments on associates—except for a few rare exceptions—are consistently warm and positive. Only in the publisher's bio at the end of the book did I realize he had received the Veitch Memorial Medal, the Victoria Medal of Honor, an OBE in 1999, a CBE in 2014, and two honorary doctorates. In retelling his life, Lancaster keeps the focus on his education and professional career, recounting the sequence of places he worked and the people he worked with. The book is also a photo scrapbook, with dozens of photos split between special plants he has encountered and the people/places connected with those plant discoveries. This is not a great book, but it was an easy, enjoyable read, portraying the life of someone who has been in love with beautiful plants for 80 years.

Lively, Penelope. *Life in the Garden* (Viking, 2017). An author of over 20 works of fiction—including *Moon Tiger*, earning Dame Lively a Booker Prize—this appears to be Lively's first book on the subject of gardens. To phrase it more accurately, this is not so much a book on gardens as a book analyzing how gardens have been perceived and portrayed in literature and painting. While these essays do not tell us much about Lively's own gardening experiences, she does display her strong emotional attachment to gardens and their evocative/metaphoric power, first experienced as a child living in Egypt. She is most effective and insightful when illuminating how other artists have used gardens in their own works.

The authors and artists celebrated by Lively include Virginia Woolf (whose "Kew Gardens" is the "essence of modernist writing"), Claude Monet ("the painterly complement to Virginia Woolf [combining] practical applied gardening with use of the garden as image"), Frances Hodgson Burnett's *The Secret Garden*, Carol Shields's *The Stone Diaries*, Elizabeth von Arnim's *Elizabeth and Her German Garden* (a memoir pretending to be a novel), T. S. Eliot ("Burnt Norton" is a poem about "garden time"), and Edith Wharton (Lively brilliantly analyzes the garden imagery in *Age of Innocence*). Lively also discusses writers who have written books on the subject of gardening: Sir George Sitwell, *On the Making of Gardens*; Anna Pavord, *The Curious Gardener*; James Fenton, *A Garden from a Hundred Packets of Seed*; Margery Fish, *We Made a Garden*; Beth Chatto, *The Dry Garden*; Eleanor Perényi's *Green Thoughts*, Karl Čapek's *The Gardener's Year*, and anonymous authors of seed and flower catalogs..

Here is a sample of my favorite passages from the book.

- "... gardens themselves are eloquent, in that they speak for their owners. By their gardens ye shall know them."
- Lively celebrates the remarkable diversity of flowers introduced into English gardens in the 19th century, changing forever the face of gardening: "... our gardens are cosmopolitan, they speak in tongues."
- "To garden is to elide past, present and future; it is a defiance of time. You garden today for tomorrow; the garden mutates from season to season, always the same, but always different. . . . We are always gardening for a future; we are supposing, assuming a future."

Annotated Bibliography of Garden Books (2020)

- “The great defiance of time is our capacity to remember—the power of memory. Time streams away behind us, and beyond, but individual memory shapes, for each of us, a known place. We own a particular piece of time; I was there, then, I did this, saw that, felt thus. And gardening, in its small way, performs a memory feat: it corrals time, pinning it to the seasons, to the gardening year, by summoning up the garden in the past, the garden to come. A garden is never just *now*; it suggests yesterday and tomorrow; it does not allow time its steady progress.”
- “You can’t impose order, where nature is concerned. A garden may be a defined area, but it is also an artificial concept, and plants will evade definition if it suits them—jump the wall and flourish elsewhere. It seems a form of give-and-take: the garden colonizes the wild, the wild probes the garden, sending up natural growth wherever it gets the chance.”

Mabey, Richard. *A Brush with Nature: Reflections on the Natural World* (BBC Books, 2010).

This was a book I purchased in a Used Book Store in London and started reading while spending a week in London in October. As the book’s subtitle suggests, this collection of 82 short essays is more focused on the English countryside than on gardens, but gardening issues frequently pop up in these short texts originally written for *BBC Wildlife*. Mabey is one of Britain’s leading authorities on native flora and on English gardens, and it’s no surprise that even when writing on non-gardening topics, his arguments will be relevant to gardening.

