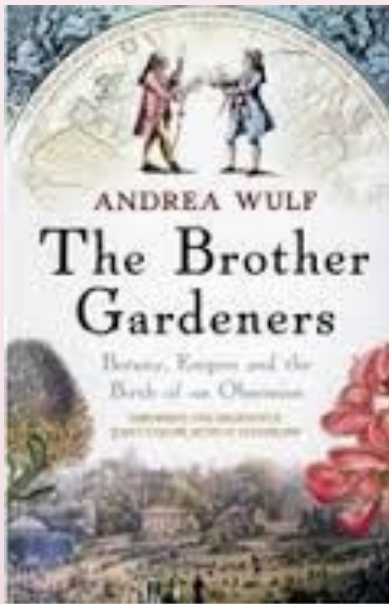


A Book Review

Kathleen A. Roberts , MGV 2011

The Brother Gardeners

Author: Andrea Wulf



When a friend and fellow garden enthusiast suggested I read this book, I readily accepted but had some reservations nonetheless. Did this have a textbook style and flavor? Happily, once opened, I traveled along with the expert guidance of Ms. Wulf to better understand the birth of England's obsession with gardening. I recognized that I had little appreciation for how England grew to be a country as dedicated and devoted to its garden spaces. And yet, there was a birth moment, so to speak, which Ms. Wulf carefully reconstructs for the reader. This is a book to relish as the story unfolds with a pacing that is near perfect. There is a cast of players stretching from the USA to the UK with the influence of Swedish botanist Carl Linne (also known as Linnaeus) playing a key role. The suspense builds with the sea voyage of the botanist-adventurer, Joseph Banks, and his colleague Daniel Solander. Together they explored the exotic flora of Tahiti and Australia on one of the most ambitious voyages for its time on Capt. Cook's Endeavour. Within the story are the timeless struggles of egos, competition, destiny, misunderstandings and conflicting agendas.

For any reader with a curiosity and appreciation for the natural world, this is a satisfying, well-researched book. It is a gift to be able to pull a reader into a fairly dense, information-heavy story and keep interest throughout. The author has accomplished this with a story-telling technique that is nothing less than charming.

What did you learn from reading this book

My appreciation for the semi-miraculous path of flora and fauna from the USA to the UK and the explosion of gardening passion that it brought was the greatest gain. I took my time with this book, and yet I could easily reread it several times to further cement the vast amount of information contained within. I now have a far greater appreciation for the actions and efforts in the 18th century that literally created the frenzy and passion we identify as "gardening" today.

Your evaluation of the worth of this book including both negative & positive comments

The biggest obstacle for some readers could be the concern that it will be simply too dense. That the story will plod along, filled with so much detail and history that it may resemble a course book rather than compelling nonfiction. The author grabs the reader with her prologue, exclaiming that her small garden plot was "the ordered result of pioneering work by an extraordinary and dedicated group of men who turned their fellow countrymen into a nation of gardeners. THIS IS THEIR STORY." Even the most scholarly Master Gardener can hardly resist an introduction that purports to explain the emergence of "the garden of the world," i.e., the UK.

Rather than a criticism, I have a suggestion that perhaps could have made the cast of characters somewhat easier to follow. Similar to a family tree, a simple diagram of the main characters, country of origin, relationship to either each other OR the greater subject of botany may have been very helpful.