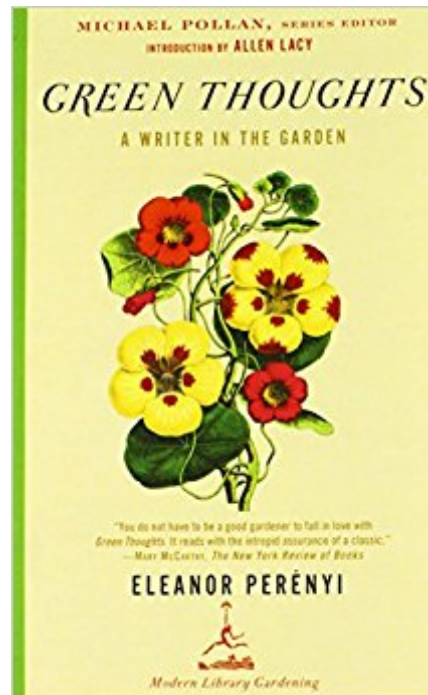




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# **Green Thoughts: A Writer In The Garden (Modern Library Gardening)**



## Synopsis

A classic in the literature of the garden, *Green Thoughts* is a beautifully written and highly original collection of seventy-two essays, alphabetically arranged, on topics ranging from "Annuals" and "Artichokes" to "Weeds" and "Wildflowers." An amateur gardener for over thirty years, Eleanor Perenyi draws upon her wide-ranging knowledge of gardening lore to create a delightful, witty blend of how-to advice, informed opinion, historical insight, and philosophical musing. There are entries in praise of earthworms and in protest of rock gardens, a treatise on the sexual politics of tending plants, and a paean to the salubrious effect of gardening (see "Longevity"). Twenty years after its initial publication, *Green Thoughts* remains as much a joy to read as ever. This Modern Library edition is published with a new Introduction by Allen Lacy, former gardening columnist for *The Wall Street Journal* and *The New York Times* and the author of numerous gardening books.

## Book Information

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Gardening & Landscape Design > Reference

## Customer Reviews

Modern Library expands its scope into gardening with these two titles. Published in 1981, Perenyi's text offers a collection of essays on topics from annuals to wild flowers and everything in between. The practical information is laced with anecdotes and historical tidbits about gardens and gardeners. Reaching back to 1871, Warner's volume also offers helpful advice along with much humor and even drama as he uses plant life to draw lessons for daily living. A nice break from the

straightforward how-to books. Copyright 2001 Reed Business Information, Inc.

“You do not have to be a good gardener to fall in love with *Green Thoughts*. It reads with the intrepid assurance of a classic.”  
• Mary McCarthy, *The New York Review of Books*  
“Unlike any other gardening book I know, with its Old World charm, its down-to-earth practicality, its whimsy and sophistication.”  
• Brooke Astor, *The New York Times Book Review*  
“One of those dangerous reference works that you reach for at a moment of horticultural crisis or indecision only to find yourself an hour later browsing far beyond the page where you began.”  
• The New Yorker

THE BOOK IS ABOUT MORE THAN GARDENS: Readers of "*Green Thoughts: A Writer in the Garden*" get a three-fer reward: a romp through fields of reading, eating, and planting. There are 72 essays in this 1981 book, some as short as one line (*Mazes*) and most considerably longer including almost a novella on herbs and 12 pages on *Women's Place*. Each essay has thoughts related to plants & gardens but can veer into quotes from the world's literature which author Eleanor Perenyi assumes her readers know, care about, and which she at times puts straight. See for example her five page essay on *Pruning* (p.190) which begins: "Never before or afterward did a gardening style evoke so much attention, generate so much literary heat, as one that overthrew the formal garden with its geometrically determined space and sculptured evergreens and replaced it with an imitation of wild nature.... The leaders were Pope, Addison, Horace Walpole, and their friends among the Whig aristocracy..." And she must have enjoyed cooking & eating, since perhaps a third of these green thoughts include recipes. Archival pictures (not included in this unillustrated edition) show a movie-star slender & elegant blonde. Her later years find her elegant in a more Julia Child way. P 181, e.g., has a fine recipe for potato salad and one for herbed fingerlings she grew herself that seem worth an addition to the waistline. The fingerlings were smuggled in but have since, Perenyi notes in a relieved way, been found in legal nurseries.

