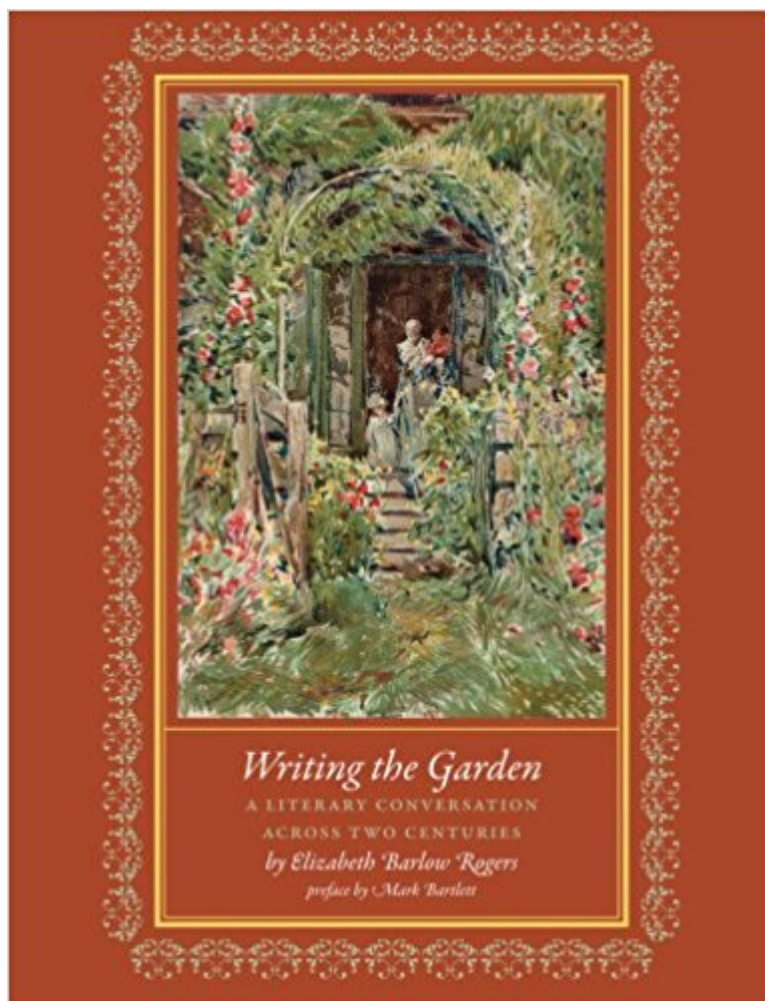


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# Writing The Garden: A Literary Conversation Across Two Centuries



## Synopsis

Gardening, more than most outdoor activities, has always attracted a cult of devotedly literate practitioners; people who like to dig, it would appear, also like to write. And many of them write exceedingly well. In this thoughtful, personal, and embracing consideration of garden writing, garden historian Elizabeth Barlow Rogers selects and discusses the best of these writers. She makes her case by picking delightful examples that span two centuries, arranging the writers by what they did and how they saw themselves: nurserymen, foragers, conversationalists, philosophers, humorists, etc. Her discussions and appreciations of these diverse personalities are enhanced and supported by informed appraisals of their talents, obsessions, and idiosyncrasies, and by extensive extracts from their writings. Rogers provides historical background, anecdotal material, and insight into how these garden writers worked. And wherever appropriate, she illustrates her story with images from their books, so you can not only read what they wrote but also see what they were describing. Since gardens are by their very nature ephemeral, these visual clues from the pages of their books, many reproduced in color, are as close as we will come to the originals. What makes *Writing the Garden* such a joy to read is that it is not simply a collection of extracts, but real discussions and examinations of the personalities who made their mark on how we design, how we plant, and how we think about what is for many one of life's lasting pleasures. Starting with "Women in the Garden" (Jane Loudon, Frances Garnet Wolseley, and Gertrude Jekyll) and concluding with "Philosophers in the Garden" (Henry David Thoreau, Michael Pollan, and Allen Lacy), this is a book that encompasses the full sweep of the best garden writing in the English language. *Writing the Garden* is co-published by the New York Society Library and the Foundation for Landscape Studies in association with David R. Godine, Publisher. Winner of a 2012 American Horticultural Society Book Award!

