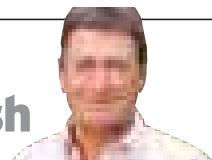




Dream Gardens With Alan Titchmarsh



Leaf through some classic green tomes

WHEN the year's work has been done and you need a jolly good read to while away the long winter nights, the gardening classics are guaranteed to enthuse, inspire and entertain. And they make great Christmas gifts.

Most of the old faves were written years ago but many are still reprinted regularly and secondhand copies turn up in bookshops or on the internet (try www.abebooks.com).

Plant hunters' stories make riveting reads – think travellers' tales sprinkled with added greenery. Even if you don't grow the rhododendrons and massive tree species being collected by the likes of Robert Fortune, Ernest Wilson and Frank Kingdon Ward a century or so ago, you will enjoy sharing their travels page-by-page from the comfort of your fireside.

Awesome journeys with primitive (if any) transport, dodgy natives and dangerous wildlife were all in a day's work

for our intrepid heroes, just to satisfy the demand for new garden plants. It makes you glad of today's garden centres.

Some classic authors toured the world's great gardens in style, taking something of a horticultural Grand Tour. That's the aspect I find most fascinating about Russell Page's *The Education Of A Gardener*. One of our top landscape designers in the Fifties, he travelled the world looking at shining examples that have influenced gardens ever since. His conversational thoughts and observations are just as enjoyable – not to mention valid – today.

Down-to-earth authors such as EA Bowles, Mr Middleton

and Gertrude Jekyll are also a real joy – they wrote with such feeling about their gardens or, in the case of Miss Jekyll, those of her clients. Any of their books are wonderful winter gardening reads, giving a great insight into the minds of the

authors, and you will pick up lots of useful tips.

And if you've ever wondered what it really felt like to be a gardener "in service" during the days of grand country houses and gardens, look for a copy of Geoffrey Eley's *And Here Is Mr Streeter*.

It's the biography of Fred Streeter, the head gardener at Petworth Park in West Sussex who followed Mr Middleton as *the* radio gardener between the wars and was a well-known gardening personality for years afterwards. It brings to life the

time when apprentices learnt the job over many years from the bottom up, and every little task was given the most minute attention to detail.

Imagine tying in fan-trained peach trees to wires on a greenhouse wall today, using raffia every six inches – it beggars belief.

BUT when it comes to more contemporary times, the modern classic authors – for me – must be Christopher Lloyd and Beth Chatto. Both are real experts who write from personal experience but in a delightfully personal, conversational style – and, in Christopher Lloyd's case, with flashes of "attitude".

If you want one of each, I suggest Lloyd's *The Well Tempered Garden* and Chatto's *Dear Friend And Gardener*, a series of letters on gardening and life between her and Lloyd, her long-time gardening friend.

Once you start rummaging, you will turn up lots more intriguing titles.

Gardening bookshelves are a goldmine, so start browsing – you will be "lost" for hours.

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INSPIRING: Beth Chatto's gardens at Elmstead Market, Essex – her books are also a delight