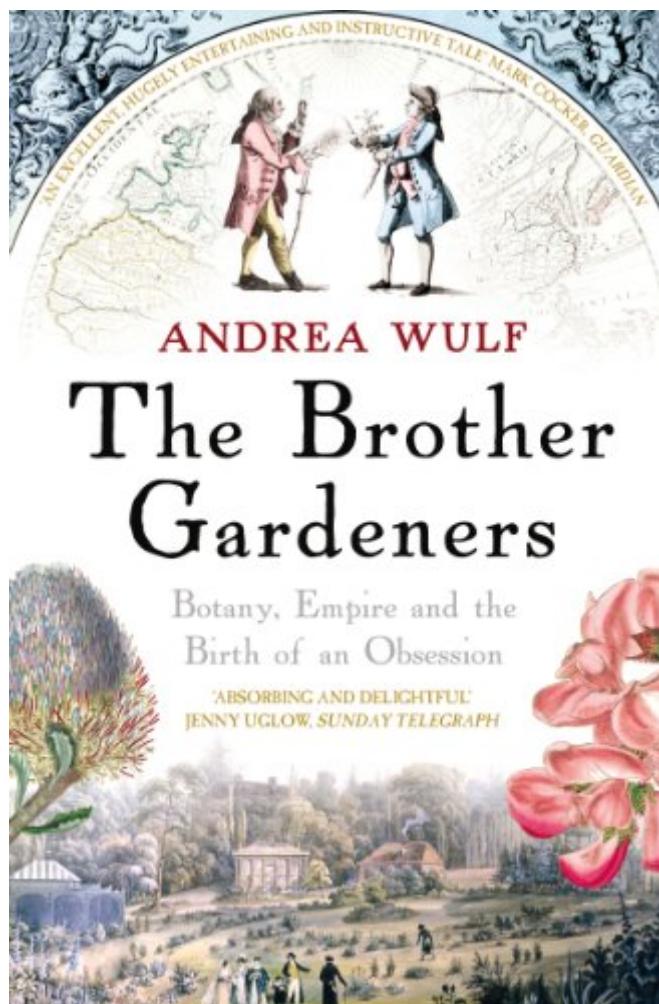


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The Brother Gardeners: Botany, Empire And The Birth Of An Obsession



Synopsis

One January morning in 1734, cloth merchant Peter Collinson hurried down to the docks at London's Custom House to collect cargo just arrived from John Bartram in the American colonies. But it was not bales of cotton that awaited him, but plants and seeds...Over the next forty years, Bartram would send hundreds of American species to England, where Collinson was one of a handful of men who would foster a national obsession and change the gardens of Britain forever: Philip Miller, author of the bestselling Gardeners Dictionary; the Swede Carl Linnaeus, whose standardised botanical nomenclature popularised botany; the botanist-adventurer Joseph Banks and his colleague Daniel Solander who both explored the strange flora of Tahiti and Australia on Captain Cook's Endeavour. This is the story of these men - friends, rivals, enemies, united by a passion for plants. Set against the backdrop of the emerging empire and the uncharted world beyond, *The Brother Gardeners* tells the story how Britain became a nation of gardeners.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

If you love the 18th century and gardening and adventure stories, Andrea Wulf's books are made for you. You will laugh and you will wince at the office politics, the one-upmanship, and the sheer joy and camaraderie found in "The Brother Gardeners." This story of the tight fraternity of early botanists

