ForeWord Reviews

The Edible Garden Series: The Edible French Garden
Rosalind Creasy
Tuttle Publishing/Periplus Editions
978-962-593292-7
(March 1999)

Rosalind Creasy has just published the definitive six-book series on edible gardens—flower, salad, French, Italian, herb and heirloom (vegetable). And what a series it is. With detailed photographs and splendid writing, she expertly guides one from bed preparation and seed purchase to planting and harvesting the vegetables, herbs or flowers one has grown. Along the way, she interviews experts in each field (Chef Paul Bertolli for Italian vegetables; Chef Alice Waters for edible flowers), gives an encyclopedic overview of the plants in each category, and ends with a dozen or more mouthwatering recipes to showcase the harvest. Creasy omits nothing in her effort to convince one that "anyone who wants to experience the rich spectrum of tastes … is going to have to plant a garden."

Creasy travels throughout the United States and Europe, searching for the plants she will feature. Viewing the produce market in Rome, she exclaims, "How can a food lover be cool in front of a waist high pile of purple artichokes?" Foraging in Sicily with Los Angeles Chef Celestrino Drago, she discovers the taste-treat of spring greens. She savors baby leeks in herb vinaigrette, breakfast bowls of Alpine strawberries and round baby carrots in chervil butter during a visit to the breathtaking French vegetable garden at Chateau de Villandry. And in the lettuce gardens of northern California, she discovers "Merveille de Quatre Saisons"—a type a long way from the iceberg lettuce of her childhood.

Creasy's research knows no bounds. She establishes demonstration gardens to test different varieties of plants, various garden designs (the visual appeal of the gardens is always important), variable climatic conditions and a range of soil types. For the volume on herbs, she visits the famous herb garden, Caprilands in Coventry, Connecticut, and asks herb maven Carol Saville in Los Angeles to provide her with prototype gardens. Others grew French or Italian vegetable gardens; one of the gardeners for California's Chez Panisse restaurant experimenting with new varieties of edible flowers.

The Edible Garden Series will satisfy a wide spectrum of readers. Food lovers will applaud the series for its information and inspiration in putting fresher and tastier produce on their tables. And enthusiasts will applaud Creasy for bringing us back to the most important food source of all: our gardens.

Ellen Pisor