



Smithsonian Gardens



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Timeline of Women's History in American Gardens

From the mobilization of the Women's Land Army of World War I to the passion for garden clubs — from design pioneers like Beatrix Farrand to environmental thought leaders like Rachel Carson — women have played a central role in the stewardship of America's landscapes.

Browse selected moments and movements in which American women have used plants, gardens, and landscapes for power, advocacy, and change.



1858 Saving Mount Vernon's Landscape

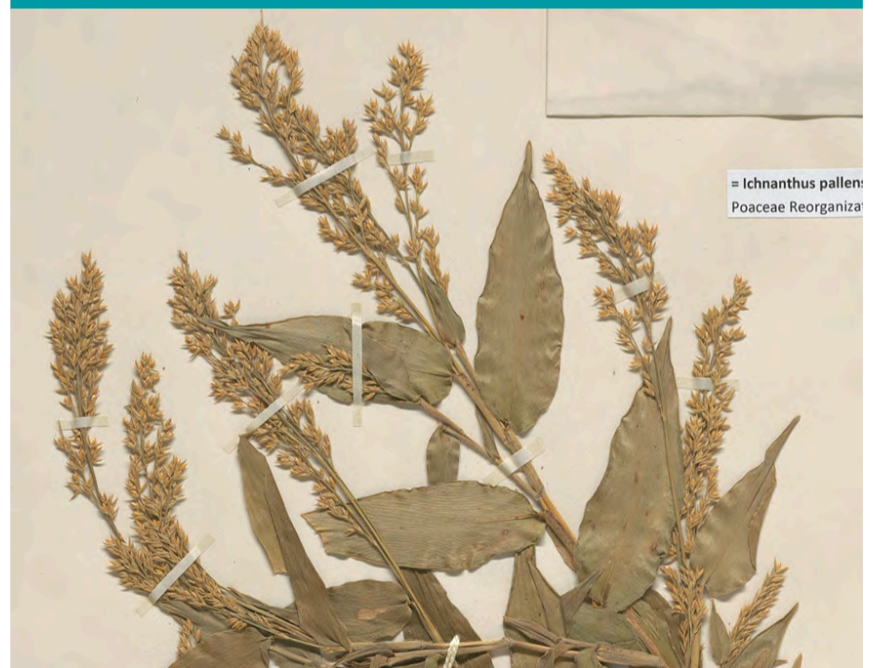


The grounds and gardens of George Washington's home at Mount Vernon are saved from disrepair by the Mount Vernon Ladies Association. Women play a major role in starting the movement to preserve historic homes and landscapes.

[References](#)



1870 Botanist Ynes Mexia Born



At a time when female scientists are few, Mexican-American botanist Ynes Mexia goes on to travel throughout North and South America, collecting and categorizing hundreds of plant specimens new to Western science.

[References](#)



1880s-1920s "Municipal Housekeepers" Promote Parks





As traditional caretakers of home and garden, women's clubs lead campaigns to build more parks and gardens in cities, hoping to promote beauty and public health. Women also lead the movement to protect native plants from overcollection.

[References](#)

1891 Early Women's Garden Clubs



A group of women from Georgia organizes the Ladies Garden Club of Athens, recognized as the first women's gardening society of its kind in America.

[References](#)

1893 Art Out-of-Doors



Art critic Mariana Griswold Van Rensselaer publishes *Art Out-of-Doors*, presenting landscape design as an art form on par with architecture. The book is required reading in many male-only landscape architecture courses.

[References](#)



1899 Women and the American Society of Landscape Architects



Beatrix Farrand is the only woman among eleven landscape design professionals who found the American Society of Landscape Architects. Later, more women join the ranks, including Elizabeth Bullard, Marian Cruger Coffin, Ellen Shipman, Annette Hoyt Flanders, Marjorie Sewell Cautley, and Martha Brookes Hutchenson.

[References](#)

1901 Lowthorpe School of Landscape Architecture for Women Opens



Lowthorpe School of Landscape Architecture for Women FOUNDED IN 1901

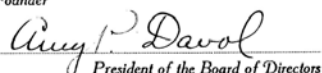
THIS IS TO CERTIFY THAT
Doris Katherine Turnbull
HAVING SATISFACTORILY COMPLETED THE COURSE OF STUDY
PRESCRIBED BY THE SCHOOL IS AWARDED THIS

Diploma

GIVEN AT GROTON, MASSACHUSETTS, THIS TWENTY SECOND DAY OF MARCH
IN THE YEAR OF OUR LORD ONE THOUSAND NINE HUNDRED AND TWENTY NINE.



