



The Dirt

Gardening Resources & Tips from the MMGA

August 2026 Gardens Galore



August is a precious month in Massachusetts. Summer gardens are in full bloom, the temperature is often warm but pleasant, and we start to get hints of the approaching fall. All the more reason to explore any garden we can, gathering ideas, if not plants, for our own efforts. For this issue of *The Dirt*, we feature "gardens galore" - a look at four well-known historic gardens, along with a collection of stories and pictures from our own Master Gardeners' gardens. The cumulative result? We hope it's motivation to get gardening!

In this month's issue of The Dirt...

- Featured Garden: We feature not one but four historical gardens!
- Featured Book Review: *A Short History of Flowers* is a gardener's must-read.
- Special Feature: Enjoy "Visit a Master Gardener's Garden" - a collection of first-hand experiences from this summer!

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They can subscribe online by clicking [HERE](#).

2026 Massachusetts Gardening Symposium

Presented by the Massachusetts Master Gardener Association

Saturday, September 26, 2026, 9:00 AM - 4:00 PM

BENTLEY UNIVERSITY, WALTHAM, MASSACHUSETTS

10 Years of Growing Together: Reimagining the Garden from the Ground Up

All gardeners are invited to explore fresh ideas shaping the future of our landscapes, large and small. Expert insight into soil science, adaptability/sustainability and elements of design promise new knowledge and inspiration for all levels.

THREE ACCLAIMED SPEAKERS:

Kirsten Kurtz



Soil Scientist

Stephen Orr



Garden Writer & Editor

Page Dickey



Ecological Garden Designer

THREE EXCITING TOPICS:

- “The Science Behind Healthy Soil” (Kurtz)
- “The Gardener’s Mindset: Lessons Learned from Four Gardens” (Orr)
- “Garden Design with an Ecological Slant” (Dickey)
- Q&A Panel featuring your curated questions for all 3 speakers

Also includes lunch, vendor marketplace, book signings, raffle and door prizes



LEARN MORE AND REGISTER

<https://www.massmastergardeners.org/educational-resources/Symposium>

Early Bird price thru July 6th--Registration closes Sept. 16, 2026

Header photo courtesy of Master Gardener Erica Bond © 2026 MMGA, all rights reserved



Featured Monthly Garden Gardening with History

Dorothy Quincy Homestead

Longfellow House

34 Butler Road
Quincy, MA 02169
P. 617-742-3190

<https://nscdama.org/properties/dorothy-quincy-homestead/>

105 Brattle Street
Cambridge, MA 02138
P. (617) 876-4491

<https://www.nps.gov/long/index.htm>

Loring Greenough House

12 South Street
Jamaica Plain, MA 02130
P. 617.524.3158

<https://loring-greenough.org/>

Shirley-Eustis House

33 Shirley Street
Boston, MA, 02119
P. 617-442-2275

<https://www.shirleyeustishouse.org/>

Author Mary Lou O'Connor, LMG, has been a gardener for most of her life, but didn't realize how little she knew until she enrolled in the Master Gardener program. She was in the class of 2011. Her primary interest is 'working plants', those plants that are attractive but also serve useful culinary or medicinal purposes. She has presented on these topics at MMGA events, sharing interesting mixes of history and horticulture. When not gardening, Mary Lou is a member of the BMW Regional Committee and moderates the BMW Book Club.

I love a garden that has a story. And what better stories are there than those told by gardens at historic properties?

Master Gardeners have an opportunity to volunteer at many historic sites. Some of these sites have existed since the early years of colonial settlement. Some are the product of the gentleman farmer period after the Revolution. Some are historic because of their owners and some because of the designer who created them. But they all give us a chance to shepherd their legacy for future gardeners.



One of the oldest is the **Dorothy Quincy Homestead** which was built in 1681 and is currently owned by the Daughters of the American Revolution. Additions to the house were made in the 18th century and it was the home of Dorothy Quincy, the wife of John Hancock, Massachusetts Governor, and signer of The Declaration of Independence. The gardens are made up of a kitchen garden with both culinary and medicinal herbs, and formal gardens, including a parterre.



While gardening there, I was introduced to three plants, among many others, that have wonderful stories. The first is Costmary, aka Bible leaf, *Tanacetum balsamita*. Used since the Middle Ages, it is a culinary and medicinal herb. The leaves have an astringent quality. According to folklore, people would place a leaf in their Bible and if they got sleepy during a long church service, they would chew a little piece to revive themselves. I must admit I tried a taste; it was a little like Listerine.

Being a knitter, I was happy to discover Fuller's teasel, *Dipsacus fullonum*, in the Quincy Garden. This is a large plant that produces a bristly seed pod on a very sturdy stem. Fuller's teasel was used in pre-industrial textile processing, providing a natural comb for cleaning fleece before it was spun into yarn.