This is the 5th book by Mabey that I’ve read. I suppose one reason I find his work so appealing is his advocacy for and practice of the walking essay. I assigned dozens of walking essay assignments over a long teaching career. I found the genre appealing because, as Mabey points out in his essay “Pootling,” writing about a walk provides the author with a “ready-made framework for a writer to hang a narrative account on.” The essay can begin by describing the author’s first steps and the essay ends when the walk ends. Very simple, very neat. Along the way, the writer describes what is seen and heard while using those observations to reflect on whatever topics are stimulated by those observations. Here are some of Mabey’s observations that struck me as most relevant to my current preoccupations with gardening:

- Mabey provides a marvelous description of the cultural/aesthetic ideals underlying Moorish gardens, focusing on the gardens surrounding the Alhambra in the city of Granada: “They consist of tiers of cool and shaded terraces, each one containing just a few simple elements—orange trees ranged alongside a narrow canal and water by rows of fountains; single magnolias and judas trees in their own walled alcoves; steps lined with ivy and broom, and carrying aqueducts just a few inches wide along their edges. It sounds as unwild and formal as you could imagine, but the whole stone framework also includes a multitude of arches, peepholes, viewpoints over the lower layers, so that you are forever seeing things from different perspectives. . . . I imagine this is an expression of the Islamic view of nature, and of finding beauty and pattern in simplicity. But it was also an ecological lesson about hidden intricacy and unexpected relationships.” (“Andalusia”)
- “The hidden agenda behind the 16th-century botanic garden was nothing less than the re-creation of paradise. . . . in the growing mood of confidence that followed the Renaissance, a new idea began to take root. At the Fall, nature had not so much been cursed as scattered across the Earth, to be discovered by humans when they were ready. It was humankind’s redemptive challenge to reassemble the jigsaw puzzle, and make coherent sense of it.” (“The Oldest Botanical Garden in the World”)
- Mabey on landscape painting. “Psychologists suggest that our landscape needs can be grouped under the headings of ‘prospect’ and ‘refuge.’ There is an abundance of prospects in the British tradition—Turner’s seascapes, Samuel Palmer’s mystical harvest scenes, Paul Nash’s beechwoods—yet hard

Annotated Bibliography of Garden Books (2020)

to find more than a handful of refuges or retreats, interior views, views from the grass roots and hedge bottom. There is simply no painterly equivalent of the intimate poems of 19th-century farmworker John Claire." Mabey suggests the landscape painters' dependence on recurrent prospect archetypes has made us blind to landscape's "details, its contradictions and its movement through time." He asks if "our quest for 'timelessness', our nagging sense of loss, quite literally 'picturesque', a regret that the reality no longer lives up to the fixed images made during a short moment in art?" ("Landscape Painting")

- Mabey on the benefits of sculpture in woodland, such as the installations by Andy Goldsworth: ". . . surprise and incongruity are partly what these works are all about. Most are explorations of the raw stuff of the surrounding landscape—wood, stone, water—and, set directly among the greenery rather than in a remote gallery, are wonderfully conducive to meditations on the differences between natural and human creativity." ("Art in the Wild")
- Mabey defends Derek Jarman's unique garden and its current owner, who is in conflict with the governmental agency that has brought actions against him for planting red valerian, a plant which has been naturalized in Britain for at least 500 years: "On this bleak headland jutting into the Channel, against the lurking bulk of a nuclear power station, Jarman created an environment that cocks a snook at the distinctions we make between the natural and the man-made." Mabey is another gardener/naturalist who doesn't hesitate to "cock a snook" when an opportunity presents itself. ("Derek Jarman's Garden")
- Mabey's reflections on Shakespeare's *A Midsummer's Night Dream* and the play's botanical hero, the Pansy: "'love-in-idleness' in the playwright's own country of Warwickshire—shoe juice, squeezed by Puck into the hapless characters' eyes to make them love the next creature they see, is the engine for all the mischief in the Dream—including Titania's crush on Bottom wearing his donkey's head. The pansy is also known as 'heartsease', and as 'three-faces-under-one-hood', perhaps because of the way its three lower petals suggested a woman flanked by two lovers; a flower representing frustrated, useless, 'idle' love. I suspect that Shakespeare simply made up the juice-in-eye spell as a bit of comic business. It has no roots whatever in folklore. But his knowledge of the vernacular names and folklore of plants is remarkable, and he makes wonderful, layered puns with them." (From "Shakespeare's Plants")
- While Mabey vigorously defends the need to protect native flora and fauna, he also defends the aesthetic and environmental benefits of nurturing non-native species: "It is surely only the churlish whose hearts aren't gladdened by the thought of African ring-necked parakeets trapezing round south London cemeteries; by the feral wallaby colony that has somehow survived 50 winters in the Peak District; by Chinese buddleia delighting butterflies and commuters in every city centre. These intruders are the resilient, magnanimous face of nature, and maybe its insurance policy, too." (From "Alien Nations")

