

We Welcome You!

The Attentive Gardener is your invitation to walk the seasons with attentiveness and affection, to discover how love—for soil and seed, for beauty and nourishment, for land and worms, and for one another—gently orders the work of gardening and, in time, the art of living simply and well.

***The Attentive Gardener* is a gardening guidebook in plain English, written for novice and expert alike.** The author takes us on a thoughtful and engaging journey through the gardening year, from winter planning to spring planting, summer tending, and autumn harvest. Drawing on years of experience and training, the author guides readers through the essentials of soil care, seed selection, and plant cultivation, while introducing the wider life of the garden—pollinators, toads, and of course, the worms!

Woven through it all is a deeper reflection on what it means to garden well. This is not simply a book of instruction, but an invitation to be an attentive gardener whether you have one pot on a patio or an acre in the countryside, and to recognize that the first and most necessary act in gardening is to bring love into the garden.

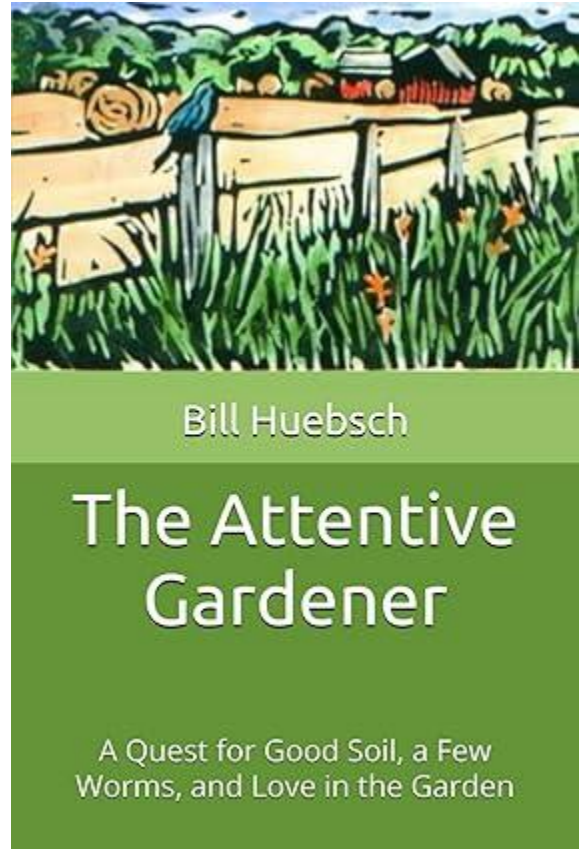
Illustrated by popular artist Mark Hakomaki with some fifty hand-tinted block prints, this book charms from beginning to end. It's a book you will read and re-read and then give a copy to every gardener you know!

Love in the Garden

If you wish to be a gardener, you must begin by bringing love into your garden. This is true no matter how large your space may be: two pots on a back patio, a narrow plot in a community garden or allotment, a windowsill in a city, a backyard in the suburbs, a cottage in England, or a few acres in the countryside.

The kitchen garden we tend is a Stuart-inspired set of seven parterres on that sunny north acre fenced into a space some 85 feet long and 65 feet wide. It's lovely soil on which cattle and poultry lived (and pooped) which helped its tilth grow rich.

It has become, over time, an important metaphor for our shared life. Gardening is never a commitment made for a single season. It asks for patience. It calls us to be attentive to one another. And it instills in us the willingness to stay when the work is demanding or uncertain. However one comes to the garden, it teaches that love—like soil—deepens through care and attention, given steadily and over time.



And beyond our own patch are the gardens of friends and neighbors. When a storm has passed through or one of life's unexpected demands calls them away from their watering and care, we step in. We jump into our pickup truck and appear at their gate. To garden is to care for one's own needs, and also to be attentive to neighbors and friends.

Love Comes First

Before the seed, before the spade is raised,
Bring love—as one brings oil to the flame.
Let it be first, like breath before the word,
a present force that we can scarcely name.

Love first the soil that you have come to till,
its ancient tilth a dark and fertile grace.
Love every leaf and stem entrusted there,
Each fragile life set gently in its place.

Love for the work—the efforts shared each day,
and love, of course, for those who labor near.
Then lift your thanks like incense as a prayer,
For with such love your joy shall e'er appear.

The Soil

Your work as an attentive gardener extends, of course, to the soil itself—with admiration for the essential work it performs, respect for its long origins, and a commitment to its future. It is easy to take soil for granted. After all, it's what the garden is mainly composed of. Learning what is occurring below the surface where an incredible community of tiny workers make growing possible—and being attentive to them—will greatly enhance your love for this work.

