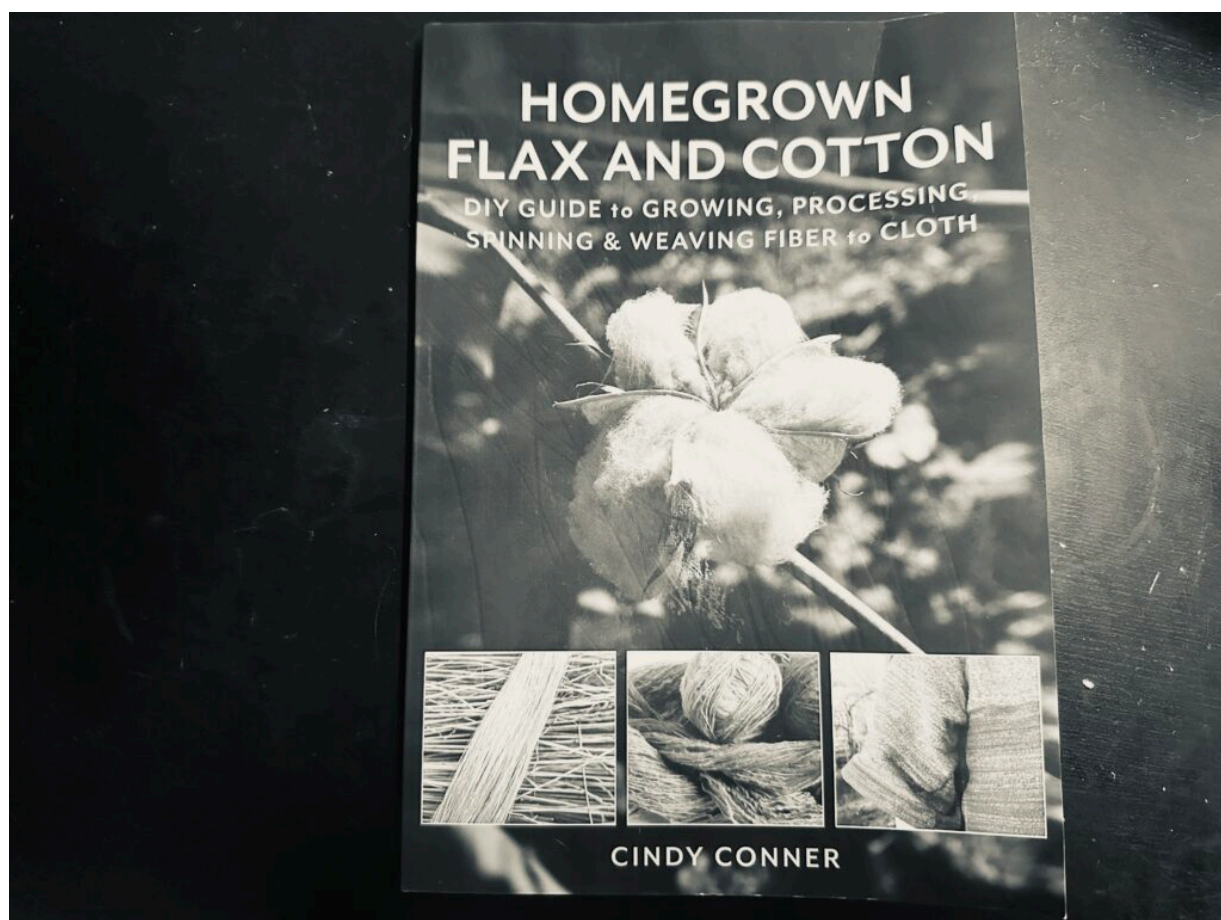


Book Review: Homegrown Flax and Cotton



Every once in a while, I get to marry multiple interests. For example, I have long loved crochet and believe in the slow yarn movement. Every now and then, I can combine that with gardening. I shared a bit of that with you when I did a book review of [A Garden to Dye For](#). Today, I'll share more with a book review of Homegrown Flax and Cotton by Cindy Conner.

What Is Slow Yarn?

[Slow yarn](#), like the slow food movement, refers to engaging in yarn crafting mindfully and sustainably. It's part of an overall sustainable lifestyle. And it celebrates doing things by hand. Crochet and knitting are already slow crafts. After all, it takes a lot longer to create a handmade sweater than

it does to just go buy one. However, you can extend that into a longer, more involved slow yarn process.

For example, in the book [Unraveling](#), author Peggy Orenstein shares her slow yarn story. She first learns how to shear a sheep, which is no easy task. After learning, she shears enough to collect wool to make a sweater. She cleans the wool. Then she learns how to spin it. After that, she learns how to dye it. Finally, she is ready to knit it into a sweater. That's an example of slow yarn.

Slow Yarn in the Garden

Wool isn't the only fiber that you can use to knit or crochet. In fact, there are many other great natural fibers that offer various benefits when crafting. Cotton is a favorite choice when making lightweight summer clothes as well as kitchen towels. Therefore, you can incorporate gardening into a slow yarn movement of your own. Cindy Conner's book "Homegrown Flax and Cotton" is all about this.

Homegrown Flax and Cotton by Cindy Conner

This book is subtitled: "DIY Guide to Growing, Processing, Spinning and Weaving Fiber to Cloth." Or, as a description of the book puts it, you learn how to go "from seed to shirt." That pretty much sums up what this book is about. It teaches us how to grow either flax or cotton in our own gardens. Then, we learn how to actually take that material from plant form into yarn form. Finally, there are tips for weaving it to create a cloth. However, once you have the spun cotton or flax yarn, you could also knit or crochet with it. As a crocheter, that would be my personal plan.

Flax vs. Cotton for Growing Your Own Fiber

The book explains that both flax and cotton are easier than you might expect to grow in your own garden. The author explains that if you live in a colder climate, then you will probably want to try growing flax. In contrast, cotton is best grown in a warmer environment. Of course, if you live in a more temperate climate, then you could choose either one (or both).

