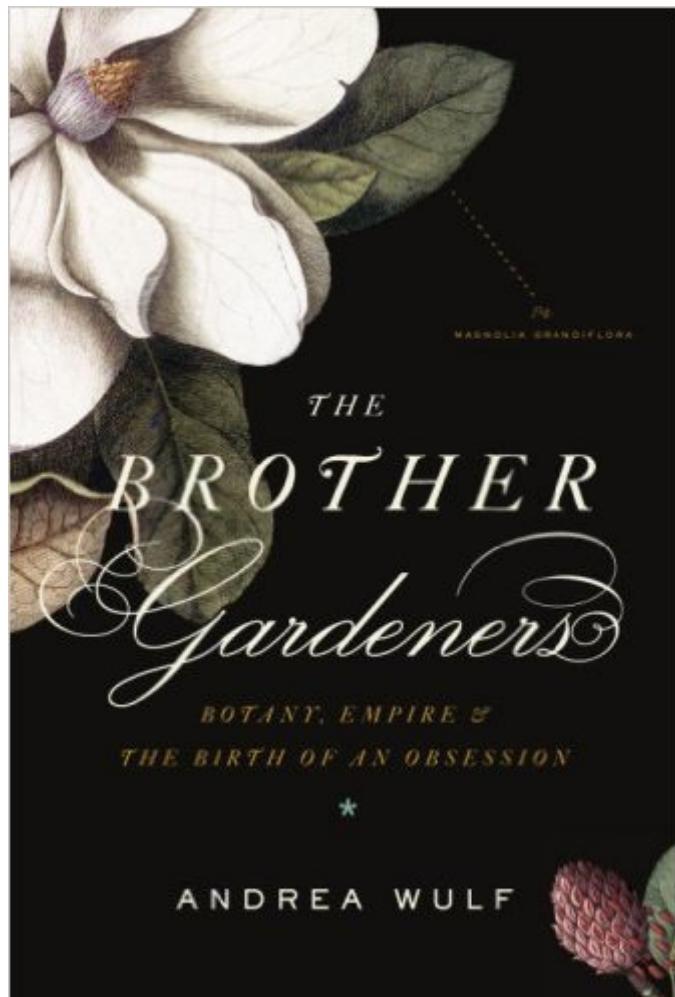


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The Brother Gardeners: Botany, Empire And The Birth Of An Obsession



Synopsis

This is the fascinating story of a small group of eighteenth-century naturalists who made Britain a nation of gardeners and the epicenter of horticultural and botanical expertise. It's the story of a garden revolution that began in America. In 1733, the American farmer John Bartram dispatched two boxes of plants and seeds from the American colonies, addressed to the London cloth merchant Peter Collinson. Most of these plants had never before been grown in British soil, but in time the magnificent and colorful American trees, evergreens, and shrubs would transform the English landscape and garden forever. During the next forty years, Collinson and a handful of botany enthusiasts cultivated hundreds of American species. The Brother Gardeners follows the lives of six of these men, whose shared passion for plants gave rise to the English love affair with gardens. In addition to Collinson and Bartram, who forged an extraordinary friendship, here are Philip Miller, author of the best-selling Gardeners Dictionary; the Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus, whose standardized nomenclature helped bring botany to the middle classes; and Joseph Banks and Daniel Solander, who explored the strange flora of Brazil, Tahiti, New Zealand, and Australia on the greatest voyage of discovery of their time, aboard Captain Cook's Endeavour. From the exotic blooms in Botany Bay to the royal gardens at Kew, from the streets of London to the vistas of the Appalachian Mountains, The Brother Gardeners paints a vivid portrait of an emerging world of knowledge and of gardening as we know it today. It is a delightful and beautifully told narrative history.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The Brother Gardeners: Botany, Empire and the Birth of an Obsession One of the best written and organized books that I have read in quite some years. What could be a pretty esoteric topic becomes a wonderfully interesting and germane story. To some extent it reminds me of Kurlansky's Cod although this work is even better written. The book comes alive because the author captures so well the personalities of the people involved. Bartram and Collinson are so human. And their problems in keeping up a relationship at such a distance is beautifully and sympathetically portrayed. Linnaeus is wonderfully and humanly portrayed. What a genius, what a jerk! Reminds me to some extent of Richard Wagner, one of my favorite composers, but one of the most egotistical and sometimes downright nasty people that one is likely to meet. The same sort of self-aggrandizing individual as Linnaeus. Banks, who, at first, seems (and evidently was) completely heartless, becomes more humane as he ages. And I love the irascible Miller who is a genius in his own way and knows best about everything (which often he does), but can be irritating to those with less knowledge and ability, and too dogmatic to see the virtue of Linnaeus' system. And the charming Solander, who has the guts to abandon Linnaeus, is amusing as the scholar and drawing room raconteur (some great scenes when Banks saves his life and they enjoy the splendors--and women--of Tahiti together).

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