Mulch and other soil edibles. As part of our treatment of the soil, we must turn our attention to its diet. Soil wants to be fed so that it has what it needs to produce its gifts. How and when we do that is as important as planning and planting. And in this part of the book we'll consider whether to till or not and whether to test the soil or not. Without making it complex, we'll pass along the lessons learned from Herman and Milns about how to build, use, and rest the soil.

The Seed

Likewise, each seed carries within it an astonishing sense of self-direction—an inborn intelligence shaped by sunlight, soil, and seasons long before it reaches our hands. Encoded in that small packet is a memory of what it has been, a knowledge of how to grow, and a readiness to give us gifts of food and beauty if we are attentive to the remarkable inborn intelligence of each seed. They arrive bearing the long history of the plants that made them, generations adapting, enduring, offering themselves again and again to human hands.

The Plants

When we plant with love, dear readers, we acknowledge this lineage and enter into partnership rather than control, trusting that life, guided by its own ancient wisdom, knows how to unfold when welcomed with patience and respect. Hence, we learn to be attentive to the plants themselves, each “botanical being” entrusted to our care. No seed is insignificant, no seedling

anonymous. Each has a place, a rhythm, a calling toward light, and the gardener's love remembers them all, tending none casually and helping each achieve its destiny.

Photosynthesis and Water. As we learn the botany of gardening, one of the most astonishing realities is this: sunlight enters a plant through its leaves and, joined with water drawn—almost miraculously—upward against gravity, becomes green beans. Every single day.

It is easy to overlook this unseen alchemy, happening without fanfare in every corner of the garden. Yet it reminds us that what we harvest is not merely the result of our labor, but of forces working far beyond our understanding.

In much the same way, learning how to use water well in the garden—perhaps the most misunderstood aspect of tending what we plant—is as important as amending the soil or choosing a place in full sun. Water, after all, is the unseen partner in that daily transformation, carrying life upward and making possible everything the garden becomes.

A cutting garden requires good planning and frequent tending. Unlike borders of flowers and blooming shrubs meant simply to be admired in passing, these cutting beds are planted with the expectation that they will indeed be harvested early and often throughout the season. The flowers will be taken again and again and the garden must be ready to provide more. Planning here is an act of generosity made in advance.

Hence, to plan a cutting garden is to think ahead for beauty that will leave the garden and bless other rooms, other tables, other homes. It is a form of hospitality written into the soil—a promise that what is grown here is meant not only to be seen, but to be shared.

But of course, we also have flowers in other places, and not all are meant to be cut. They're in pots on patios and tucked into other corners of the property. They're along herbaceous borders, under shady areas, and growing along the meadow fenceline.

The Meadow & Grove

And around the edges of the garden, we learn to be attentive to the meadow and the trees that form the place where the garden is made. The elders among the trees are its wisdom keepers—and often the parents of many offspring, seeds scattered by the winds and the critters. The meadow is a sunny savannah of native plants that welcomes pollinators and provides habitat for creatures who might otherwise be tempted to the veg patch. Our attention extends to these lovely neighbors outside the garden.

At first, the idea of turning a portion of familiar turf lawn into native meadow can feel unusual, even slightly exotic—as though it belongs to a different kind of gardener. And yet, those who have gone down this path often discover it to be one of the most satisfying practices they undertake, good not only for the land but for the gardener's own sense of belonging to it.

Again, many people devoted to flowers or vegetables have given little thought to planting native, pollinator-friendly meadows alongside their beds and borders. The garden was tended carefully, while the surrounding ground remained largely unconsidered. In this book, we suggest widening that vision. We will return to these ideas and explore meadow-making as an essential

expression of gardening itself, an act of care that deepens the garden's life by extending it outward, into the wider landscape that sustains it.

Native plants also carry long memories. They have co-evolved with local insects, fungi, birds, and mammals over thousands of years, learning one another's rhythms and requirements. The chemistry of their leaves, the architecture of their stems and roots, and the precise timing of their flowering and seed-set are not accidents. These traits make native species uniquely capable of serving as host plants, food sources, and shelter for native herbivores, pollinators, and microbial communities. In ecological terms, they belong together.

Because of this tight coupling, even small changes in planting can yield outsized results. When we replaced a portion of lawn with an ecologically designed meadow—one that favors regional grasses and forbs—it led to rapid, measurable increases in insect abundance and diversity, followed quickly by birds and other wildlife. What had been a green lawn carpet of limited function became a layered community, rich in niches and seasonal interest.