Richardson, Tim. *You Should Have Been Here Last Week: Sharp Cuttings from a Garden Writer*

(Pimpernel Press, 2018). Richardson is a prolific author, having published 15 gardening books since the year 2000, including several first-rate historical texts—most notably, *The Arcadian Friends: Inventing the English Landscape Garden*. Based on that reputation, I purchased this book while in Glasgow, prior to a hike in June through the Scottish highlands. The book became my evening companion after a day navigating through Scottish forests and across Perthshire's gorse-covered hillsides. The 67 short essays, arranged chronologically according to year of composition, first appeared in such publications as *Country Life*, *Daily Telegraph* (most frequent source), *Financial Times*, *Gardens Illustrated*, *House & Garden*, *The Idler*, *Literary Review*, and the *New York Times*. His topics include articles on famous gardeners (Robin Lane Fox, Rosemary Verey, Piet Oudolf, Capability Brown, Ian Hamilton Finlay), famous gardens (Great Dixter,

Annotated Bibliography of Garden Books (2020)

Sissinghurst, Villa Gamberaia, Little Sparta), and the politics and practices of the garden world (Chelsea Flower Show, gay landscapers, modern garden design, gardening clothes).

Perhaps because so many of these pieces were newspaper columns written in response to recent events, I found the collection uneven in quality and not as entertaining or enlightening as I had expected. Some pieces suggested Richardson's primary motivation was to score points against his opponents. Richardson casts himself as an independent-minded polemicist, willing to fire away at diverse targets. The pleasure he finds in a good fight is evident throughout the collection. The book is, nevertheless, full of many insightful, thought-provoking passages. Here's a small sample:

- "There has been a strong temptation to succumb to the idea of a garden as a place that needs filling up with things. The drawn plan can encourage this tendency, since the onus is on occupying all those little gridded squares with material, instead of coming up with a basic idea or theme and letting it colonize the space conceptually before it does physically." ("Dreadful"; May 2005)
- On allotments and growing one's own vegetables: "Every garden is a political act. Every plant is a political prisoner." ("The Politics of Self-Sufficiency"; December 2009)
- ". . . for a garden visit is essentially a dialogue." ("Cycling to Gardens"; January 2011)
- Quoting Graham Stuart Thomas on a landscape shaped by trees: "Fifty years is a long time in anticipation, but short in retrospect." And in the next paragraph quoting Hugh Johnson: "The spaces between the trees are even more important than the trees themselves—you've got to think of the context." ("Tree Planting"; January 2012)
- ". . . like islands, gardens are considered to be 'transcendent' spaces: other worlds where normal rules do not apply." ("On Islands"; April 2015)
- Richardson, quoting the garden designer Luciano Giubbilei: "Longevity through the seasons is what you need to understand. It's all to do with spacing and how you group the plants; it's all about patience. You have to understand the different moments of the season, and the plants might be there for one particular moment. You have to learn to wait." ("The Education of a Gardener"; July 2015)
- "It must be understood that we do not garden chiefly because it is good for us. Gardening and gardens are dynamic, powerful and profound, not benignly passive. It is their richness and unpredictability, the ways they constantly surprise, delight—and occasionally disappoint or infuriate—that keep us coming back for more." ("Is Your Garden Good for You?"; July 2016)