Some of the other key differences, besides temperature requirements, of flax vs. cotton include:

- Flax has a shorter growing season, smaller flowers, and is usually a physically shorter plant than the cotton plant. Cotton plants actually have really pretty flowers that turn into the cotton.
- Generally speaking, cotton requires more garden space to grow. That said, flax tends to have a lower yield than cotton. As a result, you will need to plant more in order to get the same amount of yarn.
- Flax prefers well-draining, fertile soil with a slightly acidic to neutral pH range (around 6-7). It requires regular watering, particularly during its early growth stages. Cotton, on the other hand, prefers well-drained, loamy soil with good moisture retention. It has a higher water demand than flax and requires consistent watering throughout its growing season.
- Both flax and cotton can be susceptible to certain pests. However, the pests are different for each. Flax may attract insects like aphids, thrips, and flea beetles. Cotton can be affected by pests such as bollworms, aphids, and spider mites.
- Flax is a self-pollinating plant. Cotton, on the other hand, typically requires cross-pollination by bees or other [pollinators](#) to produce a good yield of cotton

bolts.

- The harvesting and processing methods are different for each, which the book explains in greater detail.

8 Gardening Things to Learn From Homegrown Flax and Cotton

You'll have to read the book to get all of the details. In brief, though, here are eight things you'll learn about related to the gardening of cotton and flax:

1. If farm-to-table gardening and eating makes sense to you, then garden-to-garment will make sense as well. The textile industry does a lot of harm to the planet. You can help by growing your own fiber and making your own clothes.
2. In case you weren't already familiar with it, growing flax means that you'll be making clothes out of linen. Notably, you will not also be able to eat flax seeds from this plant. That's because there are two different flax plants – one that's edible and another that's for fiber.
3. For both plants, you want soil that is rich and ready to go in spring. You can use autumn leaves to cover the beds through the winter, preparing the soil for spring planting. However, if you live in an especially cold area, then you might instead plant "winter-kill" crops like forage radish, winter rye and oats.
4. You can plant flax in rows or by scattering the seeds. However, rows might make more sense as a beginner because it's tough to tell what's flax and what's weeds at first. That said you want a really dense planting so that the stalks are crowded together and don't get too wide.
5. You can get seeds for white, green, or brown cotton. The author thinks it's more fun to spin with the color, but you can choose what works for you. Make sure that you

get cotton seeds that are NOT genetically modified.

6. If you know how to plant tomatoes, then you should find it relatively easy to learn to plant cotton!
7. If you've never seen a cotton plant grow before, then you might find the whole process surprisingly exciting. It goes through interesting stages of flowering.
8. Did you know that in some states there are restrictions on planting cotton even in your own backyard garden?! If you live in a cotton-growing state, you should look into the rules before proceeding.

Read More:

- [Colorfast vs. Fugitive Dyes From Plants](#)
 - [Garden Photo Walks for Mindfulness](#)
 - [5 Fun Ways to Use Yarn in the Garden](#)
-

Playlist: Best Songs About Gardens



I have been known to pick really random themes and make music playlists around them. One of my favorites is a playlist of songs about rain. Fire, sleep, and “bang bang” are a few other themes. It’s easy to find songs about nature. However, what about songs that are specifically about gardens? Here are the songs that I would put on a garden songs playlist:

“Garden Song” or “Inch by Inch”

This is a folk song written by David Mallett. It’s been covered by many famous folk singers. However, the most popular version is John Denver’s. It really is just about life in a garden ... and how that’s a metaphor for all working together to make the Earth a better place.

“The Garden Song” has become an [anthem for gardeners](#) and nature lovers alike, inspiring a sense of connection to the Earth and a desire to cultivate and nurture life. Its positive message and engaging melody have made it a beloved and enduring song in the realm of gardening and environmental awareness.

Favorite Lines:

*"Pullin' weeds and pickin' stones
Man is made of dreams and bones
Feel the need to grow my own"*

"The Garden Rules" by Snow Patrol

This song is about childhood and innocence and first love, reflected in storytelling about playing games in the garden as kids.

Favorite Lines:

*"You would call the garden rules out like commands
And we would all obey
But you'd stifle giddy laughter as you spoke
And puncture the pretend
Then we would chase our tails, until the sun forgot to
shine
And our parents called our names, 'til just you and I were
left"*

Van Morrison's "In The Garden"

"In the Garden" is a track from Van Morrison's 1986 album, "No Guru, No Method, No Teacher." The song is a contemplative and spiritual piece that reflects Morrison's interest in mystical themes. The lyrics evoke a sense of personal transformation and the desire to find solace and connection in a garden setting. It's about finding meaning in life and reflects that tuning in to nature, and to oneself through connection to nature, is part of that process.

Favorite Lines:

"No guru, no method, no teacher"

*Just you and I and nature
And the Father and the Son and the Holy Ghost
In the garden wet with rain"*

"Garden" by Nahko and Medicine for the People

This is another song reflecting the spiritual essence and power of nature. The singer describes the song [in an interview](#):

"When I'm alone, I am surrounded...by nature, my ancestors, and Creation. We are never truly alone. Look deep within, above and below. That's what gets addressed in this song. It takes time, nurturing, and patience to turn the stones, or even the soil, that has been there since we were children. It takes courage to tend the garden of your body, mind, and soul."

"Safe in My Garden" by The Mamas and The Papas

This song contrasts the safety of a bucolic peaceful garden with the turmoil of the 1960's wartime and civil unrest. On the one hand, the singer is "safe in my garden" where "an ancient flower blooms." On the other hand:

*"When you go out in the street
So many hassles with the heat
No one there can fill your desire
Cops out with the megaphones
Telling people stay inside their home
Man, can't they see the world's on fire"*

It makes you want to find the peace of the garden again. But also safety is a privilege and activism is important, so

there's this contrast of what to do.

“The Garden” by Rush

This song uses the metaphor of a garden to convey its deeper philosophical message. The garden represents life itself, with all its complexities, choices, and experiences. Like a garden that requires nurturing, tending, and cultivation, the song suggests that life is a journey of personal growth and self-discovery. It encourages individuals to embrace the challenges and opportunities that come their way, much like tending a garden and watching it flourish.

Gardens can be tranquil spaces for reflection and contemplation, and the song evokes a sense of introspection. It prompts listeners to reflect on the meaning of their own lives, the choices they've made, and the lessons they've learned. It's a song that is [driven by the melody](#), and this lends itself well to that sense of introspection.

Favorite Lyrics:

*“In the fullness of time
A garden to nurture and protect
In the rise and the set of the sun
'Til the stars go spinning
Spinning 'round the night
Oh, it is what it is and forever
Each moment a memory in flight”*

“Garden Kisses” by Giveon

There are several songs that use the garden as a metaphor for love/sexuality. There are a lot of garden metaphors about women's sexuality. This incorporates some of those. Think “forbidden fruit” references. It's a sensual song.