Founder


President of the Board of Directors

One of the first landscape design schools to admit women is the all-female Lowthorpe School in Massachusetts. Similar schools follow, including the Cambridge School of Architectural and Landscape Design for Women, established under the auspices of Harvard University in 1915.

[References](#)



1902 DeWitt Clinton Farm School Founded



Reformer Frances Griscom Parsons establishes the DeWitt Clinton Farm School in New York City, one of the first gardening programs for children in America.

[References](#)

1914 Home Demonstration Agents Deploy



The Smith-Lever Act funds home demonstration agents – mostly women – to teach up-to-date agricultural, gardening, and food preservation techniques to families of all races living in rural



areas. One of the goals of the project is to “develop leadership abilities in rural women and girls.”

[References](#)



1916 The “National Parks Lady”



The National Park Service is established thanks to the efforts of many, including prominent conservationist Mary Belle King Sherman, who lobbied for its creation.

[References](#)

1917 Buffalo Bird Woman's Garden



Waheenee, also known as Buffalo Bird Woman, records traditional gardening techniques used among women of the Hidatsa people of the Great Plains in a series of interviews.

[References](#)



1917-1919 Mobilization of Women's Land Army



Director Harriot Stanton Blatch mobilizes women to harvest crops and produce food during World War I as men leave to fight overseas. She later leverages their role in the war to win voting rights for women.

1920s Creation of National Roadside Council



Housewife Elizabeth Lawton forms the predecessor of the National Roadside Council. Women's clubs are persistent advocates for protecting natural scenery from the visual "blight" of billboard advertising through the 1960s.

[References](#)

1930 Garden Clubs Saving the Redwoods



The Garden Club of America partners with Save the Redwoods League, raising \$92,000 to purchase and preserve a 2,552-acre grove of redwood trees in Humboldt County, California.

[References](#)

1931 Gardens of Colony and State



Alice G.B. Lockwood publishes *Gardens of Colony and State*, an influential overview of early American gardens. Lockwood's work helped define the emerging field of garden history.

[References](#)

1932 African-American Garden Clubs Unite

HANDBOOK
of the
NEGRO GARDEN CLUB
of
VIRGINIA

Edited by
H. HAMILTON WILLIAMS

Ethel Earley Clark is the only woman among the original founders of the Negro Garden Club of Virginia. The club promotes four main values: home improvement, community improvement, improving race relations, and recreation and creative self-expression.

[References](#)

1938 Founding of the Delphinium
Garden Club

DELPHINIUM CLUB WILL HOLD GARDEN WALK

Formed with the idea of beautifying their own yards and neighborhood and to stimulate interest in this worthwhile project, the Delphinium Garden club, organized March 14, 1938, met in the Attucks Library. Mr. Fagan was guest speaker and gave an informative talk on care of lawns. A miniature garden, arranged under the supervision of Mrs. Lillian C. Hall, in celebration of National Garden Week, drew much admiration.

African-American garden clubs continue to grow in popularity with the founding of the Delphinium Garden Club of Indianapolis, Indiana. Its mission: to educate and "beautify yards and gardens in many parts of the city,

especially among school children, by donating seeds and plants." The club had a special tie to the segregated Crispus Attucks High School, as many members taught there.

[References](#)



1943 Eleanor Roosevelt's Victory Garden



Eleanor Roosevelt plants a Victory Garden on the White House lawn, helping to popularize Americans' patriotic duty to grow their own food during the Second World War so that larger farms can send more produce to troops overseas.

[References](#)

1943-1945 USDA recognizes Women's Land Army





The USDA announces the formal establishment of the Women's Land Army under a new agency, the United States Crop Corps. Women played a crucial role in cultivating and harvesting the nation's crops during World War II while millions of men served away from home in the armed forces. The organization also opened opportunities for many women to work outside the home for the first time and earn a wage.