Rupp, Rebecca. *Blue Corn & Square Tomatoes* (Storey Communications, 1987). The funniest and most entertaining book I read this year; also one of the most informative. Rupp has individual chapters on 19 vegetables found in American gardens, all ones grown in my own vegetable garden: tomatoes, peppers, eggplants, peas, beans, lettuce, celery, carrots, radishes, cabbages, turnips, beets, spinach, onions, pumpkins and squashes, cucumbers, melons, and corn. In each chapter she recounts the evolutionary history of the vegetable (including the evolving common names), historical attitudes toward the vegetable and the medicinal and culinary ways it has been used, associations with breeders and seed companies, classifications of different varieties (such as the five basic kinds of corn), nutritional values (or lack thereof), famous cultivars, growing and harvesting characteristics, and a few old-time recipes. Rupp has an appealing writing style with a sharp eye for the amusing story, the revelatory anecdote, the well-placed phrase or quotation. She crams into her text piles of scientific and historical information and yet everything is conveyed in a clear, easy-to-understand prose. Although the text is now over 30 years old—which means many passages on recent scientific discoveries or names of the latest hybrids will be outdated—I still found this one of the most informative books on vegetables I have ever read. And, as I

Annotated Bibliography of Garden Books (2020)

said in the first sentence of this review, it was an amusing read. Here are just two examples, suggesting Rupp's skill at combining humor with information:

- On the pronunciation of the word *tomato*: "linguists believe, is *to-mah-to*, from the sixteenth-century Spanish *tomate*. The word picked up its *o* in eighteenth-century England, where the insular English believed that all Spanish words ended that way, but retained its short *a*. We, however, will continue to plant and eat *to-may-toes*. After all these years of phonetic error, it's just too blasted late to call the whole thing off."
- "The average cucumber is 96 percent water, with not much else other than a paltry seventy International Units of vitamin A (1 ½ percent of the Recommended Daily Allowance), all in the peel. At that rate, in terms of vitamin A, it takes 120 unpeeled cucumbers to equal 1 carrot. Food historian Waverley Root describes the cucumber as "as close to neutrality as a vegetable can get without ceasing to exist."

Solomon, Steve. *The Intelligent Gardener: Growing Nutrient-Dense Food* (New Society Publishers, 2013).

One of my primary vegetable seed sources is Territorial Seeds, a company in Oregon founded by Steve Solomon, the author of this book. Because of my admiration for the company's catalog (which includes invaluable guidance on their seeds, fertilizer needs, best conditions for seed germination, etc), I came to this book with high expectations. To my surprise Solomon often comes across as a cranky crackpot. I found it difficult taking Solomon seriously when he launched into one of his frequent attacks on the Rodale organization and their empirically unsupported advocacy of composting and organic gardening practices. He also makes some extreme claims about the many health problems which could be eliminated if our food was richer in nutritional value.

Despite my reservations, the book was thought-provoking and provides substantial evidence that vegetable gardeners should concentrate more attention on the minerals in their soil and the benefits of extensive soil testing. Solomon vigorously argues that gardeners need soil testing that goes beyond NPK and pH numbers so that they have accurate information on the availability of essential minerals and nutrients. He believes many garden (and farm) soils are out of balance, producing foods dramatically less nutritious than they were 50 or 100 years ago.

I originally read the book on my Kindle, and here are some of my highlighted passages saved in Kindle's enormous quotation cloud:

- "There is a famous aphorism which says, "Growth is controlled not by the total amount of resources available, but by the scarcest resource. Please, let the scarcest resource be something like the gardener's time, not some bit of mineral lacking in the soil."
- "Leached soil retains relatively more potassium compared to other nutrients; I could about as well say that leached soil loses relatively less potassium than it loses calcium and phosphorus (and magnesium, etc). Consequently, leached soils produce foods that are higher in carbohydrates and lower in protein, and the smaller quantity of protein is also lower-quality protein. This sort of food provides our bodies with much more potassium than we have any use for, and it has considerably less calcium, magnesium, and phosphorus than we need--desperately need."
- ". . . too much high-magnesium lime gets added to a soil with clay in it, compaction, airlessness and tightness can increase--despite huge additions of compost. Magnesium excess can tighten up a clay subsoil beneath a sandy topsoil, preventing the crop from putting roots there. Magnesium's effect is amazingly powerful when the soil has a lot of clay in it, even ten percent clay and too much magnesium can make soil become rock hard and airless, even if it has had heaps of organic matter put into it."