Favorite Lines:

*"Please sprout up for me
Your tulips are my fate."*

"Secret Garden" by Madonna

This is another sensual song, in which the secret garden refers to the singer's sexuality and pleasure. I include it because it has some great garden metaphors. Additionally, it's one of my favorite songs on the list. It comes from her Erotica album. The chorus is:

*"A petal that isn't torn
A heart that will not harden
A place that I can be born
In my secret garden
A rose without a thorn
A lover without scorn"*

"Garden Party" by Ricky Nelson

This isn't really about gardening. It's about Nelson's musical career and the people he encountered with it. However, it is set in a "garden party." This actually references Madison Square Garden. The song is based on a 1970's concert there. However, I love picturing it as a party in an actual garden with Yoko and Dylan and Mary Lou. It's just a fun fantasy. And a catchy little song.

Favorite Lines:

*"People came from miles around
Everyone was there
Yoko brought her walrus
There was magic in the air
And over in the corner"*

*Much to my surprise
Mr Hughes hid in Dylan's shoes
Wearing his disguise"*

What are your favorite garden songs? Tell me the ones I don't know about yet!

Read More:

- [Garden Photo Walks for Mindfulness](#)
 - [10 Best Gardening Podcasts](#)
 - [The Best Plants for Mental Health Benefits](#)
-

A Visit to Hollister House Garden



Hollister House Garden, all photos by Kathryn Vercillo, 2023

I'm never going to have an English garden. It just feels a little bit too perfect for my brown thumb, even though it has some informality to it. Either way, though, they are beautiful gardens, and it's a delight to get a chance to visit one. I

had just that chance recently on a family trip to Connecticut. We were staying in Washington, CT, where we visited the Hollister House Garden.

What Is Hollister House Garden?

As [the website](#) proudly proclaims, this garden is:

“A classic garden in the English manner, with a loosely formal structure, informally planted in generous abundance situated in the Litchfield hills of Northwestern Connecticut.”

They further go on to explain that the garden is inspired by famous English gardens. However, it's an American version of that inspiration, particularly in terms of plant choice.



What Is an English Garden?

An English garden refers to a particular style of gardening that originated in England. It became popular during the 18th and 19th centuries. Their style is characterized by its

naturalistic, romantic, and somewhat informal design despite the fact that it has a formal structure.

Formal aspects of the English garden include:

1. **Symmetry and Balance:** Formal English gardens often exhibit a sense of symmetry and balance in their design. Pathways, hedges, and flowerbeds may be laid out in precise geometric patterns, creating an orderly and structured appearance.
2. **Defined Shapes and Lines:** The formal elements of an English garden involve crisp and well-defined shapes and lines. This includes neatly trimmed hedges, geometrically shaped flowerbeds, and precisely aligned paths or walkways.
3. **Architectural Features:** Formal English gardens often incorporate architectural elements, such as statuary, fountains, and ornate gazebos. These features add a touch of elegance and structure to the overall design, enhancing the formal atmosphere.
4. **Pruned and Controlled Plantings:** Plants in formal English gardens are typically pruned and shaped meticulously to maintain a controlled and uniform appearance. This includes topiaries, espaliered trees against walls, and manicured shrubs.



Informal aspects of the English garden include:

1. **Naturalistic Layout:** Informal English gardens embrace a more natural and relaxed layout. Paths and walkways may meander and curve, mimicking the flow of nature rather than adhering to strict geometric patterns.

2. **Abundance of Plantings:** Informal gardens are known for their profusion of plants and flowers. They often feature mixed and densely planted beds of various colors, textures, and heights, creating a sense of abundance and wild beauty.
3. **Soft Edges and Blending:** Informal English gardens avoid sharp edges and instead emphasize softer transitions. Plants may spill over onto pathways, creating a more organic and less structured appearance.
4. **Embracing Nature:** Informal gardens celebrate the natural characteristics of the landscape. They may incorporate elements such as natural rock formations, existing trees, and gentle slopes, harmonizing with the surroundings rather than imposing rigid structure.
5. **Cottage Garden Influence:** Informal English gardens often draw inspiration from traditional cottage gardens, with their casual and charming aesthetics. This influence can be seen in the use of cottage-style plants, including roses, hollyhocks, and other cottage garden favorites.



More About Hollister House Garden

George Schoellkopf started the garden in 1979. The garden is located on about 25 acres of woodsy land, next to a house built in the 18th century. Hollister House Garden was designed

to complement the old house as well as the barns and buildings from the same era that surround the place. They used antique / handmade materials as much as possible to add to this feeling.

The garden combines formal elements with the natural surroundings. The paths, walls, and hedges blend into the landscape. There are about different sections with varying colors and spaces. Walls and hedges, about eight to ten feet tall, define the different areas, creating a solid structure for the various plantings. There is also a winding brook and a large pond on the property.

Plants at Hollister House Garden

Naturally, you'll see [different plants blooming at different times](#) depending on when you visit the garden. These are mostly spring and summer plants. Therefore, you should visit between April and October. During the winter months, you get a little bit of fall foliage, but you don't see a lot of the beauty of the English garden. We went at the beginning of June, which is one of the best times of year to go. I recognized lilies and forget-me-nots, as well as the red Japanese Maple trees.

My sister knows plants a lot better than I do, so she pointed out the others for me. The small hedges were Boxwood, the large ones were Yew. There were also a lot of dogwood trees. For flowers she noticed irises, peonies, azalea, zinnias. She said not everything was in bloom but we also saw viburnum, daisies, salvia, dianthus, sweet busy, and wiegela. And, of course, mountain laurel, which is the state flower. It was a lot of lovely color laid out in little "rooms" separated by hedges.



What I Loved About Hollister House Garden

Those “rooms” are what’s so great about English gardens. One of the things that I love about old San Francisco houses is that they’re made up all of these little rooms and nooks so

even in a small square footage space, you get to explore and see discover things. English gardens are like this. While this particular garden is large, you could scale it down and use hedges to create rooms in a smaller garden and achieve the same effect. It's a delight because it feels like you're on an adventure, not just sitting in a garden.

Of course, there's nothing wrong with just sitting in a garden, either. There are plenty of great places to just sit in this garden as well. Benches. Tiered rock stairs. We hiked over a small bridge to a viewpoint overlooking the house and garden, sitting on large rocks there. It was peaceful. Beautiful. Inspiring. Colorful. Green, so green. The weather was lovely, the view was amazing, and the people we ran into while visiting were all welcoming. All in all, it's what you want when you visit a garden.

