

Fifty Shades of Gardening

Books for lovers of gardening and nature

Gardeners, winter is upon us. We finally have time to read and think about gardens—past and future, near and far, real and imaginary. Not surprisingly, MGVs (and some CCE crew) have recommended books that have inspired, guided and entertained them.



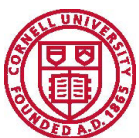
Seamus Carroll and Ruby

Koch-Fienberg both mentioned **The Overstory**, Richard Powers's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel (W. W. Norton & Company), which the novelist Ann Patchett described as "The best novel ever written about trees, and really, just one of the best novels, period." Another engaging plant-related novel, about a 19th-century female botanist, is **The Signature of All Things** by Elizabeth Gilbert (Riverhead Books). That recommendation goes double if you're interested in moss.

Seamus also likes **Wilding** by Isabella Tree (Blackstone Publishing), about an English couple who decided to let their 3,500-acre farm revert to wilderness. Ruby also likes **Animal, Vegetable, Miracle** by Barbara Kingsolver (Faber and Faber), the record of a year when the author's family tried to eat only food that they or their neighbors had grown or raised.

Several MGVs recommended books by Douglas W. Tallamy, including **Bringing Nature Home: How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants** and **Nature's Best Hope: A New Approach to Conservation That Starts in Your Yard**, co-written with Rick Darke (both published by Timber Press). Erika West says these accessible books call attention to the urgent problem of wildlife decline and discuss the biological, cultural and historical contexts of gardening and conservation.

Erika also likes **Planting in A Post-Wild World: Designing Plant Communities for Resilient Landscapes** by Thomas Rainer and Claudia West (Timber Press), a



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practical and approachable guide for ecological landscaping; and **100 Plants to Feed the Bees: Provide a Healthy Habitat to Help Pollinators Thrive** by The Xerces Society (Storey Publishing). This book, Erika says, was a key reference for her during her work on SEDGe's new host-plant signs.

For gardeners who like history, and many do, Phyllis Boch recommends **Founding Gardeners** by Andrea Wulf (Vintage), the story of early Americans' relationship to nature as seen through the gardens of the founding fathers. **American Eden** by Victoria Johnson (Liveright) also combines early American history with botany, telling the story of the founding of the first botanic garden in the U.S.

Lynne Bernstein recommends **American Garden Writing**, edited by Bonnie Marranta (Penguin Books), essays by a wide range of garden writers (and writers who write about gardens), with interesting historical perspectives.

She also mentioned **Noah's Garden, Restoring the Ecology of Our Own Back Yards** by Sara Bonnett Stein (Houghton Mifflin), an early and, she says, much-overlooked discussion of ecological gardening, and **Naturally Curious: A photographic field guide and month-by-month journey through the fields, woods and marshes of New England** by Mary Holland (Trafalgar Square Books). It's a very easy stroll through the year with excellent photos of what's happening when.



Jackie Merrill says the book that probably started her on her gardening journey was **Oakes Ames: Jottings of a Harvard Botanist** edited by Pauline Ames Plimpton (Harvard University Press; this book is out of print but available used on-line). “The fascinating trajectory of this remarkable man has inspired me for decades,” she says. She also likes **The Greater Perfection** by Frank Cabot (University of Chicago Press)—the story of the creation of Quatre Vents, Cabot’s world-famous Quebec estate. Also Gertrude Jekyll’s classic **Color Schemes for the Flower Garden** (out of print but available used).

Jane-ellen Malinowsky hopes the second edition of **Weeds of the Northeast** (Comstock Publishing Associates) is coming her way this month because the first has been so useful to her.

Robin Hoffman recommends **Entangled Life** by Merlin Sheldrake (Random House), which, she says, explores the world of fungi and the mysteries of the underground fungal network while challenging the way we think about our relationship with the natural world.

Ginger Lefurgy likes **Trowel and Error: Over 700 Organic Remedies, Shortcuts, and Tips for the Gardener** by Sharon Lovejoy (Workman), which offers practical wisdom, whimsically illustrated, about how organic gardeners can prevail over all the things trying to eat their plants.

My own go-to book for new gardeners is **Mrs. Greenthumbs** by Cassandra Diaz (Three Rivers Press). Diaz talked me through my first exasperating years of gardening with common sense, wit and a few lines I still quote today. Another MGV recommends the classic how-to book, **The Well-Tended Perennial Garden, Planting and Pruning Techniques** by Tracy DiSabato-Aust (Timber Press).

I also love **A Northeast Gardener's Year** by Lee Reich (Perseus Publishing), the month-by-month diary of a contemplative man who plants, waters, watches, smells, writes, weeds and daydreams.

Helaine Balsam likes **The Way We Garden Now** by Katherine Whiteside (Clarkson Potter). It was Whiteside's column in the Putnam County News and Recorder "that got me into gardening big time," she says. The book contains 41 garden projects--some large and some small. But it also has great general advice. Also, **Design Your Garden Toolkit-Visualize the Perfect Plant Combinations for Your Yard** by Michele Gervais (Storey Publishing), a step-by-step guide with profiles of 128 popular plants, reusable cling stickers and a fold-out design board.

This should get us through 'til spring.

Written by Cynthia Crossen

