

## JOHN'S CORNER

### A BOOK GIFT LIST FOR GARDENERS

*By John Ferguson*

**The Botany of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View of the World**, Michael Pollan, Random House 2001, hardcover: ISBN 0-375-50129-0, 2002 paperback: ISBN 0-375-76039-3

This book is about how human desires affect our relationship with plants. Wikipedia has the following information: This work explores the nature of domesticated plants from the dual perspective of humans and the plants themselves. Pollan presents case studies that mirror four types of human desires that are reflected in the way that we selectively grow, breed, and genetically engineer our plants. The apple reflects the desire of sweetness, the tulip beauty, marijuana pleasure and the potato sustenance. Pollan narrates his own experience with each of the plants, which he then intertwines with an exploration into their social history. Each section presents an element of human domestication, or the "human bumblebee" as Pollan calls us. The stories range from the true story of Johnny Appleseed to Pollan's first-hand research with sophisticated marijuana hybrids in Amsterdam to the paradigm-shifting possibilities of genetically engineered potatoes. Pollan also discusses the limitations of monoculture agriculture: specifically, the adoption in Ireland of a single breed of potato (the Lumper) made the Irish vulnerable to a fungus to which it had no resistance, resulting in the Irish Potato Famine. The Peruvians from whom the Irish had gotten the potato grew hundreds of varieties, so their exposure to any given pest was slight.

**Seeds of Change: Six Plants That Transformed Mankind**, Henry Hobhouse, Counterpoint Press, 2005, ISBN 0-333-73628-1-9 (paperback). Seeds of Change is about the history of six plants we grow commercially and how they changed the world. It talks about how sugar, tea, cotton, the potato, quinine, and the cocoa plant have shaped our past. Henry Hobhouse explains the consequences of these plants with attention-grabbing historical moments. While most records of history focus on



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human influence, Hobhouse emphasizes how plants too are a central and influential factor in the historical process. I found this book a very interesting tool to aid my understanding of modern gardening and agricultural practices.

**Founding Gardeners: The Revolutionary Generation, Nature, and the Shaping of the American Nation**, Andrea Wulf, Knopf, 2011 ISBN 978-0-307-26990-4. A fascinating look at the founding fathers from the unique and intimate perspective of their lives as gardeners, plantsmen, and farmers. For the founding fathers, gardening, agriculture, and botany were elemental passions, as deeply ingrained in their characters as their belief in liberty for the nation they were creating. Andrea Wulf reveals for the first time this aspect of the revolutionary generation. She describes how, even as British ships gathered off Staten Island, George Washington wrote his estate manager about the garden at Mount Vernon; how a tour of English gardens renewed Thomas Jefferson's and John Adams's faith in their fledgling nation; how a trip to the great botanist John Bartram's garden helped the delegates of the Constitutional Congress break their deadlock; and why James Madison is the forgotten father of American environmentalism. These and other stories reveal a guiding but previously overlooked ideology of the American Revolution. *Founding Gardeners* adds depth and nuance to our understanding of the American experiment and provides us with a portrait of the founding fathers as they've never before been seen.

**"Year Round Vegetables, Fruits and Flowers for Metro Houston,"** by Bob Randall, PhD., Retired Executive Director Urban Harvest. A resource guide on how to grow plants in the Houston area organically and where to get the supplies you may need. It is sold at many area gardening centers. One of the very best resources for Houston and Gulf Coast. Highly Recommended

**Teaming with Microbes. Revised edition, A Gardener's Guide to the Soil Food Web**, by Jeff Lowenfels & Wayne Lewis, Timber Press, 2010, ISBN 13:978-0-88192-777-1, 978-1-60460-113-3

This is the most complete book on the market about biological or organic methods in horticulture. It is written in a very easy to understand, non technical format with lots of pictures illustrating the latest research in soil science. It is written for the average gardener and landscaper as an introduction that explains why organic methods work so well and how they help a person save time and money. The book is written in two parts. The first part is a easy to understand very basic presentation on the

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science of soil biology. The second part take the ideas and concepts on the Soil Food Web that were introduced in part one and applies them to solving problems in our yards and gardens. Subjects covered range from taking care of our soil, to compost and mulch choices. Also included is information on compost teas to natural weed control. Each plant group from lawns and turf grass, to annuals and vegetables, to shrubs perennials and trees are covered. This book is Highly Recommended for all gardeners, landscapers or anyone taking care of a lawn or garden.

**A Garden Book for Houston and The Texas Gulf Coast, River Oaks Garden Club, 5th edition, 2013,** edited by Lynn Herbert, ISBN 978-0-578-09149-6 Highly Recommended

This is the most complete book on how to garden in Houston. It explains the most modern methods in horticulture in a very easy to read manner with lots of pictures, charts and tables. The focus is on using the best methods based on sustainability to make your garden beautiful and safe for you, your family and pets, while saving one a lot of time and money in the process. The editor has done a fabulous job of compiling it with input from experts in each area discussed and based on proven results. For anyone that wants a beautiful lawn or garden.

**Mycelium Running, How Mushrooms Can Help Save the World,** by Paul Stamets, Ten Speed Press, ISBN 978-1-58008-579-3 This book is a deeper look at fungus and how it affects the world around us from plants to humans. The second edition was recently released.

**The Complete Compost Gardening Guide,** Barbara Pleasant and Deborah Martin, Storey Publishing, Copyright 2008, ISBN 978-1-58017-702-3 (Very Good)

**We would love to know what your favorite gardening books are for this area. Drop us a line at [lazygardenerandfriends@gmail.com](mailto:lazygardenerandfriends@gmail.com)**