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JOHN'S CORNER:

NEWS FROM THE WONDERFUL WORLD OF SOIL AND PLANTS

by John Ferguson

Here are a few books I have finished reading over the last couple months that a gardener might enjoy.

“The Secret Life of Your Microbiome – Why Nature and Biodiversity are Essential to Health and Happiness”, Susan I. Prescott, MD, PhD and Alan C. Logan, ND, 2017, New Society Publishers, ISBN: 978-0-86571-851-7

This book is about the connection between our health and the microbes in the environment. From the cover: “For too long our bodies have been viewed as capsules, sealed off and protected from 'bugs' by our immune systems and an arsenal of antibiotics, pesticides, processed foods, and antibacterial soaps. The more insulated from nature, the better.

The Secret Life of Your Microbiome shatters this deeply held myth, presenting a revolutionary new paradigm, backed by vast science; we're deeply connected to the biodiversity of nature through our microbiomes, the rich microbial ecosystem of our guts and skin, and this connection is essential to health and happiness.

From sugar-rich diets wiping out good gut bacteria and exacerbating depression, to microbes mediating phytonutrient absorption in the brain, to inflammation and cancer, the influence of biodiversity on our bodies is everywhere. The great communicator is our immune system, a 'mobile brain' that interacts with micro-organisms in and around us with profound health consequences. Written with pace, clarity, and humor by world-renowned scientists in immunology, nutrition, and environmental health, *The Secret Life of Your Microbiome* makes



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the irrefutable case that health and happiness depends fundamentally on the health of biodiversity, and shows how we can nurture this nature.”

Dr. Susan L. Prescott, MD, PhD is an internationally acclaimed immunologist and pediatrician. She has authored 250 scientific papers and *The Allergy Epidemic*, *The Calling*, and *Origins*.

Dr. Alan C. Logan ND is a naturopathic doctor and researcher, a trusted media commentator, and co-author of *Your Brain on Nature* and *The Clear Skin Diet*. He and Prescott live in New York and Perth, Australia.

The North American Butterfly Association has their new book out called **Butterfly Gardening**, by Jane Hurwitz, Princeton University Press, 2018, ISBN: 978-0-691-17034-3

This book is a great guide whether one is an experienced butterfly gardener or just getting started. There is lots of information on everything from pollen and nectar plants to host plants for the caterpillars. A feature I liked is that they divided the country into many regions and then talked about which plants and butterflies can be found in each region. It covers the migratory species like Monarchs and several others and shows their travel routes. There is lots information on propagation as many of the best plants to attract butterflies are wild flowers and herbs that one will not find in the local garden center. Even though I have been butterfly gardening for 40 years, I found the book full of useful information. The photographs alone of both plants and butterflies make this book a nice addition to anyone's gardening library.

The Ground Beneath Us – From the Oldest Cities to the Last Wilderness, What Dirt Tells Us About Who We Are, by Paul Bogard, 2017, Little, Brown and Company publishers, ISBN: 978-0-316-34226-1



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This book is about how we as a people have treated our soil from a historical and archeological approach. It explores the physical, intellectual and emotional connections between humans and the Earth. It goes on to describes the connection to our culture and ecology and the importance of ground for our future. A piece of information presented is that we have more than 40 million acres of turfgrass (sixty thousand square miles) which is three times the amount of land devoted to growing corn. It explores the effects of paving over the earth and how it may affect our future as a species.

Sustainable Landscaping for Dummies, Owen E. Dell, 2009, Wiley Publishing, ISBN: 978-0-470-41149-0

Owen Dell is a licensed landscape architect and contractor from California with 40 years' experience in design and installation of landscapes. He explains while traditional landscaping is an environmental nightmare and then show how sustainable methods not only look better but cost far less. This is a practical guide to a new gardener or home owner that will help one design a landscape safe for children and pets that is free of toxic chemicals.

Garden Revolution – How Our landscapes can be a source of environmental change, Larry Weaver and Thomas Christopher, 2016, Timber Press, ISBN: 978-1604696165

This book is about liberating your landscape to follow natural principles. For me it follows Doug Tallamy's book "Bringing Nature Home" which explains why natural landscaping is important. This book goes on to explain "How" to design your landscape. This book is an American Horticultural Society Award winner.

This lushly-photographed reference is an important moment in horticulture that will be embraced by anyone looking for a better, smarter way to garden. Larry Weaner is an icon in



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the world of ecological landscape design, and now his revolutionary approach is available to all gardeners. *Garden Revolution* shows how an ecological approach to planting can lead to beautiful gardens that buck much of conventional gardening's counter-productive, time-consuming practices. Instead of picking the wrong plant and then constantly tilling, weeding, irrigating, and fertilizing, Weaner advocates for choosing plants that are adapted to the soil and climate of a specific site and letting them naturally evolve over time. Allowing the plants to find their own niches, to spread their seed around until they find the microclimate and spot that suits them best, creates a landscape that is vibrant, dynamic, and gorgeous year after year.

I enjoyed reading this book and it has a lot of good information on improving our landscapes. I will let the following Editorial reviews speak to its value:

"This beautiful book shows us that guiding natural processes rather than fighting them is the key to creating healthier landscapes and happier gardeners. An essential addition to our knowledge of sustainable landscapes." —Doug Tallamy, author of ***Bringing Nature Home***

"An essential reference for conservation-minded home gardeners and stewards of larger landscapes." —Rick Darke, author of ***The Living Landscape*** and ***The American Woodland Garden***

"There's inspiration here, from the honesty with which the authors address climate change to the experiential wisdom they bring to every aspect of the complex process of creating a landscape." —***Booklist***

"In this text-heavy volume, a landscape designer and a horticulturist teach us that gardening can be a partnership with nature when gardeners shed conventional practices, exploit plants' life cycles, and embrace unpredictable plant communities." —***Library Journal***

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“What is marvelous about reading this book is the powerful sense of those lifetimes of knowledge and skill being shared, and so concisely—there is hardly a spare sentence here. . . . Illustrations are plentiful, clear and enticing. . . . I wholeheartedly recommend this book to anyone who wants to work with wild or ecological planting styles; we can all learn a lot from it.” —***Gardens Illustrated***

“A guide to every aspect of a new kind of garden based on age-old laws—nature’s law.” —***Country Gardens***

“There’s a way to design and plant that’s beneficial to the environment, that looks beautiful, and that saves you—the homeowner— from a lot of toil and trouble. . . . the principles he outlines can be adapted for almost any garden, so it’s a book that you’ll want on your bookshelf. . . . This is a book that’s long, long overdue.” —***Garden Design Online***

“This book shows how [Larry Weaner] evaluates the natural habitat, chooses plants, and watches them grow and reseed, then edits if necessary. . . . This is a book that will guide a designer through a planning process, including a demonstration of the use of themed maps to show microclimates and other features of a site.” —***San Francisco Chronicle***

“*Garden Revolution* reinforces what we’ve been told again and again—and thankfully are beginning to heed—that as garden makers, we need to pay attention to the local ecology. . . . Throughout the book, practical content is presented alongside anecdotal planting examples. . . their observations and analysis open our eyes and invite us to adopt an approach that can be deeply meaningful and filled with ‘surprises and revelatory events.’” —***Pacific Horticulture Magazine***

“*Garden Revolution* gives land managers the toolkit to work with land on large and small scales in order to create ecologically sensitive landscapes. For anyone who is a steward of land or interested in the topic, this is a book to find and read sooner rather than later.” —***NYBG’s Plant Talk***

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“A thoughtful meditation on ecology, garden design, and theory of native landscapes.” —
Garden Collage