



Foundational Garden Books: The Books I Use the Most

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For the beginning gardener, having ready access to good foundational gardening books can be immensely helpful. I've been gardening now for seven years and still consider myself a beginner. I am an artist, too, and in art there is a famous aphorism that says, *ars longa, vita brevis* (art is long, life is short). For me, this bit of wisdom applies to gardening as well as art; for it takes a very long time to learn the ins and outs of gardening. One must be very kind to oneself and unflustered by incomprehensible failures.

There are a few books I keep close-by at all times; I usually check one, if not all of them, before I do anything I'm not sure of. For, where one book offers only minimal information, another provides an important insight, an illuminating practical suggestion, or a way of doing something that is more consistent with my personal approach to gardening.

In sum, these are the books I lean on over and over, year after year. These are the books that have helped me the most.

1. **Four-Season Harvest ? Eliot Coleman**

First published in 1992, the expanded and revised edition (1999) of this book is a classic and has done more for my gardening than any other book.

Eliot Coleman is a treasure. He is a person of extraordinary intelligence and openhandedness. Moreover, Coleman is observant, inquisitive, and creative, three of the most important qualities of any gardener—or any human being, for that matter. He is also a very good writer; he doesn't just 'lay down tracks' of information, he writes with style and humanity. He takes you into the heart of gardening in a way that will change how you relate to the process and feeling for what you do. For one thing, you will become more relaxed and less troubled when there is trouble, and there will be trouble.

He not only shows you how to extend your garden season to include all four seasons using cold frames, greenhouses, and high tunnels, but also sowing, transplanting, trellising, crop rotation, green manures, root cellars, and how to make some indispensable garden tools. The book also includes a list of vegetables and how to plant and care for them. I have learned more from this book than any other.

2. **The New Seed-Starters Handbook ? Nancy Bubel**

This is another classic. It includes the latest research on seed starting, the best growing media, solutions to seed-starting problems, and a source list for seeds and hard-to find gardening supplies. Like Coleman, Bubel includes a list of vegetables, but her list is much more comprehensive. She includes herbs, flowers, trees, and shrubs. I grow almost everything from seed so this is a very important book to me.

3. **Great Garden Companions ? Sally Jean Cunningham**

This book is really growing on me. I'm beginning to lean on it more and more. I love it. In this well written book, Sally shows how to keep pests and diseases at bay with her unique companion-gardening system. By planting special combinations of vegetables, flowers, and herbs, she shows how you can minimize pest and disease problems and create a high-yielding, beautiful garden. I use companion planting and have very little problem with garden pests or diseases. I use no pesticides.

4. The Gardener's A-Z Guide to Growing Organic Food ? Tanya Denckla

Here is another classic gardening book. In it you will find 765 varieties of vegetables, herbs, fruits, and nuts, along with formulas and techniques that control 201 pests and diseases organically. For each vegetable, Denckla includes temperature, soil and water needs, support structures, pests, diseases, allies, companions, incompatibles, harvest notes, and first and last seed-starting dates. It is succinct and to the point. A very valuable, no-nonsense reference.

5. Your Organic Garden ? Jeff Cox

This book is the "Official Companion" to the PBS TV series and is full of practical tips on growing healthy plants, labor-saving techniques, and step-by-step directions. It is really well done and features complete information on composting and organic soil care, seed-starting, plant-by-plant growing guides for vegetables and fruits, troubleshooting tips and organic controls for all major pests and diseases, information on growing healthy perennials, easy-to-use low-maintenance techniques, and guidelines for choosing the right plants. Highly recommended.

6. Organic Gardening ? Geoff Hamilton

I use this book less often than the others but there is no good reason for this. It's a great book and beautifully illustrated. One of Britain's best-loved gardeners, Geoff Hamilton was renowned for his common-sense, practical approach to gardening. The author of many books on different aspects of gardening, he was host of Gardener's World on BBC2 for 17 years.

This book is very down-to-earth, practical, and well-illustrated with lots of pictures, diagrams, and step-by-step images. A great reference for almost any gardening question.

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