AMONG ITS FINE QUALITIES: This book is likely to be read years from now:--Perenyi had directed the proceedings at gardens larger (her husband's vast estates in Hungary) and smaller (her acres in Connecticut). She writes as knowledgeable amateur as do, among others, Vita Sackville-West & Henry Mitchell. Essays begin with artichokes, asparagus and ashes, go on to a long list of culinary herbs such as borage, lavender, and tarragon, continue through toads, tomatoes and tree-houses and conclude with women & agriculture through the ages. The essays are arranged alphabetically, a refreshing change from the gardener's year organization.--What she has to say may be superseded over the

years with new cultivars and new techniques but is likely to stand oak firm on topics such as mulch, mauve, and pesticides. However, this is not a comprehensive, how-to book or an in-depth source on matters such as roses or ranunculus. There are other books for that.--Perenyi was the editor of magazines such as *Mademoiselle* and *Harper's Bazaar*, a regular contributor to *The Atlantic Monthly*, the author of a prize-winning biography of Frans Liszt, and of a memoir of her life with her husband in Europe. She was a writer first and foremost, and her skills shine in "Green Thoughts," in which there seems to be nary a clunky sentence.--Nor a dull sentence. Perenyi held strong opinions on every topic about which she wrote here. She disdained, for example, seed tapes and people who used them; her admiration for dahlias was almost unbounded; and she gave a go-out-and-win-the-game talk on failures. Her observations were ahead of her time in matters such as organic gardening, her advice makes sense, and her authoritative voice seems like instructions to Adam & Eve. Here she is on Makielski Berry Farm, then located in Ypsilanti: "This little company has a list, not a catalog, and wouldn't be worth mentioning except that they carry the only decent gooseberry I have been able to discover in America. The name is Poorman and while not comparable to the English fruit, it is far better than the dreary and ubiquitous Pixwell." (p 275)--The book includes a ten page small print index that looks professionally done, a section on where to order plants and seeds that while it may be out of date, still makes for more good reading, and introductory material by series editor Michael Pollan and garden writer Allen Lacy. Perenyi is among the few writers who can make these popular authors seem serviceable rather than scintillating. ANY READER ALERTS? This book helped inspire a new generation of gardeners. However, its pleasures may be best enjoyed in small portions. Strong views can seem fresh. A lot of them at once can feel ill-tempered. HIGHLY RECOMMENDED: At used book prices, as low as a penny, "A Green Thought" can be bought in quantities for the reader's own pleasure and for sowing with a generous hand among friends. A new copy is still a fine value & a sumptuous treat, perhaps given with a quality dibble & a package of Johnny's seeds.

If you haven't discovered Eleanor Perenyi, you are in for a delight. She writes beautifully, which is interesting in itself as the lady didn't even graduate from high school. She married a titled Hungarian right before WWII, made it back to the US and settled in New England where she took up gardening. is she opinionated? Of course but show me a good gardener who isn't opinionated. I highly recommend this book. It's good winter reading when we don't get out into the garden as much as we'd like to.

I loved this! It is my second copy, as the one I loaned has never come back to me. The writing is lovely, the information is useful, and I dream at night of vast European gardens, numerous topiaries, a boxwood maze, gardens of perennials blooming in all four seasons--all in my backyard. A lovely companion book for gardeners.

Ms. Perenyi is a writer who gardens, not the other way round. So first and foremost this is exceptional writing. Like watching Julia Child, you don't have to do what she writes about to enjoy reading about it. There is a wealth of knowledge, generalities and minutiae, all of interest, that she passes through. The tone is aristocratic-bohemian. It feels sometimes as though one were walking with her near sunset, just before supper, whiskies in hand. One can hardly imagine a more pleasureable gardening book.

A neighbor gave me this book along with my 'starter set' of perennials from her own garden when I moved into my first house 30 years ago. Ms. Perenyi has beautifully expressed her ideas on everything from compost to specific plants based on her own garden in Connecticut. Her essays include strong opinions presented in the manner of a more civilized time. I now have it on my night stand and my kindle, available for whenever I feel the need to decompress.

Eleanor was my editor at Mademoiselle. I can hear her voice in every chapter. Though I am not an avid gardener by a long shot, I enjoy opening up the book periodically just to read her bon mots. For someone who loves gardening AND good anecdotal and informational writing, this book is a must.

This is a book best served in small helpings and since that's the way it is organized, it's good. Reading this book is like eating raspberries; it tastes wonderful and the seeds occasionally get in between the teeth, like "...it is the only garnish for oeufs en gelee...". Tarragon, that is. On the other hand, ref. tarragon, here is the word on why growing it from seed results in disappointment, to wit, the real stuff is propagated by "division, layering or cuttings". Herein, as well, is the lowdown on growing onions, scallions, and leeks. Who knew? I think that this book is a total treasure, seeds and all.

great

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