[References](#)

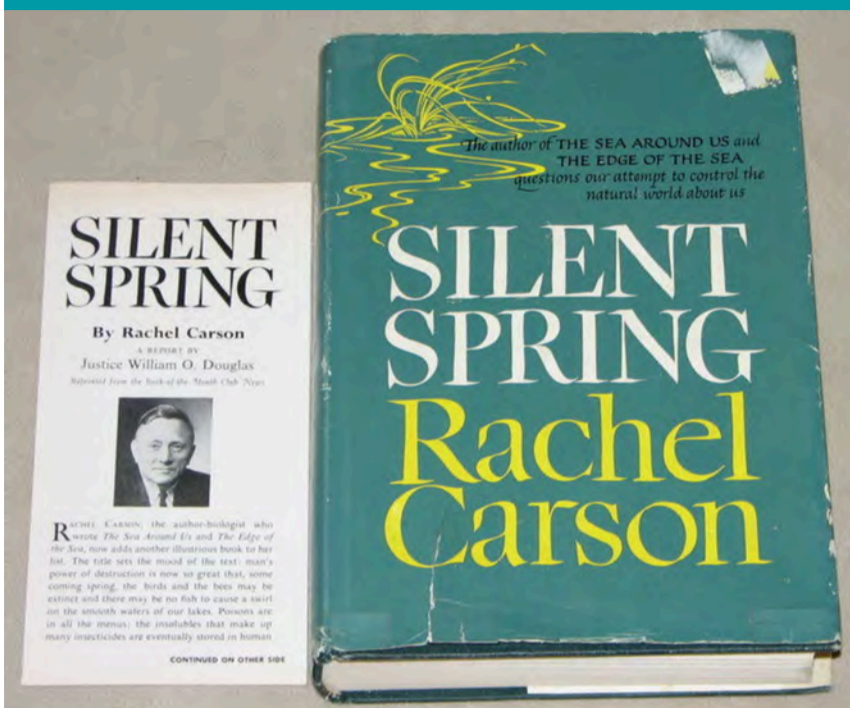


1955 The "Plant Doctor" Cited by American Horticultural Society



Plant pathologist Dr. Cynthia Westcott, known as the "plant doctor" after the title of one of her many popular gardening manuals, is honored by the American Horticultural Society.

1962 Silent Spring



Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* is influential in changing American attitudes toward pesticides and herbicides, which were in wide use after World War II to achieve mosquito-free backyards and velvety green lawns.

[References](#)



1965 "Lady Bird's Bill"



President Johnson signs the Highway Beautification Act. Lady Bird Johnson had strongly advocated for the bill, which called for the removal of billboards, roadside junkyards, and certain outdoor advertising. It also encouraged scenic enhancements, like flower plantings along roadways.

[References](#)

1969 Freedom Farm Collective



Civil rights activist and former sharecropper Fannie Lou Hamer founds the Freedom Farm Cooperative as a means for African-American farmers to share resources, including field crops and vegetables.

[References](#)



1970 Women Living on the Earth



Alicia Bay Laurel's manual *Living on the Earth* serves as a guide for young people looking to live off the land on the Wheeler Ranch Commune in Sonoma, California. The book sells more than 350,000 copies. The same year, Jane Shuttleworth co-founds the magazine *Mother Earth News*, another publication that helped shape the back-to-the-land movement of the 1970s.

[References](#)

1977 Gladys Tantaquidgeon and Plant Medicine





Gladys Tantaquidgeon, anthropologist and medicine woman of the Mohegan tribe, publishes *Folk Medicine of the Delaware and Related Algonkian Tribes*, her third study of Native American plant medicines.

[References](#)



1988 WE ACT for Environmental Justice



Peggy M. Shepard co-founds West Harlem Environmental Action (WE ACT), a grassroots organization dedicated to environmental health policy. Among other causes, the organization encourages urban gardening and fights for access to greenspace in communities of color.

[References](#)

2006 Women at South Central Farm





Urban gardens make news as farmers protest a forced eviction at South Central Farm in Los Angeles, considered one of the largest urban farms in the U.S. Forty protestors are arrested amid a property dispute. Though the farm has no official spokesperson, several women farmers including Rufina Juarez, Josefina Medina, and Maria Cavero rise to the forefront as advocates for the farm.

[References](#)



2009 The White House Kitchen Garden



First Lady Michelle Obama plants a kitchen garden on the South Lawn of the White House, the first vegetable plot on the property since Eleanor Roosevelt's Victory Garden. Obama uses the garden to start conversations around healthy eating.

[References](#)