Annotated Bibliography of Garden Books (2020)

- “There is a fundamental difference between gardening and farming. To quote Robert Parnes, ‘the vegetable garden is an endless sinkhole for plant nutrients.’ It has to be. Many kinds of vegetables require extraordinarily rich soil to grow well. Vegetables were like that during Roman times, and they still are. It’s in their genes. But sustainable, biologically oriented farming aimed at producing nutrient-density in field crops operates at lower levels of soil fertility than a garden requires. A farm can export some organic matter; a garden, never.”
- “Not only does high soil potassium lower overall protein content, the nature of those proteins changes. I hope you already know that proteins are long, complex chains of about 20 different amino acids. A few amino acids usually are scarce; in plants grown with excess potassium these are even scarcer, lowering protein quality and leading to diseases in all the animals eating them, including us.”
- “As soil pH moves from 7.0 to 8.0, most nutrients become far less available. For some, like sulfur and magnesium, the effect is not that severe. However, potassium loses about three-quarters of its availability between 7.0 and 8.0, and phosphorus does even worse. Iron, zinc and manganese squeeze down to nothing above 7.5. Obviously, if soil pH can conveniently be reduced below 7.5, the garden will be better nourished.
- “Most of the soils in the northern United States (which was covered by a continental glacier 10,000 years ago) are still fairly young. Somewhat leached, but still young. Typically, they possess strong clay. Many hold large, unreleased mineral reserves; with proper management, these have every chance to remain naturally productive agricultural soils for thousands of years. Because of the nature of the rocks the most recent continental glacier brought from the Canadian Shield, soils in the northern United States tend to magnesium excess.”
- It is “impossible to create a damaging calcium excess with agricultural lime. No matter how much ag lime is spread, calcium saturation will not exceed 85%; at that saturation, food crops still grow excellently because there remains another 15% on the exchange sites to provide plants with more than enough of the other cations. As long as the pH remains below about 7.6, calcium-saturated soil delivers up cations with greater ease than it can when the soil remains acidic; this compensates a great deal for the diminishment of availability due to high pH.”

Although Solomon provides guidelines for individual gardeners developing their own fertilizer mix in response to specific soil test results, he does offer a generic recipe for a Complete Organic Fertilizer (a mixture of oilseed meal, colloidal rock phosphate, kelp meal, potassium sulfate, and small amounts of borax, zinc sulfate, copper sulfate, and manganese sulfate). This spring I plan to use his recommended fertilizer/mineral mix with some raised vegetable beds and see if I can detect any differences in the results—either in terms of quality or quantity.

Stafford, Fiona. *The Brief Life of Flowers* (John Murray, 2018). In June I bought my copy in a Glasgow bookstore, shortly after finishing a 9-day hiking trip in the Scottish highlands. We had a few days in Glasgow before returning to the U.S., and I was looking for a book that would be entertaining and not add much weight to my carry-on baggage. Stafford’s book filled the bill on both counts, providing a welcome late-hour repast after our day-time trips to gardens in and around Glasgow. Stafford is a literature professor at the University of Oxford, specializing in the Romantic period and contemporary poetry and nature writing. In this book she introduces readers to 14 flowers with a long history in English gardens (plus a 2-page chapter on the Ghost Orchid, a woodland flower rarely seen). Ranging in length from 8 pages (thistles) to 18 (roses), each chapter discusses the flower’s common and scientific names, its role in various eras of English gardens, and the ways the flower has been treated in the written and visual

Annotated Bibliography of Garden Books (2020)

arts. The chapter on foxgloves, for example, discusses the role of the flower in Sackville-West's White Garden at Sissinghurst and in written texts by Beatrix Potter, John Clare, Sir Walter Scott (*The Lady of the Lake*), and William Withering (a scientific study published in 1785). Stafford expertly mixes together personal experiences, medicinal folklore, scientific studies, literary descriptions, and flower portraits in the visual arts. This was one of the most interesting and engaging books I read in 2019.