Read More:

- [Garden Photo Walks for Mindfulness](#)
- [The Best Plants for Mental Health Benefits](#)
- [Greek Gardening Style on the Cheap](#)

5 Reasons I Enjoy Lia's Living Almanac



I have recently become a huge fan of Substack newsletters. People write mostly longform content about the thing they are most passionate about. It's a great place to find smart writing about a range of different topics. This includes gardening. In terms of gardening and nature, the newsletter I'm loving most so far is Lia's Living Almanac.

What Is Substack?

Substack is a platform where writers can create newsletters on any topic. They can offer them free or by subscription or in some combination of both. I write a newsletter there called [Create Me Free](#), which is about the intersection of art and mental health.

Substack caters to longform content writers so you'll find a lot of newsletters about writing as well as writing itself like people who publish serialized fiction in newsletter format. However, you can find newsletters about all different kinds of topics.

The Notes section of the site functions somewhat like Twitter or other social media but without many of those platform's drawbacks. I don't love social media but I do love Substack.

Lia's Living Almanac

I am looking into finding new gardening and nature newsletters to read on Substack. For now, though, my favorite is [Lia's Living Almanac](#). It's written by gardening expert and author Lia Leendertz.

Lia Leendertz and the Annual Almanac

Leendertz is writer who writes most frequently about gardening. She writes about growing your own food and cooking with it. Therefore, if you like fruit and vegetable gardening, you might like what she shares. She's written for Gardens Illustrated, The Garden, Simple Things and more. She also has a monthly podcast called As The Season Turns.

Each year, she publishes a book called The Almanac. Built upon the old idea of rural almanacs, it is a natural guide to the seasons of the year. It includes moon phases, seasonal recipes, seasonal bee behavior, and much more. Gardens allow us to tune into nature and this is a great reminder of how to do it. 2022 marked the fifth year of her almanac.

Lia's Substack newsletter offers weekly installations of the seasonal changes that she sees. It's a real time almanac of sorts.

5 Reasons I Enjoy Lia's Living Almanac

I only have so much bandwidth to read longform newsletters, of course. Here are five reasons that Lia's Living Almanac makes the cut:

1. It Literally Reminds Me To Stop and Smell The Roses

Each week, Lia shares what she's noticed in the garden. She notices the first new rosebud of the season and shares that with her readers. She also notices other things in nature – the wildlife coming into the garden, the phase of the moon up above.

Time can slip by us so easily and we wonder where the seasons went. Pausing to notice what has changed in just one week offers a beautiful way to return to the present moment and ground ourselves in the season that we are currently inhabiting.

It reminds us to enjoy what is right here right now. What's here is a season's best thing. And it won't last very long at all. Remembering this through nature reminds me to have gratitude for all of the other things happening right now as well.

2. It Offers a Gardening Education

I would say that this newsletter is more about nature than specifically about gardening. However, there are things throughout that help me learn more about gardening.

In Week 20, she shared about her dog's moulting fur and how birds are using it in nests. That's something dog-owning gardeners might look into further. In week 15, she shared that there's only about one week when dandelions look really good as border flowers. From week 5, I learned a little about how to use backlighting to make garden photography look more interesting.

Mostly, I learn about what different plants look like. I don't have a strong working knowledge of different flowers and trees and bushes. So, when she shares them, I learn from her.

3. I Love a Great List

I love lists of things. I don't know what this is all about but it's true. In each newsletter, she highlights three seasonal changes that she covers in more detail. However, before that, she provides a running list of everything from the week. I love these lists. For example, just a small selection from the list in her Week 21 newsletter:

"all the rowan trees in flower; first (absolutely delicious) strawberries of the season; almost head high cow parsley and buttercup avenues; starting off some rhubarb gin; making home-made mayo because it's asparagus season; wisteria unfolding; a waning gibbous moon low in the morning sky"

4. I Find Myself Filled With So Much More Joy

From the "about" page of Lia's Substack, she says about the importance of this weekly noticing:

"I find it life affirming and joyous. It makes me feel tiny, it makes me feel grand."

This comes through in the weekly newsletters. They brighten my week when I read them or even when I skim the photos. They give me joy. And the reminder to notice the little things in my life brings a lot more joy to my days as well.

5. The Community Around It Is Warm and Inviting

The thing that I really love about Substack is that it creates community. We find our tribes and we truly connect there. It's happening for me in a way that hasn't happened on other social media platforms. It's not algorithm-driven but interest-driven. Honestly, it reminds me a lot of having pen pals, of zine culture. It reminds of the early days of blogging when it was all about authenticity and sharing and connecting with others. It wasn't so toxic.

Of course, some Substack newsletters seem to have a stronger community around them than others. Lia's is great. On Substack, you can create a "chat" for your subscribers. Lia does a weekly "show and tell" where everyone shares the thing that they noticed during the week that was the most seasonal for them. This means that there are lots of gardening and nature images. It's amazing!

I get the chance to see what is growing in people's gardens all around the world. It's different everywhere, of course. For example, cherry blossoms come out in February here in San Francisco. But they don't start emerging on the East Coast until several months later. I get to notice these differences. Additionally, I get to enjoy different plants throughout the year in this way. Lia's posts sometimes include updates from Australian readers where the season is completely opposite to most of the US.

Read More:

- [5 Things I Learned About Gardening in 2022](#)
- [Book Review: A Garden to Dye For](#)
- [10 Best Gardening Podcasts Worth Listening To](#)

The Best Plants for Mental Health Benefits



My two biggest passions in life are art and mental health. Gardening is an art form. Also, gardening has many mental health benefits. I was curious to do some research into the best plants for mental health benefits. Of course, this will vary from person to person. Nevertheless, there are some plants commonly considered beneficial in this way.

Plants and Mental Health

[Keeping plants improves mental health](#) according to numerous studies and personal anecdotes. Potential benefits include:

- Reduces stress
- Reduces loneliness
- Improves mood
- Creates routine and structure
- Improves cognitive function as well as creativity
- Enhances self-esteem
- Improves sleep

Notably, of course, this will vary from person to person. I'd argue that keeping plants can help most people's mental health but that what this looks like for each person will vary. For example, if you have severe depression, then it can be really challenging to get the motivation to water every day. Going out to your garden each day can help ease the depression. And yet, if you can't keep up with it and your plants die, that can make you feel worse. As someone who lives with recurring depression, I understand that there's a fine line. So for people like me, keeping fewer plants that require less care can be a good solution.

