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We Made A Garden (Modern Library Gardening)



Synopsis

First published in Britain in 1956 and never before available in America, *We Made a Garden* is the classic story of a unique and enduring English country garden. One of Britain's most esteemed gardening writers recounts how she and her husband set about creating an exemplary cottage garden from unpromising beginnings on the site of the former farmyard and rubbish heap that surround their newly purchased home in the countryside of Somerset, England. Each imbued with a strong set of horticultural opinions and passions, Mr. and Mrs. Fish negotiate the terrain of their garden, by turns separately and together, often with humorous collisions. From the secret to cultivating the smoothest lawn to the art of lifting and replanting tulip bulbs to the landscaping possibilities of evergreens, the diverse elements of successful gardening—and delightful writing—are bound together by Mr. and Mrs. Fish's aspiration to cultivate that most precious and slow-growing quality—the fundamental character of a good garden.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

Just in time for the 40th anniversary of its original publication, Margery Fish's classic gardening memoir has been published in the United States for the first time. Fish and her husband Walter, a former editor of the *Daily Mail*, bought a dilapidated house and two acres of limey clay in Somerset in 1937, fearing the onset of war. For the next two decades, they cultivated, pruned, and watered, with Walter providing the direction and the sense of order and Margery the flowers, the unstructured

flora, and the wry observations. As in all of the best gardening books, Fish's memoir leavens technical information on gardening with memory and reflection. The book is above all the story of a marriage within the story of a landscape. Walter's lectures on the importance of structure, the distant war, the hardships of postwar England, come through slightly muted, like the outlines of buildings seen through dense foliage. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

“Crammed with good advice. . . . I defy any amateur gardener not to find pleasure, encouragement, and profit from *We Made a Garden*.”

“Gardening is like everything else in life, you get out of it as much as you put in. No one can make a garden by buying a few packets of seeds or doing an afternoon’s weeding. You must love it, and then your love will be repaid a thousandfold, as every gardener knows.”

•Margery Fish

Aside from being the history of the development of a wonderful garden I found this book to be a disturbing memoir of a controlling husband and an unquestioned emotionally abusive marriage in a sexist era where the woman gained power by subterfuge. Walter deadheads roses, carelessly ignoring the trail of fallen blooms leaving Margery to pick them up like a servant. Walter cuts down her long awaited budding new flowers with a scythe without consulting her and she thinks he is teaching her a important lesson about not experimenting with new plants. In spring Walter plants high growing pole climbing roses in a garden bed that Margery spent a cold, wet winter preparing alone for her favorite low growing plants. Walter "allows" her one clematis of her choosing and buys five of the color he wants to decorate the famous front door with their blue blooms. He likes neat walk ways and she likes plants trailing over the edges which she plants after his death. In one scene they are putting in a paved walkway and she asks the workman for holes to be left for the small sprawling plants she loves. Walter becomes furious and deems her greedy when she asks for "too many" and her holes are filled in with concrete. The sad thing is that she believes that she is greedy and that Walter is right. I know this book is from another time, but reading it gave me a stomach ache at Margery's acceptance of her domination. She is a horticulturist of high intellect and personal opinions living in a sexist world who found insidious ways to get her way. She constantly defers to Walter, rationalizing that since he is the more experienced gardener, he must be right, but she orders new plants in secret and fears his noticing their arrival at the door. Walter purchases gaudy dinner plate dahlias that she hates, leaving her the work of meticulously planting, watering,

digging up, cleaning and storing them. Margery takes her revenge, eventually letting all but a few die during their over wintering rest in the guest room. My husband thought the book was hysterical. I first read it aloud to him as a joke but the more I read the more I got upset. Margery and Walter disagree on hydrangea colors, she like pinks, he likes blues, so they buy all blues until he dies when she replaces them all with pink. I guess she did finally get her way.

Quite good, though I did not get as much gardening advice as amusement on her relationship with her late husband. A classic that I am late coming to, as a result of a recommendation on Slate.

There are not picture at all, so when she talk about a plant, there is no way what the plant look like.

an interesting story about the making of a garden by a pretty famous lady. I am enjoying reading this book.

Apart from its value as a classic of garden literature this book is simply a most charming read. I delighted in the characters portrayed as the garden developed.

Kind of tedious. Not worth the time.

WE MADE A GARDEN is a lovely little book by Margery Fish, an "elderly" English lady who with her husband (he who must be obeyed or cleverly deceived it seems) moved to a country manor and converted the mostly lawn areas into gardens of shrubs, flowers, and herbs. First published in the U.K. in the 1950s, the book has been republished as part of the 'Modern Library Garden Series' edited by Michael Pollan. Fish's little book will be considered a gem by experienced gardeners who can picture the plants she names in the mind's eye, identify with her triumphs and failures, and appreciate a useful clues from an obviously seasoned hand. Garden veterans will also identify with the greedy gardener who never has enough space, the stubborn gardener who plants *Nepeta* despite it's runaway habits, the recalcitrant gardener who hides the verboten brilliant orange *Lychnis chalcedonica* at the back of the beds, and the disobedient gardener who leaves many openings in the cemented walkway hubby designed to thwart weeds. The book may appear a bit dense to the new gardener as it describes activities such as composing flower beds, creating walkways, and engineering rock gardens with inferior rocks, with no illustrations, other than a few black and white photos-one of Mrs Fish on bended knee at work in her rock garden. However, all is not lost.

Determined gardeners unfamiliar with the various plants Mrs Fish names can refer to a nursery catalogue since 60-70 percent of the plants available in the 1950s can be found contemporary mail order publications

Margery Fish must have loved her Walter very, very much to have put up with him all those years. Her account of the garden they made despite each other is one of the great triumphs of the "garden memoir" genre, and vastly more interesting than most such works. The book is haunted by the presence of Walter, and his likes and dislikes, and right ways and wrong ways to do anything. You can't help but feel Mrs Fish must have breathed the world's biggest sigh of relief at his passing, since it finally allowed her to get on with her gardening. Here's a sample: Walter would smother her seedlings by putting too much manure around HIS roses, he decorated the outbuildings with bought mounted animal trophy heads (until they rotted), and he would stand guard over his wife while she planted dahlias to ensure she did so 'correctly.' Not to be missed! (And for others in the just-as-absorbing-when-not-about-the-garden books, you must turn to Beverley Nichols and any of his brilliantly charming works about house or garden). Note: a 3 star ranking from me is actually pretty good; I reserve 4 stars for tremendously good works, and 5 only for the rare few that are or ought to be classic; unfortunately most books published are 2 or less.

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