Herbs

To grow herbs well is to learn their characters. Some thrive on neglect, others on careful timing; some insist on boundaries, others on freedom. Basil asks for regular visits, rosemary for patience, thyme for trust, and parsley for humility. Dill and cilantro want us to accept that they will be with us only briefly. In learning these dispositions, we also learn something of ourselves and of the delicate choreography between garden and kitchen. Herbs bridge those two worlds. They translate soil and sun into flavor, memory, and nourishment. A handful of their fragrant and tasty leaves can turn a dish that seems simple into one that feels complete.

Here, then, we will meet the herbs as individuals—where they prefer to grow, how they ask to be tended, when they offer their best. But we will also follow them indoors, to the cutting board and the stove, to the ordinary liturgy of meals prepared and shared. Herbs remind us that abundance does not always arrive in bushels. Sometimes it comes as a pinch, a sprig, or a light finishing touch—small, fragrant acts that bless the whole.

Vegetables

Great Abundance. July and August bring their own vegetable abundance. Harvesting becomes daily work—sharing, canning, freezing. Tomatoes and peppers begin to color, onions swell, and soon the first batch of garden multi-veg juice—including eight or ten fresh vegetables—is nearly within reach—*the kitchen garden in a glass*. Cabbages stack up, kohlrabi appears at the table almost daily, fennel arrives early, Roma tomatoes begin their journey toward drying. Garlic is pulled, new potatoes lifted, bunching onions and young leeks gathered. Beans, beans, beans.

Each vegetable carries its own history and temperament. Some are patient and slow, content to deepen their roots before showing much above ground. Others grow quickly, eager and generous, demanding timely harvest lest they pass their prime. Some need trellises and training while others prefer to sprawl. Learning to grow vegetables well is a practice in observation and respect—listening closely to what each plant requires and responding without force. The garden teaches us that abundance is rarely accidental; it is the fruit of rhythm, timing, and care.

In the kitchen, vegetables complete the circle begun in the soil. They arrive dusty, imperfect, alive with possibility, and are either eaten raw or are transformed by heat, water, and oil. Meals made

from the garden carry more than calories; they carry memory, effort, and gratitude. To prepare vegetables well is to honor the season that grew them and the hands that tended them. In following these plants from seed to harvest, we remember that feeding one another is among the most ordinary—and most sacred—acts of daily life.

Draw Near to Mystery

To connect with the earth, we learned, is to draw near to Mystery itself. Each seed carries a secret no one can explain—a whole future folded into something small and ordinary. Light pours down, leaves lift themselves toward it, and through the miracle of photosynthesis the sun is translated into food, breath, and beauty. What appears simple is endlessly astonishing, a daily sacrament enacted without applause, faithful in its repetition and fresh in its wonder.

Our Partners

The love we bring into the garden widens and deepens. It includes the people with whom we garden—partners who share the vision fully, helpers who come when they can, companions in the work and the waiting, even neighbors who will benefit from the bounty. Or possibly that patient friend with no garden who listens charitably as we wax on about this seedling or that variety or how much work is left to be done. All share in the love we find in the garden.

To share a garden with one's partner, however, is to share more than labor; it is to share a way of being together. Beneath the daily tasks lies an unspoken trust in what we are doing—in the remarkable miracle of seed, water, and light, and in the hope that rises each season no matter how many times it has risen before. We may not name this trust aloud, yet it is the basis of our work and lives.

A partner in the garden becomes a companion in all the work, even the difficult work: the lifting, weeding, and long days when weather or weariness test our resolve. Shared effort lightens the load, not because the work disappears, but because it is carried together. Laughter slips in where frustration might have settled; silence, too, finds its place, comfortable and companionable.

Over time, this shared tending creates a bond rooted as deeply as the plants themselves. It is a connection shaped by seasons, patience, and mutual care—stable, strong, and lasting. Like the garden, it is built not in grand gestures, but in repeated acts of attention. And like the garden, it bears fruit far beyond what was first imagined.

There is also this: companionable silence allows gratitude to surface without being summoned. When we cease striving, we begin to perceive gift. The orchard in blossom is no longer the result of pruning technique; it is sheer generosity. The meadow's hum is not something we engineered; it is a chorus into which we have been admitted.

You and your partner side by side after the day's work is done, need not speak of what was planted or what still needs mending. The land holds those conversations in its own memory. What passes between you instead is more intimate: shared breath, shared fatigue, shared wonder.