is divided into two related sections. The first half of the book focuses on John Bartram of Philadelphia and his business partnership with Peter Collinson of England. The impact one hard-working Pennsylvania Quaker had on the international trade and exchange of plants is breath-taking. Seed by seed, pine cone by pine cone, plant by plant, John Bartram changed the face of English gardens forever. Bartram's adventures in collecting plants and seeds to fill Collinson's orders are phenomenal--climbing trees, canoeing, hiking, crawling through caves, and during the French and Indian War, searching for plants along the dangerous frontier. Collinson's frustrations when incoming shipments are spoiled by the weather or plundered by pirates and his squabbling friendship with Bartram are both sad and funny. The second part of the book picks up after both Bartram and Collinson have died. This section has some of the same characters as Part One, now focusing on Daniel Solander and Joseph Banks, the second generation of botanist-adventurers. Their adventures and discoveries with Captain Cook on the "Endeavour" and their trip to Tahiti with Captain Bligh on the "Bounty," put an exciting spin on botany, global exploration, and international trade. One of the many threads that tie the two sections of the book together is the story of Carl Linnaeus. An important scientific figure, a brilliant egomaniac, a proud and lonely man, Linnaeus adds a bit of spikiness to the story. The book is fascinating and should be read for pleasure, as well as for its lessons in history, botany, and international trade. Great book! Kim Burdick Stanton, DE

Love this book. One of my favorites. If you are interested in the history of botany and plant trading between Britain and the American colonies, this is for you! Excellent research and writing. Fascinating characters and their interrelationships. Everyone raves about her Humboldt book but I liked this better due to the subject and the many personalities.

Do you know why William Bligh's tomb is in the National Museum of Garden History, a few steps from Gertrude Jekyl's boots? Do you know how and why "English" gardens differ from "French" gardens? Probably not. Gardening and Botanical History are the nominal subjects of this book, but the heart of it is one of the great adventures of all time, the first voyage of Cook's HMS Endeavour and its scientific mission(s). It ranks with the Lewis and Clark expedition or those of Ernest Shackleton in and around Antarctica, in the sweep of the story and importance of the results. If you've read "South" by Ernest Shackleton or "Undaunted Courage" by Stephen Ambrose, you should be prepared for Wulf's presentation of Joseph Banks' around the world quest for scientific knowledge aboard Cook's ship on its way to observe the Transit of Venus, about which Wulf has

written another book. Wulf lets the facts speak for themselves and provides many references to source material, much of it online, that will give you hours if not months of adventure of your own. This book is about a more than one huge subject, handled with respect by a very competent scholar. It is about the revolution, if not the invention of gardening, about the invention of Taxonomy, about the seeds of Darwin's studies of evolution, planted by his grandfather. It's about the incredible importance of the Royal Society and some of its Fellows. It's about much more, especially if you are American or English. Any one of these sub-plots has been the subject of many college courses, but this book is definitely not a dry academic text. One of the most important subjects of "The Brother Gardeners" is, indirectly, 18th century American Colonial History. The continuous close relationship between John Bartram and his English "Brothers" when America was about to launch the War of Independence reminds us of how close the colonies were to the English and how badly the English government misread and lost their richest and closest allies. Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and a few other people you may have heard of are also important to this first part of "Brother Gardeners". So much so that Wulf has written a second book about some of the "Founding Gardeners". The Kindle Edition may not be for the serious student of Gardening or History. Access to the footnotes is excellent by touch. The footnotes are not distracting and are terse and well done. But if you want to read the extensive bibliography you risk getting lost. And the glossary is almost unreadable since it is in an extremely small typeface and not expandable. Read this book once to learn about the "Brothers". Read it again with a computer handy for the original Notes of Captain Cook and Joseph Banks and others, and above all for the original botanical illustrations from various people mentioned in the text. If you are a biologist and think you know Linnaeus, this book and the online primary source material may revise or amplify your view. This reviewer is an old biologist with more than a year in Antarctica and another in England and some its gardens and I learned something from Andrea Wulf on almost every page of this innocent looking book.

What a charming book! I loved the botanical details, but most of all I loved learning about the friendships and little squabbles between these fascinating 18th century gentlemen on both sides of the Atlantic. What fun to discover that Linnaeus was a bit of a pill, that Tahiti was a young man's dream destination (until they messed in their kit), and that the sometimes haughty Englishmen came to appreciate the expertise of their American counterparts. When I first began the book, I thought the writing came across like a doctoral thesis, but then I came to appreciate the author's careful scholarship and revelation of humble details that truly brought these men to life. Thank you, Ms. Wulf!

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