

Gardening 101 Lesson Twelve – Armchair Gardening

Some gardeners never touch a plant or dirty their hands at all; still they garden. Some fervent gardeners garden year round, even though our long winters keep growing spaces frozen for many months. How? Well, both these groups practice armchair gardening by buying or borrowing a good book or two on gardening and finding a nice comfortable place to sit and read them.

Here are some good gardening books for winter armchair gardening. Most are available at the Public Library; the others are listed on www.Amazon.com.

Pollan, Michael. *Second nature: a gardener's education* (New York: Dell Publishing, 1991). Pollan has recently become somewhat of a guru on the subject of sustainable eating but this, his first book, explains why and how he got into gardening. It's a thoughtful, often humorous, always insightful tale detailing his journey from gardening theory to hard-earned gardening reality as he converts an old dairy farm into a Connecticut home garden.

Perényi, Eleanor. *Green thoughts: a writer in the garden* (New York: Random House, 1981) A classic. I've never forgotten Perényi's advice that using a push mower produces a more velvety lawn than do fuel powered ones and discovering that she never actually pushed a mower herself has not diminished the value of the observation. This and other topics are explored as Perényi expounds on various gardening subjects while taking the reader down historical, artistic, and personal paths in her garden. There's no shortage of practical advice either. Want to know how to tie up gooseberry bushes? Here's your source. Along with the instructions come some observations on just how achievable they might be.

Mitchell, Henry. *The essential earthman* (1981), *One man's garden* (1992), *Henry Mitchell on gardening* (1998) – all published by Houghton Mifflin. Henry Mitchell was a columnist for the Washington Post for over twenty-five years and has been dead for quite a few so you may be wondering why his books are on the list. Well, he's simply a wonderful writer and though the plants he writes about may not grow in our area, his humorous observations and wry comments on gardening topics still delight.

Kennedy, Des. *The passionate gardener: adventures of an ardent green thumb* (Vancouver: Greystone Books, 2006). Des Kennedy has written several wise and humorous books about gardening but this one had me laughing loud enough to disturb the neighbours. Kennedy gardens on Denman Island in British Columbia which enjoys a very salubrious climate for gardening but, still, he has to deal with banana slugs and we don't so keep that in mind as you envy his situation.

Keeble, Midge Ellis. *Tottering in my garden: a gardener's memoirs with notes for the novice* (Willowdale: Camden House, 1989). In her seventies at time of writing, Midge Keeble tells us about the six different gardens (with accompanying houses) she created in southern Ontario through the decades. The "Notes for novices" are excellent. As Keeble constantly refers to the wonderfully competent tradespeople who carry out her visions, readers may be forgiven for envying the kind of gardening which plentiful money can allow.

Chambers, Douglas. *Stony Ground: the making of a Canadian garden* (Toronto: Alfred A. Knopf Canada, 1996). 'Stony Ground' is the name of a garden in Bruce County, located in a plant hardiness zone similar to Old Ottawa East's so the gardening information in the book is a little more relevant to us than most. Of course our properties are somewhat smaller than the expansive gardens Chambers has created on the 150 acre family property he inherited but we can all dream, can't we?

Cabot, Francis H. Cabot. *The greater perfection: the story of the gardens at Les Quatre Vents* (New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 2001). This is the story of one of Canada's most glorious and famous gardens. The photographs of this magnificent garden, located on the north shore of the St. Lawrence River near La Malbaie, are so luscious, they border on gardening art. It's a delight to be able to visit it through the pages of this most beautiful (and expensive!) of books and to share in Frank Cabot's thoughts as he plans and expands 'Les Quatre Vents'.

Thompson, Elspeth. *Urban gardener* (London: Orion Press, 1999). What do you do if you live in a large city, have no ground in which to plant a garden but still desperately want to grow flowers and vegetables? This book, which is a reprinting of her columns from the *Sunday Telegraph*, relates how Thompson managed to achieve her gardening dream (and others) in downtown London, England. It's an enjoyable, comfortable book which will enchant most readers. There were problems galore which had to be overcome but the way in which gardening enriched Thompson's life made the effort worthwhile.

Here endeth the lessons. If you'd like to know more about any aspect of gardening, a good source is *The Garden Primer*, by Barbara Damrosch. A second edition came out in 2008 and was published by Workman Publishing in New York. The book is available widely.