The Best Plants for Mental Health Benefits

The plants that people prefer are also very individual, of course. Some people feel best when growing healthy vegetables that they can eat. Others thrive with lots of very colorful flowers around. You'll know – and continue to discover – what is right for you. That said, there are some plants that are [widely considered](#) the best plants for mental health benefits. Here are some common examples:

Lavender

Lavender is known for its calming and relaxing properties. It has been shown to lower heart rate, blood pressure, and levels of the stress hormone cortisol. Lavender also has a soothing scent that can help to promote better sleep. Personally, I use lavender essential oil in my diffuser every night. I also use lavender spray on my bedding. Natural lavender growing in a garden would likely be even better.

Jasmine

Jasmine has a sweet, floral scent that has been shown to reduce anxiety and promote relaxation. Like lavender, it can

also help to improve sleep quality. Moreover, it's been shown to reduce symptoms of depression. If you're looking for an all-over "feel good" plant for mental health benefits, jasmine is one good choice.

Aloe Vera

Aloe Vera is a low-maintenance plant that can help to purify the air and remove toxins. It can also help to reduce stress and promote relaxation. In fact, aloe vera has natural sedative properties that can help to reduce stress and anxiety, improve sleep, and boost mood. Therefore, this is a really great indoor plant for both physical and mental health.

Peace Lily

Just the name tells you that this plant might have mental health benefits. Similar to aloe vera, the Peace Lily is another plant that can help to purify the air and remove toxins. Moreover, the plant contains compounds that can help to promote relaxation and improve mood. It is easy to care for and can thrive in a variety of environments, making it a great choice for those looking to improve their health without taxing their energy.

Snake Plant

The Snake Plant is yet another low-maintenance plant that can help to purify the air and remove toxins. The plant releases oxygen at night, which can help to create a more restful sleep environment. Additionally, it is known for its hardiness and ability to thrive in a variety of environments, so it's a versatile option in terms of plants for mental health.

Spider Plant

Similar to the Snake Plant, the Spider Plant is a low-maintenance plant that purifies the air. While the Snake Plant

is particular good at cleaning the air at night, the Spider Plant provides overall toxin clearing. A room with both of these should have nice clean air, making it easier to breathe and rest. This is always good for our mental health!

Rosemary

There are several great herbs that you can grow to promote mental health. Rosemary is a great example. The scent of rosemary has been found to stimulate the brain, which can improve cognitive function. Many mental health conditions affect concentration and memory. Rosemary can help with that! And yet, even while it boosts mood, it's also a calming plant.

Moreover, you can, of course, consume the rosemary that you grow. This has many physical and mental health benefits. Reducing inflammation and improving immune system function are two of the biggest benefits. This helps both the body and the mind.

Basil

Basil is another herb that can help to improve memory and concentration. It also has a calming effect and can help to reduce stress and promote relaxation. Moreover, it has cardiovascular benefits. Plants that support your overall health are good for your mental health. After all, mental health is health, as they say!

Sunflowers

Personally, I find it hard to be unhappy when looking at a sunflower. Of course, in the throes of depression, it's hard to recognize that beauty. Nevertheless, I've found that the little things do help with my baseline mood. Sunflowers are mood-boosting flowers. Their bright yellow color and large size make them a joy to look at. Plus, their association with sunshine and warmth can have a positive impact on mood.

Marigolds

These are also great flowers for mental health benefits. Their vibrant colors and easy care make them a popular choice for gardeners and flower enthusiasts. The bright colors are great mood boosters. And yet since they're easy to take care of, you run less risk of low self-esteem from times when you lack the energy to provide full care.

Chamomile

This is another flower that is relatively easy to grow and care for. Chamomile is especially known for its ability to promote sleep and reduce insomnia. After all, haven't you ever been offered chamomile tea to sleep? You can make tea with the plant in your garden or just reap the mental health benefits of tending to it.

Read More:

- [6 Health Benefits of Gardening](#)
- [5 Ways Healthy Gardens Help the Planet](#)
- [Being a Beginner in the Garden](#)
- [Choosing a Bed: Sleep Number vs Tempurpedic](#)

13 Gardening Books on My To Be Read Shelf



I love my local library. In fact, I get pleasure not just from going to the library and reading the books I get there but also from the process of looking through their catalog regularly and adding books to my “for later shelf.” There’s something satisfying about even just learning about which books are out there that I might get to read someday. So, I thought that I’d head over to my virtual bookshelf and let you know about 13 gardening books currently waiting there for me.

13 Gardening Books on My To Be Read Shelf

There are actually more than two dozen gardening books on my SFPL “For Later” shelf. However, here are the top thirteen on my list:

1. The Climate Change Garden by Sally

Morgan

Subtitled “Down to Earth Advice for Growing a Resilient Garden,” this book seems like a must-read for gardeners in our times. Soils are eroding, rainfall is unpredictable, and plants are blooming earlier or being damaged by pests.

This book provides techniques, practices, and equipment that can be used to adapt gardens to climate extremes and protect them against exotic pests and invasive weeds. It covers topics such as adapting plant selections, using season extenders, reducing a garden’s carbon footprint, and planting more of the right trees for a future climate.

The aim is to create a low-maintenance, climate-savvy garden that can withstand the effects of a changing climate.

2. To Stand and Stare by Andrew Timothy O’Brien

The subtitle of this one pretty much sums up what interests me about it: “How to Garden While Doing Next to Nothing.” Honestly, I’m a bit lazy about active things. I’m the kind of person who goes to the yoga studio primarily for the restorative yoga class. So, this book feels right up my alley.

3. The Joy of Gardening: the Everyday Zen of Mowing the Lawn by Ellen Mary

With a background in integral psychology, I am a proponent of the [benefits of mindfulness](#). I have a busy mind and I don’t always practice what I preach. However, I regularly read books that remind me to get back in touch with the slower side of life. I like books that teach me again how to “be here now.” This one looks like a must read for me.

4. Growing Joy by Maria Faila

This one’s subtitle is “The Plant Lover’s Guide to Cultivating Happiness (and Plants).” How I love the idea of growing joy! This one was written by the host of the Bloom and Grow Radio podcast. It also seems to look at the mindfulness benefits of

gardening.

