

Putting Down Roots: Gardening Insights from Wisconsin's Early Settlers

Marcia C. Carmichael

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Walk into a garden and you can find more than tomatoes heavy on the vine, trellises filled with green beans, and rows of flowers meant to please the eye and occasionally the palate. History and culture are planted there. This is the premise of *Putting Down Roots* by Marcia C. Carmichael, the historical gardener at Old World Wisconsin, the largest of Wisconsin's living history museums.

In this fascinating cultural history amply complemented with 188 contemporary and historic photographs and illustrations, Carmichael examines the gardening practices and related traditional foodways that Wisconsin's Yankee settlers and major European immigrant groups—the Germans, Norwegians, Irish, Danish, Finnish, and Polish—brought with them to their new state in the nineteenth century. The author bases the book on her research and gardening at the 576-acre Old World Wisconsin, which contains traditional immigrant homes moved from their original homesites throughout the state, as well as nineteenth-century heirloom gardens specific to each immigrant group. The color photographs of these gardens are not only educational but inspiring.

The helpful introduction presents a brief history of the first European immigration to Wisconsin and what that meant—particularly in a state known for its harsh climate—in terms of gardening. The rest of the book, set up in chapters by nationality, looks at planting trends, particular garden tools, popular plant varieties, and favorite foods and meals, including easy-to-follow recipes. Within the chapters, Carmichael uses as examples the family histories of those who owned the homes in Old World Wisconsin to give readers a true feel for the people who worked the gardens and relied on them for sustenance.

Additionally, each chapter contains interesting sidebars; advertisements for tools, seeds, and available land; and documents illustrating garden plans and gardening techniques. The appendix contains tables of the plants commonly grown by each of the groups. For further reading, Carmichael includes extensive notes by chapter and a selected bibliography.

In a time when people are increasingly concerned about organic gardening practices and the need for more variety in our plants for the health of the planet, Carmichael shows readers the value in drawing from the past for the good of the present. For avid gardeners and simple admirers of other people's gardens alike, *Putting Down Roots* is an absorbing book of Wisconsin's history and culture.

JENNIFER FANDEL (March 7, 2011)

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