



From the Ground Up: The Story of a First Garden

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Amy Stewart had a simple dream. She wanted a garden.

When she and her husband finished graduate school, they headed west to Santa Cruz, California. With little money in their pockets, they found a modest seaside cottage with a small backyard. It wasn't much—a twelve-hundred-square-foot patch of land with a couple of fruit trees and a lot of dirt—but it was a good place to start.

From the Ground Up is Stewart's chronicle of the seedlings and weeds, cats and compost, worms and watering that transform a tiny plot of earth into a glorious garden. From planting the seeds her great-grandmother sends to battling snails, gophers, and aphids, Stewart takes us on a tour of her coastal garden and shares the lessons she's learned the hard way. In the process, she brings her California beach town to life—complete with harbor seals, monarch butterfly migrations, and an old-fashioned, seaside amusement park just down the street.

Delighting in triumphs and confessing to a multitude of gardening sins, Stewart dishes the dirt for both the novice and experienced gardener. With helpful tips in each chapter, *From the Ground Up* tells the story of a young woman's determination to create a garden in which the plants struggle to live up to the gardener's vision

From the Ground Up: The Story of a First Garden Details

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Laura says

What I loved:

- The author's weekly impulse-shopping for flowers without any sense of what would work in her garden (we might be twins)
- Her jumping-in-and-doing-it-before-researching-and-learning approach to gardening, resulting in lots of going back and fixing
- The passion for gardens that are a little wild, where the flowers don't stand rigidly in a row but ramble all around and invite the visitor to do the same
- Descriptions of the tourists, and being a local in everyone else's vacation
- Two cats!!!! (RIP to my own sweet Maya and Tigerlily)
- Finally, I loved the writing style, which is honest and natural but still thoughtful and polished

Quite simply I loved every bit of this book. Highly recommend!!

Maria Kemplin says

I'm a garden memoir fanatic and this fell very flat for me.

Joanna says

I didn't know until just now that this book is from the author of Flower Confidential. I read it some time ago and loved it. It's the story of a first time gardener building her first garden, and the conversational tone with which she describes the excitement and dismay that a first garden engenders makes me feel we have been friends forever. I really like this Amy Stewart! This is a great book for anyone who wants to garden. She is realistic about the challenges and joyous about the triumphs, as a good cottage gardener should be.

Hannah says

This is a really inspiring and honest account of a budding love affair with gardening.

Only qualm I had was with the cat stories. Personally I can't stand when gardeners start long narratives about their pets. It's boring and mostly irrelevant. I love animals and a little about their involvement in the garden

is ok but I don't get any enjoyment or useful information out of gardeners anthropomorphising their cats.

Otherwise, this is a great book!

Christie Purifoy says

A sweet and simple garden memoir. I enjoyed this but do think it's best suited for beginning gardeners.

Lindsey says

On of those books you read and think, I could write this! I could write better than this. How on earth did this get published?

I read garden books to learn from other gardeners. This book didn't teach me a thing.

Grace says

This was a really enjoyable and quick read. Many gardening books I've read are written by people who have been gardening for a long time and are fairly sure about what they're doing and have fixed opinions about the "right" way to do things. Though I'm not exactly new to gardening in a strict sense, since I am familiar with many techniques and knew I could grow things, this year for the first time I'm growing a few vegetables and gardening for wildlife instead of doing just a few pretty annuals in containers. This is why I loved Stewart's enthusiasm for gardening and love for learning and trying out for herself different ways of doing things. I can relate so much as I've become pretty obsessed with my garden as well. Stewart has a very easy way of writing and has a good sense of humor about her foray into gardening. I'll be keeping this one as she also has a lot of good tips I'll be referring back to.

Panayoti Kelaidis says

I have gradually been watching my gardening bookshelves make way for more and more compact, attractively bound, beautifully designed and charming books by Amy Stewart: how convenient that she writes about poisonous and "Wicked" plants when our culture is obsessed with Gothic gruesomeness and horror... Suddenly everyone is aware of the plight of honeybees and Monarchs, and PRESTO! Out comes "Wicked Bugs" with its wonderfully whimsical red cover and Victorian ornamentation to tell the other side of the story. Drinking has finally recovered from the stigma of Dean Martin-style excess, and Amy responds with "The Drunken Botanist" reminding us that Chlorophyll once again is the key to human happiness. Like a surfer, she rides the waves of timeliness--and why not? I sought out "Flower Confidential"--a wonderful documentation of the enormous economic shifts that have taken place with globalization and our little flower world--a dazzling piece of journalism. So I confess I'm hooked: I had to finally get around to her first book (A sort of "Portrait of the Artist as a young gardener"--a very modest, homey tome that fits comfortably in one's hand, and which tells the story (one we all have lived) of how she became obsessed with gardening. She reveals more than a little about her past, her truly wonderful partnership with her husband, and her