5. Creating a Garden Retreat: An Artist's Guide to Planting An Outdoor Sanctuary by Virginia Johnson

Virginia Johnson shares her personal garden journey, from a small city lot to a beautiful and welcoming oasis. Her garden is wild and carefree, with hornbeams, peonies, hollyhocks, roses, and hydrangeas. Johnson explains her process with ease and clarity, bringing her ideas to life through words and illustrations. The book is organized into clear chapters about trees, flowers, seasons, and more. It sounds so inspiring!

6. The Philosophy of Gardening by Karen Caruana

This one doesn't actually have a very extensive description on the library website. In fact, all it says is, "A collection of essays about different gardening philosophies and practices, mostly from a German point of view." However, that's enough to pique my interest. I am so curious to see what is inside those pages!

7. The Regenerative Garden by Stephanie Rose

This one's subtitle helps explain what it is all about: "80 Practical Projects for Creating a Self-sustaining Garden Ecosystem."

A healthy, organic, regenerative garden is a self-sustaining ecosystem where everything works together. The goal of permaculture is to turn your garden into a functioning ecosystem that is less reliant on external resources and can sustain itself through many seasons.

The book's projects cover six living elements of the garden: soil, water, plants, climate, ethics, and community. They reduce workload, conserve water and other resources, and create a habitat for wildlife. Projects include intensive planting, living mulches, self-watering planters, rain gardens, and compost systems.

8. Native Plant Gardening for Birds, Bees & Butterflies. Northern California by George Oxford Miller

I live in Northern California so this one makes a lot of practical sense for me. Plus, I love butterflies. I like birds. And I know that bees are important. A friend of mine has a garden here that is a [Certified Wildlife Habitat](#). I imagine that this book has tips along the lines of what she incorporated in her amazing space.

9. Grow More Food by Colin McCrate

My sister is the biggest gardener in my life. She prefers only to grow edibles. So, this book, subtitled "Vegetable Gardener's Guide to Getting the Biggest Harvest Possible From a Space of Any Size," seems right up her alley.

10. No-dig Gardening: Raised Beds, Layered Gardens, and Other No-till Techniques by Bella Line

The book says that it teaches you everything you need to know in order to start and care for a kitchen garden. No-dig gardening is better for the environment, easier on your back, and can produce an abundance of vegetables, herbs, and flowers. So, it's worth reading about, right?

11. The Elegant & Edible Garden by Linda Vater

As you might notice, I'm often enticed by the title and/or subtitle of a book. The subtitle of this one is: "Design a Dream Kitchen Garden to Fit Your Personality, Desires, and Lifestyle." That just captures my imagination!

12. Striking Succulent Gardens: Plants and Plans for Designing Your Low-maintenance Landscape by Gabriel Frank

I love succulents. I'm originally from the Arizona desert, so naturally I find myself drawn to cacti and succulents of all kinds. Also, they're easier to grow than many other plants. Since I'm not really great with plants, that's best for me. I think that even if I don't learn a lot from this, I'd love just looking at the images inside!

13. Garden for the Senses by Kendra Wilson

Subtitled "How Your Garden Can Soothe Your Mind and Awaken Your Soul," this one intrigues me because of the mental health benefits of gardening and plants.

Do you read gardening books? Any that you recommend me to add to my virtual To Be Read shelf?

Read More:

- [A Garden to Dye For Book Review](#)
 - [7 Free Gardening eBooks You Can Download Now](#)
 - [Gardens, Books, and Legacies](#)
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Greek Gardening Style on the Cheap



Recently I was reading an article about 2023 gardening style trends. It referenced a current resurgence of passion for the Greek Garden. That sent me down a rabbit hole of beautiful fascinating looks at Greek-inspired gardens. However, so many of them are so pricy. So, I am curious about what we can do to enjoy this trend at a cheaper cost.

What Is Greek Gardening?

The initial article that I read about [gardening trends](#) describes Greek gardens using some of the following images:

- The use of stone all throughout the garden, but particularly stone walls
- Accented, of course, with marble, particularly marble columns

- Mediterranean fruit trees, of course – Cyprus and pomegranate
- As well as herbs and flowers that are great at handling drought, for wetter winters and drier summers – lavender, cysts, thyme
- And olives, of course, grow olives
- Create seating areas that are surrounded by arches that have climbing plants and tall trees around them
- Create different levels for the effect of Greece's hills – raised beds, elevated patios, etc.

All of this makes a lot of sense to me. I haven't been to Greece, but I've been to Mediterranean locations nearby, and this all resonates with what I've seen. Moreover, it makes sense for California gardens to adopt some Greek gardening ideas, since our climates have a lot of similarities.

Other Greek Gardening Details

Exploring a variety of other blogs and articles about Greek Gardens, here are some additional features I find listed:

- More fruit trees – lemons, limes, tangerines
- More herbs – rosemary, sage, oregano
- Succulents, add succulents
- Add just a splash of colorful red or pink with flowers like pelargoniums or bougainvillea
- Decorating with white and blue, those classic color that conjure up a Greek island
- Incorporate Greek tiles in the walkway, again think white and blue
- Add some terracotta pots
- Use stones to create intriguing lines and curves that give a geometric design to the landscape
- Put a table in the garden for outdoor dining

10 Tips for a Frugal Approach to a Greek Garden

In thinking about creating this type of garden, here's what comes to mind about doing so frugally:

1. Start With Small Changes

The biggest mistake that you can make in terms of frugal gardening is to change everything all at once. Believe me, I get it – the urge to create the garden of your dreams in one fell swoop. However, you already have your garden, and even if it's nothing like the Greek Garden that you want to create, it's valuable exactly as it is. Therefore, don't ruin what you've already got. Start small. Incorporate a little bit of stone here and there. Add some olive trees. Paint an exterior wall white with blue trim.

2. Get Creative with Stone

Stone is such a big features of Greek Gardens. And yet, stonework can be very pricy. While we would all love to enjoy fancy marble and exquisite stone arches, that's not a frugal approach to enhancing our garden. So, instead, consider ways to more frugally incorporate the essence of this. Add a gravel walkway, for example. Look for some of the [cheapest rocks](#) – pea gravel, crushed granite, and river rocks are all good choices. They may not be exactly the Greek Gods of garden stone, but they help add that flavor and create beauty in your space.

