



Gardening: Philosophy for everyone Edited by Dan O'Brien

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A very interesting book about the philosophy behind gardens and gardening. Not least because of the different ideas in each essay and the juxtaposition of chapters. For example, the essay by Matthew Hunt on the morality of the use of plants by humankind, and a plea: "setting aside space for plants to grow unchecked can help take this from (Eden) a human oriented space into one that is the forefront of ethical reparations in the natural world" (i.e. leave us alone!) is followed by an essay by Helene Gummack on the cultivation of fruit and vegetables for the use of man and the manipulation of plants so to do. I like the essay which relates gardens to ritual practices and mythological believers in the Eastern Mediterranean, discussing the Hanging Garden of Babylon and its attribution to Sennacherib, making it for his wife. Plus discussion on the garden as a political tool, as a sign of status and prestige, particularly as plants need water and in the Mediterranean, having water in copious amounts was a sign of power.

From there we plunge into Brussels sprouts and Empire - an intriguing account of the way colonists tried to make a British garden in hot climates with sprouts and broad beans - again, a lot of water, with a nice phrase about the ex-pats "putting down roots". Michael Moss writes about the virtues of gardening; there is a piece about Cockney Plots; Elizabeth A. Scott writes about health in the outdoors as well as food provision. Dumbarton Oaks is used as an example of the manipulation of forms; water, foliage, pebbles to create idyllic settings with sculpture. (Quite an odd choice I thought, but the writer obviously loves this garden). Mara Miller has an essay on time and temporality, while she is herself quoted in an essay by Isamy Barwell and John Power "a (garden) is any purposeful arrangements of natural objects...with exposure to the sky.. in a form not fully fortified by purely practical considerations such as convenience"

I also liked the chapter linking gardens to music, with actual musical quotations, explaining the rhythms and harmony in terms of crochets and quavers. bars and accents. the final essay by the editor Dan O'Brien is about gardening as therapy.

A good mix of topics, ideas and arguments - a very good and meaty read.