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Rogers is not only a garden writer and landscape preservationist but also a bibliophile. In putting together this artfully produced collection of knowledgeable yet "informal, engaging, and sometimes droll" British and American garden literature, Rogers drew on her own collection and that of the New York Society Library, reveling in the pleasures of rare books. Rogers does share colorful cuttings from the writings of 42 eloquent master gardeners past and present, but her mission is primarily biographical. In a book lushly illustrated with watercolors by Childe Hassam, plates from first editions, and photographs, Rogers vividly, wittily, and incisively profiles such narrating horticulture exemplars as Thomas Jefferson; Gertrude Jekyll, for whom "gardening was horticultural picture making"; William Robinson, who was "sometimes colorfully caustic"; nurseryman Andrew Jackson Downing; Celia Thaxter, a lighthouse-keeper's daughter and a poet as well as a gardener; the "urbanelly quirky, humorously serious" Katherine S. White; and Michael Pollan, who sees the garden as a middle ground, where nature and culture are both enriched. In all, a vital, delectable, and illuminating retrospective of an essential branch of letters.

--Donna Seaman

Published to accompany an exhibit at the New York Society Library, this anthology offers a delightful introduction to more than 40 classic garden writers. Rogers (Landscape Design: A Cultural and Architectural History), a legendary park preservationist best-known for her work championing the renovation of New York's Central Park, offers thoughtful selections from 200 years of garden writing. There are nurserymen, novelists, humorists, philosophers, statesmen, and journalists in this eclectic group. Some members of this pantheon, such as Thomas Jefferson and Edith Wharton, will be familiar to all readers. Others, such as Beverley Nichols, may be known only to true gardening cognoscenti. All are masters of this literary genre. Rogers provides an intimate and illuminating introduction to each writer, highlighting the special appeal, idiosyncratic perspectives, and delightful charms of each. She has also included photographs and drawings from their original works. This is an anthology that will pique any garden lover's interest in further reading.

--Publishers Weekly

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sometimes droll" British and American garden literature, Rogers drew on her own collection and that of the New York Society Library, reveling in the pleasures of rare books. Rogers does share colorful cuttings from the writings of 42 eloquent master gardeners past and present, but her mission is primarily biographical. In a book lushly illustrated with watercolors by Childe Hassam, plates from first editions, and photographs, Rogers vividly, wittily, and incisively profiles such narrating horticulture exemplars as Thomas Jefferson; Gertrude Jekyll, for whom "gardening was horticultural picture making

Reading this book is like going to a garden party where you can meet up with garden writers and essayists across two centuries of garden writing. The author's conversational style draws you in and provides the context of when the garden writer was writing and who else was writing about gardening at the same time. I can only imagine what a daunting task it was to choose who to include in this book. There are many favorite writers "at the party" including Gertrude Jekyll, Celia Thaxter, Thomas Jefferson, William Robinson, Elizabeth Lawrence, Penelope Hobhouse and some new writers, too. You'll leave this literary garden party wanting to read more by these garden writers and many others. It's a "must attend" party for any avid gardener.

I wish the type was larger in this book so that I could enjoy reading it for longer periods. Referring to the hardcover version, I found my eyes getting tired really quickly concentrating on trying to read the small print in this book.

No less an authority that the mighty Cicero opined: "If you have a garden and a library, you have everything you need." And how true that is, especially if that library contains at least a few really good gardening books. But where to begin? In my own case, I blundered around quite a lot until I found some excellent books in the gardening space. These inevitably recommended others, equally good, and I was handed along companionably from one extremely good writer to another. I was lucky, and despite the carelessness and randomness of my approach, I managed eventually to stumble across many of the great classics of garden writing. But now it is much easier. Elizabeth Barlow Rogers was the main founder of the Central Park Conservancy in New York City; she is also the founder and president of the Foundation for Landscape Studies and the editor of the journal *Site/Lines*. She has written numerous books in the horticultural space and is a tremendous bibliophile, with a specialty taste for the horticultural genre. She is, in short, a formidable authority in her field and at the height of her powers. And now she has produced this volume, subtitled "A

Literary Conversation across Two Centuries", which has rightly won the prestigious American Horticultural Society Book Award. It fluently but never frivolously discusses the garden writing of more than three dozen great writers, sampling their work and presenting it in a superbly enlightening context. The book is divided into twelve sections beginning with "Women in the Garden" and "Warriors in the garden" and going on through ten other categories, including "Rhapsodists", "Humorists" and "Philosophers". Many old friends and classic authorities are included, such as Russell Page, Penelope Hobhouse, Rosemary Verey, Sir Roy Strong and Beverley Nichols. But many authorities are also cited that I had not read and am now eager to look deeply into. The books that are included are somewhat over-weighted with older authorities, as you would expect of a serious bibliophile, and of a book that essentially grew out of an exhibition at the New York Society Library, New York's oldest library (founded in 1754) and one with which the author has long been associated. But more contemporary voices are also heard here and on the whole this is a balanced and very well curated collection of some of the world's finest garden writing. With a gracious and experienced docent like this, even the beginning garden reader need not fear getting lost, and this book is a great way either to begin or to concentrate a love for great garden writing.

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