



A History of the Garden in Fifty Tools

Bill Laws

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A green thumb is not the only tool one needs to garden well—at least that’s what the makers of gardening catalogs and the designers of the dizzying aisle displays in lawn- and-garden stores would have us believe. Need to plant a bulb, aerate some soil, or keep out a hungry critter? Well, there’s a specific tool for almost everything. But this isn’t just a product of today’s consumer era, since the very earliest gardens, people have been developing tools to make planting and harvesting more efficient and to make flora more beautiful and trees more fruitful. In *A History of the Garden in Fifty Tools*, Bill Laws offers entertaining and colorful anecdotes of implements that have shaped our gardening experience since the beginning.

As Laws reveals, gardening tools have coevolved with human society, and the story of these fifty individual tools presents an innovative history of humans and the garden over time. Laws takes us back to the Neolithic age, when the microlith, the first “all-in-one” tool was invented. Consisting of a small sharp stone blade that was set into a handle made of wood, bone, or antler, it was a small spade that could be used to dig, clip, and cut plant material. We find out that wheelbarrows originated in China in the second century BC, and their basic form has not changed much since. He also describes how early images of a pruning knife appear in Roman art, in the form of a scythe that could cut through herbs, vegetables, fruits, and nuts and was believed to be able to tell the gardener when and what to harvest.

Organized into five thematic chapters relating to different types of gardens: the flower garden, the kitchen garden, the orchard, the lawn, and ornamental gardens, the book includes a mix of horticulture and history, in addition to stories featuring well-known characters—we learn about Henry David Thoreau’s favorite hoe, for example. *A History of the Garden in Fifty Tools* will be a beautiful gift for any home gardener and a reassuring reminder that gardeners have always struggled with the same quandaries.

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