3. Wait For Discounts For The Better Stuff

If you really want a stunning pergola or a marble arch, find ways to reduce the cost of adding such a feature to your garden. Check Craigslist and Freecycle and Facebook

Marketplace and all of those types of spots for reduced cost items like this that people are eager to give away. Put the word out among your network that this is what you're seeking and see if it finds its way to you.

4. Barter For What You Want, Especially Trees

Ready to add some of those great citrus trees to your garden? Instead of investing in them at full price, see if you can locate someone who already has some in their garden that they want to trade. What do you have in your garden that you can trade for the plants that you want? You can slowly add the Greek-inspired trees and herbs while slowly reducing the other plants in your garden just by making savvy trades.

5. Think Rustic

There are many different approaches to Greek gardens. Of course, you're going to see a lot of Instagram-worthy perfection. However, rustic is absolutely another way to go that is authentically Greek. If you want to add an al fresco dining table to your Greek Garden, for example, think rustic in design. And think cheap. Yard sales and flea markets and online "free" messages are a great place to find the table as well as the seating and settings for it.

6. Don't Shy Away From Terracotta Pots

Of course, very authentic high quality terracotta is going to cost you some money. But all of us can pretty easily get our hands on the cheaper alternatives. And they're going to give you that same effect of a Greek Garden look. So, embrace them. When it's time to do some repotting in your garden, think terracotta.

7. Incorporate Symmetry Into Your Redesign

[Gardenista](#) recommends using symmetry in your garden to help get the Greek effect. As you begin to make changes, adding and removing features, remember this. Mirror-image beds are one example. Look around your garden for key features spots and then ask yourself how you might create symmetry there.

8. Add a Statue or Two

While not all Greek Gardens incorporate these, many do. Moreover, you can easily give nod to the culture with statues and urns. Obviously, look for these at places like flea markets where you can get them at a bargain.

9. Emphasize Low Cost Herbs That Don't Require Extensive Watering

This is such a key features of Greek Gardens. Moreover, it's a really great way to grow the size and design of your garden without spending a lot of money. Oregano, thyme, rosemary, sage, lavender ... these are all great options to build out your garden. Plus, you can use them in your kitchen, saving you money that way as well.

10. Use Recycled or Upcycled Materials for Creating Garden Levels

If you want to incorporate the idea of raised beds and slight terraces, then you can look for recycled materials to help you do so. Get your hands on some bricks or palettes that someone is giving away for free or cheap and put in the labor to make them look beautiful.

Read More:

- [Are Old Tires Toxic To Plants?](#)
 - [5 Free Garden Marker Ideas to Keep Track of Plants](#)
 - [Don't Throw Those Pots Away](#)
-

5 Things I Learned About Gardening in 2022



I am happy to be back here on this blog with all of you who are interested in frugal gardening. I had taken a break due to health issues and a loss in the family throughout much of 2022. Luckily, a colleague was able to step in. It looks like they provided you with a lot of wonderful tips and information while I was gone. Now that I am back, I have been doing a lot

of thinking about what I would most like to share with you in the months to come. In order to get into that, I think the best thing to do is to look back at 2022 and see what I learned. Here are the top five things I learned about gardening in 2022.

1. Plants Are Very Personal Gifts

I suppose that this is something that I already knew. However, I had many opportunities to think about just how personal plants are throughout 2022. As aforementioned, it was a year filled with illness and loss. As a result, many people wanted to reach out with their condolences. I received many wonderful handwritten cards. Moreover, I received practical help and emotional support. I didn't receive a lot of gifts, and I didn't receive any plants. And I am happy it was that way. Looking back now, though, I am a little surprised by this.

In my mind, it's so common for people to show up with flowers when they want to express sympathy. Or when visiting your home. And yet, I realized, people actually don't ever bring me flowers. This got me thinking – is that an old-fashioned idea? Do my people just not think of that as a gift because it's not their love language or do they know it's not mine? Mine is words and I receive cards, so that could be.

Recently, I read a memoir called "Where You End and I Begin." The mother in the memoir has a lot of rules that people in her life find unconventional. One of them is that you don't bring cut flowers to someone's home because it creates work for the hostess. However, she liked to receive potted plants. To me, that requires a lot more ongoing work! And yet, I can see the point. So, what I learned – or what I have been musing on recently – is how personal the giving and receiving of plants is.

2. Plants That Are Best For Sympathy and Grief

Since I was on this topic, I started wondering what plants people do choose to give if they offer them to someone who is grieving. I learned that there are many different [sympathy plants](#) each with its own meaning. For example, gladioli represent strength. Hyacinths represent sorrow.

Since plants are indeed so personal, I don't know whether or not you want to gift one to someone who is grieving. For me, though, what I found was that perhaps I could do some intentional plant shopping in order to find plants that represent the specific stage of grief that I'm in. I learned that palms represent protection, which is something that sounds nice to have during a challenging time. The plant I selected most recently, however, is a very small orchid.

I have never kept orchids because they are known to be such finicky plants. However, I was very drawn to one, so I decided to get it for myself. And only afterward did I do some research and discover that orchids have many different meanings but one is eternal love for someone who has passed away. That feels so meaningful for me right now.

3. Best Crystals for the Garden

Although I find crystals to be pretty, I have never been particularly "into" crystals. In other words, I don't carry them around or add them to an altar in order to manifest the energy that I need in my life. And yet, recently, I also find myself drawn to them. Do they have inherent natural energy? Maybe, maybe not. It sure can't hurt to learn more about them and choose ones that could offer what I'm seeking, could it?

In that vein, I started learning about [crystals that are popular for gardens](#). I will write about this in more detail in

the future. The gist is that each one has a certain meaning and is good for certain types of energy. Some that are great for gardens include clear quartz and chrysocolla to promote growth, amazonite to protect against toxins in the soil and air, and black tourmaline as a protective border around a garden. It's an intriguing new approach to adding different colors, textures, and energies to a garden space that I am excited to learn just a little bit more about.

4. Best Plants for Natural Plant Dyeing

I shared some of this with you in my early explorations. I have continued to explore this facet of gardening. In other words, I am very interested in growing plants for the purpose of dyeing fabric and, more specifically, organic cotton yarn. Additionally, I am interested in foraging for natural plants that are good for dyeing. To be honest, this is something that I've pursued wholeheartedly. However, thinking about doing so has been a beautiful way to enhance my daily life. And I hope to actively engage with this more in this fresh new year.

