

The National Trust
**SCHOOL OF
GARDENING**

A treasure chest of gardening
advice and inspiration



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advice and inspiration



REBECCA BEVAN

Illustrations by Madeleine Smith

For my mother, who inspired my love of gardening

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CONTENTS

6 Introduction	172 CHAPTER 9 Fruit & Vegetables
12 CHAPTER 1 Creating a Garden	196 CHAPTER 10 Growing Under Glass
32 CHAPTER 2 Flower Borders	218 CHAPTER 11 Cut Flowers
54 CHAPTER 3 Roses	238 CHAPTER 12 Gardening Sustainably
74 CHAPTER 4 Lawns & Meadows	260 Further Reading
96 CHAPTER 5 Pots & Bedding Plants	262 Places to Visit
114 CHAPTER 6 Climbers	264 Index
134 CHAPTER 7 Shrubs & Trees	271 Picture Credits
152 CHAPTER 8 Topiary & Hedges	272 Acknowledgements



INTRODUCTION

The National Trust employs over 500 gardeners who have an extraordinary wealth of expertise. The places they care for vary enormously, from the sweet cottage gardens that once belonged to Beatrix Potter and Thomas Hardy to the huge terraces of Powis Castle and Cliveden. Collectively these gardens span some 400 years of horticultural history, containing formal parterres, water gardens, rose gardens, glasshouses, walled gardens, orchards, meadows and exquisite flower borders. Some are internationally famous and have become a mecca for gardening enthusiasts, while others remain relatively undiscovered.

While National Trust gardeners are at work, they are frequently asked questions by visitors. Some people are keen to hear the stories of the gardens, but many more want to know the names of the plants and how they are cared for. Clearly, even the grandest gardens have much to teach us about our own. Their lawns, borders and kitchen gardens may be a lot larger than ours, but the maintenance techniques are similar, and they contain wonderful plant combinations to recreate, or interesting varieties to grow at home. Garden visiting can also give us inspiration about what makes a garden sing – be it generous planting, winding paths, a welcoming bench in a sunny corner, or the way colour schemes change through the seasons.

Written for gardeners of all kinds – whether keen novices or experienced enthusiasts – this book shares the wisdom of National Trust experts on everything that’s relevant to domestic gardens. It is intended to give you the inspiration and confidence to make the most of your garden, while not overwhelming you with rigid rules or unnecessary technical detail. It starts with a chapter on garden-making, be that starting from scratch or simply working out which plants and materials are best in

◀ Hidcote in Gloucestershire, one of the finest gardens in the world, is cared for by the National Trust.



- ◀ A gardener chats to visitors in the Dutch Garden at Ascott in Buckinghamshire.
- ▶ Alfriston Clergy House in Sussex, the first property cared for by the National Trust and one of its smallest gardens.
- ▶ A painted lady butterfly on *Dahlia merckii*.



an existing one. Next is flower borders – a subject close to most gardeners’ hearts – with detailed advice on how to choose and combine perennials for great effect. Roses, climbers, shrubs and trees, lawns and meadows, topiary and hedges, fruit and vegetables, cut flowers and greenhouse cultivation all have their own chapters, filled with simple, up-to-date advice on plant selection, maintenance, pruning and training.

Each chapter begins with a brief introduction to the history and cultural significance of our great British gardening traditions. Did you know that wisteria has been cultivated in Asia for over 2,000 years, or that bedding was fashionable long before herbaceous perennials? This is followed by a case study from a National Trust garden where the chapter topic is demonstrated exceptionally well. The Courts Garden in Wiltshire is the perfect place to show the value of topiary and hedges for giving structure and character to a garden, while at Tintinhull in Somerset the container displays are exemplary. Each case study is accompanied by tips from National Trust Head Gardeners, such as which perennials provide the succession of colour in the borders at Packwood House or which cut flowers are best for drying. Finally, each chapter contains several pages of practical advice to help you make this aspect of gardening, or group of plants, work well for you at home. These include concise step-by-step instructions for growing dahlias, taking cuttings, making a wildlife pond, laying a lawn and much more, alongside clear diagrams. Special care has been taken to make pruning instructions as straightforward as possible, with overarching

principles explained to help you to achieve success at home.

National Trust gardeners have long known that their gardens provide valuable habitats for wildlife. Now we know that small domestic gardens play an increasingly important role in boosting biodiversity too. To help gardeners embrace their environmental responsibility, this book offers detailed advice on the species found in our gardens and their needs. Sustainable gardening is also about improving soil health and reducing our dependence on resources such as peat and water. Nunnington in Yorkshire provides an inspiring backdrop for advice on such things, with tips about composting, avoiding slug pellets and even making your own plant labels.

Today we are also increasingly aware of the therapeutic benefits gardening brings us: fresh air, exercise, a shared hobby, a connection to the seasons and the natural world, and a constant source of joy and hope. Never have there been more reasons to dedicate time to gardening. Whether you have been growing for years or are just becoming interested; whether you are creating a new garden, maintaining an established one or renovating an old one, this book has a wealth of information to inspire and guide you. Beautifully illustrated with photographs and original drawings, I hope you will find it an enjoyable read as well as an invaluable reference.



‘The most noteworthy thing
about gardeners is that they are
always optimistic, always enterprising,
and never satisfied. They always look
forward to doing something better
than they have ever done before.’

VITA SACKVILLE-WEST