Strong, Roy. *A Celebration of Gardens* (Timber Press, 1993; first published by HarperCollins in 1991). Illustrations are by Julia Trevelyan Oman. Although he served as the Director of the National Portrait Gallery for six years (1967-1973) and Director of the V&A Museum for 13 years (1974-1987), Sir Roy Strong is perhaps now best remembered as a superb gardener (most notably the Laskett, which he and his wife, Julia Trevelyan Oman, created in rural Herefordshire) and for his research and books on English garden history and design (most notably his book on English Renaissance gardens). As for this anthology, Strong limited his choices to texts that focus intently on gardens and gardening—and excluding texts whose subject might be more accurately classified as on nature. The anthology includes passages from over 350 authors, ranging from ancient to modern, famous to forgotten, poetry and prose, solemn and amusing. The most frequently quoted authors are William Cowper, Canon Ellacombe, John Evelyn, Gertrude Jekyll, John Loudon, Beverley Nichols, Vita Sackville-West, George Sitwell, and Katherine White (the one American author in this group). Strong has sorted the quoted passages into eleven chapters (Famous Gardeners, English Gardens, Plants, Types of Gardens, etc) and he provides brief introductions and commentaries that help link together the sequence of texts. I started reading this book in 2018 and am still not finished, rarely reading more than a page or two at one time. I've found it to be a marvelous collection, the best anthology of garden writing I have ever encountered.

Swift, Katherine. *The Morville Hours* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2008). On the front cover of my copy is Anna Pavord's one-word celebration of this remarkable book: "Magical." I would agree. This was the best gardening book I read this year. In the late 1980s, Katherine Swift moved to The Dower House, Morvill Hall in Shropshire and became a full-time gardener and writer. This memoir magically combines three time cycles—the Medieval Hours of the Divine Office, the twelve months of the calendar year, and two decades of gardening in Shropshire—to create a work that brings together an incredible range of topics: the geology and geography of Shropshire, the patterns of monastic life, tidbits of local history and characters, the history of this house and the evolution of this remarkable garden she resurrected—all conveyed in an endearing manner effortlessly moving from one topic to another, one moment discussing how to prune holly hedges and the next celebrating a poem by A. E. Housman. All these subjects are rendered in a beautiful, poetic prose. Among the dozens of passages I marginally noted or underlined, here is a small sample.

- "Gardens are about people first and plants second. Like our multi-layered language, gardening is made up of different elements, bits and pieces from far and near, now and long ago, taken and incorporated into the vocabulary of plant and tree, the grammar of path and hedge."
- "You could make a flower garden from peas and beans alone."
- "Gardening, reading, writing. All solitary pleasures."
- "I still love the garden best in monochrome: in snow, in moonlight, in frost, in heavy dew, in fog—especially in freezing fog, when whole trees are drowned fathoms deep in arctic air and the boundaries between sky and ground blur, when the silvered paths of the garden seem to float over the black earth of the empty beds like slender bridges cantilevered out over a chasm, and twigs and branches

Annotated Bibliography of Garden Books (2020)

are transformed by the hoar frost into fragile constructions of air and ice, each day a little longer, growing in the directions in which the air is flowing, like fingerposts to the far north." All of this rendered in a single sentence. In another passage, Swift wrote: "I like the stripped-down quality of the garden in winter, the transparency of it."

- "Gardens are experienced not simply as pictures, but as series of shifting perspectives, changing volumes—as movement, as progression."
- "Our modern gardens are refuges not only for us, from the stresses and strains of modern life, but also—in a reversal of the medieval paradigm—for the wild creatures and flowers displaced by an increasingly man-made universe."
- "Perhaps we gardeners underestimate ourselves for what else are our twenty-first-century gardens—with their passion for wildlife, their refusal to denude foreign ecosystems by stripping them of rare plants, their rejection of fossil peat as a growing medium, their turning away from chemicals as a means of controlling pests, their emphasis on water-recycling, solar power, composting—if not a critique of modern consumer society, the very society that has brought our planet to the brink of catastrophe?"
- "The other thing I really like about gardening: the silence. Not that silence out of doors is ever really silence. But absence of words, space for the thoughts to come. A silence that allows you to listen."

Very, Rosemary. *The Garden in Winter* (Timber Press, 1988). One challenge of gardening in Iowa is the long winter, potentially extending from late October into late March. That's a long stretch when the temperatures are often below freezing (and on some days below zero) and the garden may be covered with snow and ice. I ordered a copy of Very's book, hoping to find a few ideas for how to make the Coe garden more appealing during those months when we will have no fresh growth, no flowers in bloom. Veréy is an unapologetic advocate for the potential beauties of a garden in winter. It involves a recognition that "true gardening is as much about the bones of a garden as its planting." We need to see how gardens in winter are "more than graves commemorating summer's beauty." We need to learn to appreciate the muffled silence of a garden in winter, the beauties of leaves outlined in frost's silver rime, the pleasures of scenes that can be more intensely appreciated in winter (such as the mysterious scent of yews). Veréy's book is organized in five chapters:

