

# Annual Review of New Books by Pacific Northwest Authors

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This is Part 2 of the annual review of new books by Pacific Northwest (Washington, Oregon, Idaho and British Columbia) authors. This part features primarily books on food growing and urban farming. Please see the first part of this review in the Fall 2012 issue of "The Bulletin" for new, local books on other subjects.

## A Chicken in Every Garden

Jessi Bloom is a strong advocate for chickens in almost any garden setting, and in "Free-Range Chicken Gardens" she provides detailed information on compatible plantings—including those that provide food for chickens—and structures that meet the multiple needs of fowl and flora. There is a lot of well-organized information in these pages on all other related topics, too, making this of value to chicken keepers at any experience level. But you can also just enjoy the profiles of gardeners and their chickens (many are local) or the many superb photographs (by Kate Baldwin) of contented hens in their gardens, proving their value as a natural compliment.

Robert and Hannah Litt own the Urban Farm Store in Portland and wrote "A Chicken in Every Yard" from experience keeping their own chickens and helping their chicken-keeping customers. While they don't disapprove of raising chickens for food, theirs are clearly pets and the book encourages this attitude with chapters like "Parenting Your Peeps." There is a lot of detail about different types and breeds, including recommendation lists such as "best for children." All stages of raising and caring are covered in depth, but the garden is only briefly mentioned.

If your focus is solely on chickens, this book is an excellent choice.

## Urban Agriculture

"The Urban Farm Handbook" is a blending of deeply personal accounts by two urban (Seattle) families seeking ways of becoming self-reliant in producing and preparing food. By sharing both the triumphs and failures (including persuading significant others), Annette Cottrell and Joshua McNichols present a lot of options for choosing your own path to provide food for yourself and loved ones. Recipes are scattered throughout, and many of those contain meat. Dealing with the angst of slaughtering various animals to supply that meat is a significant theme of the book, but here, too, the authors give you many options for finding your own comfort level.

Drawing a parallel with the homesteaders who settled the Oregon frontier, Portland author Renee Wilkinson recognizes that same spirit—and lack of knowledge and experience—in today's pioneers seeking self-sustaining, urban homes. "Modern Homestead" is not an A-Z encyclopedia of vegetable crops, but instead provides general rules-of-thumb to help you decide what you want, including a sizeable portion of the book that is given over to "Citified Creatures." Preserving your harvest is important, too, but the strongest message is: "Don't work alone." Find some buddies to help you with your homestead, and you will collectively be more innovative and much more successful.

In contrast to the other books in this section, Peter Ladner writes "The Urban Food Revolution"

from the perspective of a policy maker (he was a two-term City Councilor in Vancouver, B.C.) and a journalist. This is not a gardening book or even an urban-farming book, but it does examine issues that impact food production and distribution in an urban setting with the goal of telling policymakers “...what they can do to improve access to healthy food for all the people they represent.” Subjects addressed include food deserts, childhood obesity, designing new developments with urban farming options, and the safety of locally raised food.

### **Nothing But Veggies (and a Little Fruit)**

Many vegetable gardening books include recipes, but few are as well integrated as in “Grow Cook Eat”—in which Willi Galloway follows sowing, growing and harvesting, with cooking as the next logical step (presumably followed by eating). In addition to the formal recipes (none are particularly complex), there are oodles of simple ideas for using the vegetable (or herbs or even a few fruits) at hand in creative and delicious ways. Jim Henkens’s photos expertly capture growing plants, the fresh harvest, and the serving plate, encouraging you to give it a try. The general culture section is brief but sufficient; the goal here is to get growing and get eating—yum!

Graham Kerr is another (now local—Mt. Vernon) author who easily includes recipes amongst his recommendations for a kitchen garden, but that’s not surprising as he is much better known as a chef (remember the Galloping Gourmet?) than a gardener. He has embraced raising his own healthful food as eagerly as any of his past pursuits. “Growing at the Speed of Life” is filled with the same enthusiasm; Kerr hasn’t lost any of his wit or knack of turning a phrase that made him such a popular television personality in the early 1970s.