cultural and personal values. It would be so easy to take pot-shots at the two or three howlers I've found in each book (she's not a Ph.D. botanist after all). It would not be hard to dismiss these slight volumes, with are timed with such seeming ephemeral relevance. Except. Except that the prose flows ever so musically. The image that you eventually gain of this delicate California-Texas Valkyrie is so indelible that I give up! I admit that these books (so reasonably priced, so attractively packaged, so perfect to perch next to the bed in your guest room, or other more personal rooms) are perhaps nothing more and nothing less than our contemporary manifestation of the White Goddess. Amy is our contemporary voice of Mother Nature herself, in a wonderfully hip, up to date persona. Buy all her books, read and re-read them. She's a modern classic! (Says he, bending on his knee in obeisance).

Judy says

Why has it taken me so long to pick up a book about someone's experiences in a garden? This is the second one that I've read this year, and they've both been delightful. Early in the book, when Ms Stewart describes the location of her garden, she writes that her house (and therefore some of her garden) appears on many postcards. I intend to watch for cards that show her house when I attend the upcoming postcard show.

One part of her account that bothers me is her take on cats. If she truly likes the natural world, why does she let her cats run free? Yes, cats are predators, but they are not natural. They fit the definition of a weed. They survive in a wide variety of habitats and they wreck havoc on the native species. I could continue this into a full-fledged rant, but I will refrain.

I can understand Stewart's comment about the Butchart Gardens, "I longed for the diversity and disarray of the wild. I didn't feel any closer to nature in this showboat garden; instead, I felt like I had spent my afternoon strolling through a very sterile, well-landscaped theme park or shopping mall." Maybe that's why I enjoyed reading about her experiences. Her goal in gardens is somewhat like mine -- diverse and natural.

Moira Burke says

This book is therapeutic in a world of politics and climate change. Stewart's self-deprecating memoir is charming and I found myself imitating her novice-gardener actions, like going to the garden store to get compost and praying they only had one kind so I wouldn't be forced to display my ignorance of all things flora. This is a well-written illustration of a new gardener's life lessons and a reminder to appreciate beautiful outdoor spaces. Highly recommended to anyone with garden aspirations.

Karen Floyd says

Ah, the naivete of the inexperienced gardener! When Stewart created her first garden she thought all there was to it was to clear weeds and put some seeds and plants in the ground and magic would happen. Well, she did live in sunny California. How she learned otherwise, by painful experience, is what this book is about. Entertaining, informative, and funny, Stewart is a good story-teller who is always willing to share a joke on herself and expose her own foibles.

Julie Durnell says

I enjoyed this amusing tale of a first garden, while Punxsutawney Phil today is predicting 6 more weeks of winter it was nice to read of growing vegetables and flowers and herbs even if it was in California!

Theodora Goss says

I really loved this book. I love books about creating gardens anyway, but I loved Stewart's clear, precise prose style. It was a good reminder of what I really appreciate in books. I liked her way of thinking, her humor, her humility in the face of all the difficulties that creating a garden poses. I just bought another one of her books, because I want to see if I like it as much. But it seems to me that Stewart's voice is a good companion--reading this book was like listening to a good friend talk about her life, her hopes, her failures. It made me feel better about the world and the small things we do in it, which are the things that make it all worthwhile.

Barb Flory says

Marvelous book about her first garden.

Annette Reynolds says

Really enjoyed this little garden memoir. Brought back a lot of memories of all my first gardening attempts in different parts of the country (and world), only to learn that all those little tries were simply a warm-up for my own garden: the one I made (and continue to build on) in - what I consider - the first house I truly owned (and that truly owned me).

Ms. Stewart has a wonderful sense of humor, and a terrific eye for describing the absurdities that working in the sun and rain and soil brings to every true gardener (new, or not). But she just barely touches on the painful, heart-wrench that will come when I have to leave this (always) work-in-progress to someone else; someone else who will have to learn where the one special yellow columbine comes up (and has come up for the past almost 17 years); the one that's survived being pulled and broken off at the crown by various unseeing and uncaring so-called professional gardeners. (And there are so many more of those survivors in my garden.)

Leaving friends all over the United States (and the world) has been hard beyond belief over the past fifty-some years. But abandoning my garden - handing it over to someone who will have no idea what that rose I planted next to the garage door means to me, and meant to my mother... that's almost unfathomable pain.

I also know that very soon I'll need to begin my letter to the new caretaker of my 100 year old house and garden and hope that they'll care about it enough to see it through all four seasons before making any drastic changes. I pray they'll love the centurion cherry tree that's part of this garden's history as much as I do, crazy

big roots and all.

So, thanks Amy for this terrific little book. I wish it had been longer. I grew up in Monterey and went to UCSC for a while so felt right at home in her garden.