5. Plant and Gardening Podcasts

There is no substitute for first-hand experience. However, when I wasn't home to take care of plants, or there wasn't a garden nearby for me to enjoy, I found that books, documentaries, and podcasts made great additions to my life. Did you know there are lots of good podcasts about plants and gardening? I'll do a full post on this soon. To get you started, though, you might want to check out "The Simple Garden Life," "Garden Culture," and "Roots and Refuge." If you have any other recommendations, I'd love to know what they are!

You Might Also Like:

- [Being a Beginner in the Garden](#)
 - [5 Ways Depression Costs Me In the Garden](#)
 - [6 Tips to Revive Wilted Plants in the Garden](#)
-

9 New Year's Resolutions for Gardeners



New Year, New Garden, right?

The new year allows us to start from a clean slate and decide what is essential and which is not. And that is where you should start your resolutions.

Consider what things are important to you and which are not. Make a list.

Below are a few things I will work on in my own garden this year.

Plan Early and Thoroughly

This year, I want to plan my garden early so I can test and add my amendments to the soil with enough time to acclimate and prevent chemical burns to my new plants.

Planning early allows me to research and adjust if there are plants or seeds I can't get.

I also want to plan out more details than I usually do.

This includes double-checking what seeds and products I have, my square footage, and the estimated number of plants, and spending less time going back and forth to the store, ultimately saving me money.

Take Better Care of My Tools

I am so bad about exposing my tools to the elements or letting my school-age kids lose them.

So this year, I want to keep them in a protected place if I am not using them. And I want to keep them clean and oiled better.

Make my Garden a Community

We spend a lot of time in the garden, so this year, I want to make it a place where the whole family works together to make memories, get closer, and teach my kids good character.

But I also want to make it a place of rest. My parents would

sit together in our garden every evening. My dad always said they were watching the plants grow, but now I understand it was an excellent place for them to escape the fast-paced modern life and the noise of a large family.

Donate Extra Produce to a Food Bank

Food banks and soup kitchens often find fresh produce a scarce commodity even though it adds much pleasure to the sensation of eating.

I want to grow enough food to donate plenty of produce.

Care for My Soil

I want to care for my soil that doesn't just consist of adding fertilizer.

Instead, I want to use cover crops, amendments, and compost to create soil that nourishes my plants and beneficial bugs.

Attract More Beneficial Bugs

Some [bugs are great for your garden](#).

I resolve to grow more plants that attract pollinators and predatory insects so my garden can thrive with less effort or chemicals.

Grow Something Adventurous

Grow something new or something you don't usually grow. It will help you stay excited about your garden and give you a sense of newness to your garden.

Also, it will be fun to show your friends and try it out together!

Add More Perennials

Last, I want to add more perennials to my garden. Berry bushes, trees, asparagus, rhubarb, chives, and artichoke are all delicious and grow back year after year.

This means more food growing and less planting every year.

My New Year's Resolutions are probably different than yours. What is on your list? Is it different from mine? Leave me a comment below!

Read More:

[Vinegar Uses In Garden](#)

[Using Shredded Paper As Garden Mulch](#)

[Garden For Free](#)

Gardening Books On My Library Want Shelf



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I have a confession. One of my [favorite weird pastimes](#) is going through all of the new books available at the library and placing any that I might read on my “For Later” shelf. I

do this weekly. And I admit that there are more books on the shelves than I could ever actually read. However, I do also weekly browse my shelf and request some of the books, so I do end up reading a lot of them. Today, I thought I'd share with you some of the gardening books that are on my For Later shelf at the local library.

The Urban Garden: 101 Ways to Grow Food and Beauty in the City by Kathy Gentz

Obviously, I live in an urban area. I don't have a huge yard to garden in. However, I have a deck, windowsill pots, and access to local [community gardens](#). Therefore, I'm always interested in ideas about gardening in the city. I'm curious to see what might inspire me among the more than 100 ideas suggested in this book.

Companion Planting for Beginners: Pair your Plants for A Bountiful, Chemical-free Vegetable Garden by Brian Lowell

I love the idea of learning how to listen to nature when designing a garden. I remember during a vineyard tour learning about how they planted certain plants at the end of each row because they could see if there was any threat to the grapes by first checking out what was going on with those plants. That's always stuck with me. This book seems like an amazing expansion upon that education.

The Regenerative Garden: 80 Practical Projects for Creating a Self-sustaining Garden Ecosystem by Stephanie Rose

Is her last name really Rose? That made me smile. In any case, I love DIY stuff, and I'm really curious about this idea of "practical projects." Plus, it's important to design gardens that work with nature. I'm really into xeriscaping and not planting non-native species. So, I think I'll learn a lot from this book.

Sustainable Garden Projects, Tips and Advice for the Eco-conscious Gardener by Maryann Boswall

Here's another one that's along the same theme as the last. Whenever I see a book like this, I immediately add it to my library To Read shelf without hesitation.

Wild: The Naturalistic Garden by Noel Kingsbury

This seems to be another one similar to the two above. My library's description of it includes:

"This is the first comprehensive overview of a new planting approach that is wild and natural by nature, reflecting the global turn towards sustainability and the current zeitgeist in garden design."

It's a look at forty different gardens from this perspective. I believe that I could learn a lot from this book.

Cutting Back: My Apprenticeship in the Gardens of Kyoto by Leslie Buck

This is a book that I've actually already gotten from the library and have sitting right next to me to read soon. Memoirs are my very favorite genre. This one is about a female American gardener who went and trained in Japanese gardens.

Color in and Out of the Garden Watercolor Practices for Painters, Gardeners, and Nature Lovers by Lorene Edwards Forkner

I'm not actually a painter. However, I'm an artist (fiber and mixed media as well as writing). And I'm always inspired by creative exercises in different mediums. So, I probably won't get out the paints to work along with this book, and yet I'm certain that it will give me inspiration.

Royal Gardens of the World by Mark Lane: 21 Celebrated Gardens From the Alhambra to Highgrove and Beyond

I've never honestly thought about Royal Gardens much. However, I imagine it would be like going on a vacation in the mind to flip through the pages of this book. Therefore, it's on my list!

Help me build my wish list! What are some of your favorite gardening books?

Read More:

- [Best Garden Instagram Accounts for Inspiration](#)
- [4 Best TV Shows for Gardeners](#)
- [Being a Beginner in the Garden](#)