The Seattle-based authors of “Food Grown Right, in Your Backyard” operate a business that gets homeowners started growing their own vegetables (along with herbs, edible flowers and a few berry fruits) no matter what the challenges

may come from inexperience or a difficult site. Colin McCrate and Brad Halm’s advice is great for beginners, providing a lot of structure and many details, while including a teaching element with every entry. For example, by growing radishes, you’ll learn how to harvest at the right time for the best taste, and planting corn will teach you about wind pollination.

Most of the authors in this review are publishing their first books, but Binda Colebrook is on her fifth edition (the first was in 1977) of the classic “Winter Gardening in the Maritime Northwest,” and it’s still a must for any serious food gardener. The emphasis is on crops that will grow throughout the year—so no tomatoes or corn—but instead you’ll discover many options that are really better suited for our mild climate. There is much emphasis on ways to reduce the impact of freezes, heavy rains and cold winds, but Colebrook is great at encouraging experimentation, even if your property doesn’t have perfect conditions. An excellent reference section completes the book.

### **Gardening Where There’s No Room**

Here is another approach to dealing with limited space: grow up. “Vertical Vegetables and Fruit” is one of the very few books focused on this technique of food-growing. Some of the featured vegetables and fruits are naturals (beans or kiwi), but many are not. And while the thought of a high-flying watermelon may take a bit of getting used to, the author devotes several pages to slings and other support devices to make this possible. There are many unconventional ideas here to try, including hanging bags and living walls, along with some more familiar espaliers of fruit trees and strawberry pots. The emphasis is on innovation and experimentation—and having fun with your veggies (and fruit)!

Massingham Hart has re-engineered another of her older titles with “Dirt-Cheap Green Thumb.” This is essentially a general gardening book (including ornamentals) packaged in short, snappy bits of information and is perfect for the newer gardener who is anxious to get started

right now. The reader who is frugal will even be more pleased as there are lots of tips (400 according to the sub-title) for saving money while growing the garden of your dreams.

“Apartment Gardening” takes the whole concept of gardening in your available space a step farther—or I should say, smaller? Amy Pennington has considerable gardening experience in a setting with plentiful space. But now confined to a Seattle apartment, she isn’t about to stop. She distills her plant selections to a short but well-tested list. Some surprised me (zucchini on a balcony?), but overall I was impressed by the “what-works” approach. Large compost bins are out, but worm bins are still possible; she even advocates a beehive on the deck. But check with the neighbors first! (Hers nixed the idea.) Helpful recipes use only the plants listed and include making lip balms and lotions, and herbal teas.

## Lavender

Many of the urban-farming and vegetable gardening books include lavender as a staple plant, but “The Lavender Lover’s Handbook” provides much greater detail on the particular needs and benefits of these sub-shrubs. Sarah Berringer Bader is a lavender farmer in western Oregon and shares her expertise on selection, planting, maintaining, harvesting and—yes!—cooking with lavender. Best is her selection of cultivars for various purposes—such as best scent, richest color (in various hues), or best in a landscape. She even includes the best choices for using in her recipes. An encyclopedia of available varieties is quite thorough and enhanced by Janet Loughrey’s skilled photography.

## Garden Hardscape and Ornaments

Lorene Edwards Forkner has addressed a real need on the garden library bookshelf. While there are a handful of books (none of them by local authors) about using foraged materials for garden decoration, none adequately take the next step of using these materials to create useful, yet attractive, objects

that we all need in our gardens. “Handmade Garden Projects” has everything from fountains to potting benches, with clear instructions and lots of encouragement to build these yourself at a fraction of the cost of having someone else be your handyman or woman. Another plus: Many of the examples are from gardens created by well-known people in the Seattle area horticultural community. ∞

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