- Space, Structure, and Pattern in the garden (primary focus on architectural details, use of silhouettes and shadows, impact of knot gardens and topiary)
- Winter pictures (re-thinking how the garden appears from inside a home; use of tubs and containers; creating a special winter corner)
- Winter Colour (re-focusing our attention on the presence and role of certain colors in a winter garden and how we assess the browns, greens, yellows, white, reds, and blacks)
- Work & Pleasure (re-considering our winter tasks, including cleaning up the vegetable garden, feeding the birds, creating bouquets that use dried flowers)
- Plant Portraits (an alphabetical list and description of plants that could have an important role in a winter garden).

Veréy has been a frequent visitor to America, has written extensively about American gardens, and includes in this book information on specific plants' winter hardiness zones in North America; nevertheless, this book is primarily oriented toward English gardens and many of her recommendations are not applicable to Iowa's conditions. It's also the case that substantial portions of her book involve options for re-designing one's garden—an option not applicable to Coe's garden, where the basic structure is already in place and not amenable to any substantial amendments. The most useful insights I gained

Annotated Bibliography of Garden Books (2020)

from Verey involved the importance of learning to see, really see, and appreciate what is there. With regard to a garden in January, it's too easy to assume that in a quick glance you have seen everything. We need to slow down, become aware of the variations in the browns and yellows, appreciate the unique reds and whites, acquire the patience to celebrate what is already there.

Vickery, Roy. *Oxford Dictionary of Plant-Lore* (Oxford University Press, 1995). It's fitting this book comes last in this bibliography because my engagement with this book was quite different from any other book I've discussed. Rather than reading this book from beginning to end, I've jumped around all over the place, stopping wherever I saw an entry on a plant about which I wanted to know more. For several months I kept this book in a drawer in one of our bathrooms and would pull it out whenever I thought my visit might require a bit of time. There are thus hundreds of entries in this dictionary that I have not yet looked at—and perhaps never will. But what I have read has consistently been entertaining and provided a wonderful portrait of British folklore associated with hundreds of different plants.

It should be immediately emphasized that the dictionary's title is misleading: this dictionary rarely mentions any plant lore not associated with the British isles. The core of this book is based on an effort in the 1980s and early 1990s to collect from all parts of the British Isles people's ideas about specific plants. Observations were obtained from over 700 informants to supplement the research in previous studies and publications. Plants are listed in the dictionary according to their most commonly accepted name. In addition, there are extensive entries on topics associated with plants (such as fairies, national emblems, saints' days, legends, various diseases). I would love to recount a much larger sample of passages I marked the past year, but I will limit myself to a couple of favorites:

- Parsley. "With the possible exception of APPLE, parsley is the focus of more superstitious beliefs than any other plant commonly grown in gardens. In common with other herbs, such as SAGE, it is said that parsley grows best where the wife is dominant. Where parsley stays green all the year round the wife wears the trousers. [Wimbledon, London, November 1983]. . . . The idea that parsley seed 'visits' the devil was widespread, the number of visits made differing in different parts of the country. [In Devon] parsley goes three times to the Devil before it comes up. [Chope, 1932]"
- Dandelion. The idea that the picking of dandelion flowers leads to bed-wetting is widespread and well-known even in urban areas. . . . This belief has given rise to many local names including: pee-beds, pee-in-bed, peed-the-bed, pee-the-beds, piss-i-beds, pissimire, piss-in-the-beds, pisterbed, pittle beds, wet-the-bed, and wet-the-beds. On the continent of Europe such names as the Dutch pisse-bed and the French pissenlit reveal that similar names and beliefs are not restricted to the British Isles." Vickery then describes a practice in the British Isles that matched with my own observations in southeast Kansas sixty years ago. "Learnt from my mother's knee, so to speak. . . . dandelion seed heads when perfect were used to find out whether someone loved you or not by blowing short breaths at the plant and with each breath reciting 'He loves me, he loves me not,' until all the seeds had blown away and the last blow decided the result.'" I remember watching young girls do the "love me, love me not" with dandelion seed heads and by removing one-by-one the petals of the flowers of dandelions and daisies.