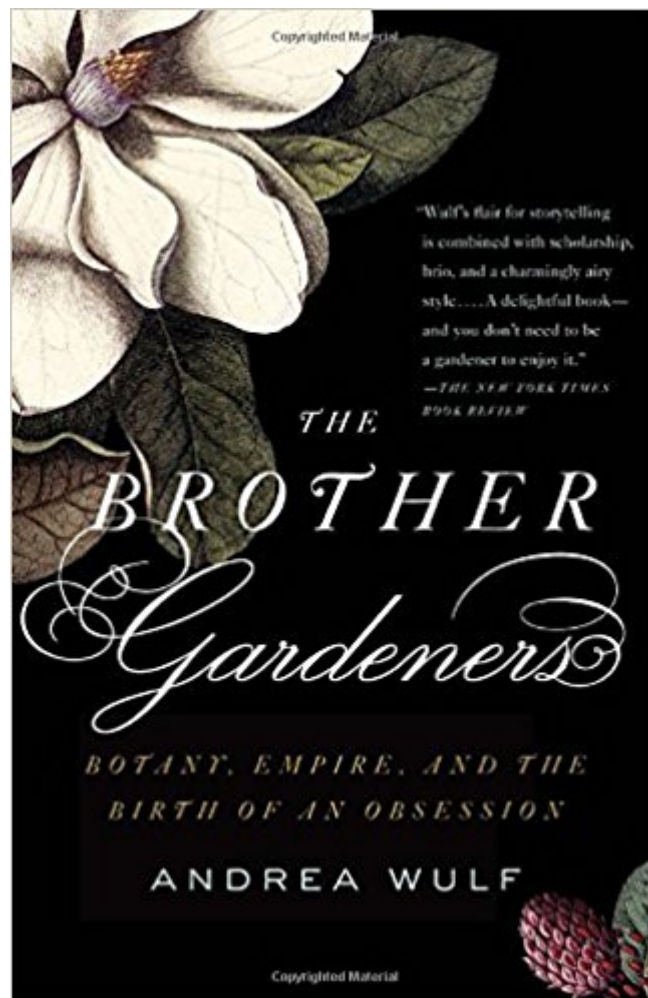




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# The Brother Gardeners: A Generation Of Gentlemen Naturalists And The Birth Of An Obsession



## Synopsis

From the bestselling author of *The Invention of Nature*, a fascinating look at the men who made Britain the center of the botanical world. Bringing to life the science and adventure of eighteenth-century plant collecting, *The Brother Gardeners* is the story of how six men created the modern garden and changed the horticultural world in the process. It is a story of a garden revolution that began in America. In 1733, colonial farmer John Bartram shipped two boxes of precious American plants and seeds to Peter Collinson in London. Around these men formed the nucleus of a botany movement, which included famous Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus; Philip Miller, bestselling author of *The Gardeners Dictionary*; and Joseph Banks and David Solander, two botanist explorers, who scoured the globe for plant life aboard Captain Cook's *Endeavor*. As they cultivated exotic blooms from around the world, they helped make Britain an epicenter of horticultural and botanical expertise. *The Brother Gardeners* paints a vivid portrait of an emerging world of knowledge and gardening as we know it today.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Wulf, a German-born journalist, wonderfully conveys the allure and cultural importance of the garden. Spanning nearly 100 years and several continents, Wulf begins her cultural investigation with the creation of the first manmade hybrid by devout Christian gardener Thomas Fairchild, who spent the rest of his life racked with guilt for the blasphemous act. She also introduces egomaniacal Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus, who scandalized British society with his sexual system of classification; his book was banned by the Vatican. There is New World farmer John Bartram, who

braved storms and steep mountains to discover new plants and send them back to his customers in England, hungry for exotic vegetation from America. As Wulf fills her readily accessible book with adventures aboard Captain Cook's ship, petty rivalries and outsized personalities, she provides an entertaining account of kooky botanists traveling the world and explores how gardening neutralized class lines, how horticulture and botany brought wealth and power, and how the English garden had a profound impact on modern landscape gardening, elevating the humble pursuit into the highest art. (Apr.) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

In Wulf's engaging account, the origin of the English country garden appears as a matter of friendship as much as of flowers—a collaborative effort between two men and two countries. In 1733, a humble American farmer, John Bartram, sent seeds of plants native to the American colonies to a London cloth merchant, Peter Collinson, who went on to lead a dedicated group of British enthusiasts in introducing American species to Britain. Previously, English gardens had been dominated by turf, topiary, and strict geometric rules; the arrival of new plants well suited to the climate transformed them into places of movement and color, and a source of immense national pride. That such a quintessentially English obsession should have its roots in foreign soil is an irony not lost on Wulf, a design historian who grew up in Germany. Copyright ©2008 Click here to subscribe to The New Yorker --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

.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 Jekyll'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 of 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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