The third plant I learned about at the Quincy Homestead is the Apothecary Rose, *Rosa gallica*. By today's standards, this is a very simple rose. It has one set of petals and only blooms once in a season. It is grown for its hips, which are a good source of vitamin C. The rose has quite a history. It was cultivated by the Romans and Greeks, and in the 11th century was brought to France and England by Crusaders returning home. In the 15th century, it was the symbol of the House of Lancaster during the War of the Roses.



The **Loring-Greenhough House** in Jamaica Plain was built in 1760 by Commodore Joshua Loring as his country residence, and the land originally was a colonial farm. Loring was a loyalist and just prior to the revolution, he abandoned the house and returned to England. Like many other colonial estates, the property was declared abandoned loyalist property and was confiscated by colonial forces.

After the revolution, the property had a series of owners until it was sold to the Greenhough family in 1784. Over the years, the property was divided among

Greenhough descendants. The Greenhough family lived there until 1924. In 1924, the Jamaica Plain Tuesday Club, a social organization, purchased the property and still owns it.



The garden is an oasis in a busy city neighborhood. There are many trees and shrubs around the edges that provide a quiet refuge. On one side of the house, there are two long perennial beds. The house is available for garden weddings and those beautiful flowers create a perfect setting for a walk up the aisle. It makes me smile to see how many people, often with young children, visit and enjoy the garden. At one corner of the property is a bed of woodland

plants including hellebores. In the past couple of years, the Master Gardeners have worked with the club's horticultural committee to install an extensive native plant garden.



The property many people are familiar with is the **Longfellow House** in Cambridge. It was built in 1759, by John Vassal. Like the Loring, Vassal was a loyalist who abandoned the property and returned to England. The property became the Headquarters of the Continental Army under George Washington, after the British evacuated Boston in 1776. And in 1843, the house was purchased by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, who established the garden. In 1924, the garden was refurbished by Ellen Biddle Shipman, one of the foremost female landscape architects of the period.

The garden is built with a series of boxwood parterres. The plants are laid out so that the beds complement each other either by color or by plant structure. The surrounding edges are filled with roses. I discovered that the Yellow Rose of Texas is an actual variety. Also known as



Harison's Yellow Rose, it was the first yellow rose bred in the United States. Another rose that I met for the first time in the Longfellow garden is the Lady of Shallot. It is yellow when it first blooms, but matures to a peachypink. I liked it so much that I planted one in my yard (channeling Ellen Shipman). The gardens are full of variety; see it's "ever changing pageant of colors" [here](#).



Shirley Place c. 1825 as it appeared at the time of Lafayette's visit, to Governor Eustis.

The garden at the **Shirley Eustis house** is both one of the oldest and one of the youngest gardens in the Master Gardeners portfolio. It was originally an orchard, established by settlers in Roxbury in the 1630s. The house was built and the garden established originally in 1747. The property (also known as Shirley Place) had 33 acres, with orchards, formal gardens, and meadows. It was the country home of William Shirley, the royal governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony. Like the Loring-Greenough and the Longfellow house, the property was taken over by the colonial government at the time of the revolution.

And like the other properties, after the war it had a series of owners until 1820 when it was purchased by William and Caroline Eustis, when William became the governor of Massachusetts. After William Eustis died in 1825, Caroline continued to live at Shirley place until her death in 1865. Caroline took pride in her flower gardens. She had a greenhouse built so she could grow citrus trees. She was one of the few women of her time to exhibit at the Massachusetts Horticultural Society show. Mass Hort's records indicate she exhibited orange and lemon trees, sweetwater grapes, a sweet white table grape and a large basket of peaches. In

1842, she exhibited Bartlett Pears, the fruit also grown by her close neighbor Enoch Bartlett.



After Caroline Eustis died, Shirley Place was sold to a developer. The house was moved 60 feet southwest of its original location and the property divided into house lots. Unfortunately, the gardens were taken down as well. The Shirley-Eustis House Association purchased the property and restored the house in the 1980s. In 2000, new gardens and an orchard of heirloom fruit trees were planted. The current property is just over 2 acres. The gardens aren't as big as the ones that Caroline managed but are still full of flowers. The orchards are filled with what are now heirloom varieties, the Roxbury Russet apple, the Clapp pear, the Gage green plum.



William Eustis, in addition to his political career, was a medical doctor and he maintained his practice in the house. We have been creating a medicinal plant bed in recognition of his work and Caroline's interest in gardening. We've learned that strawberries are antiseptic and when crushed in water were used to treat cuts and wounds and that Wood Betony, *Stachys officinalis*, is an astringent, a diuretic and an expectorant, recommended for asthma, bronchitis, heartburn, spitting blood, excessive sweating and varicose veins.

I like to think that the gardeners who came before us appreciate the work we do to care for their gardens. That the Quincy family is pleased to see their garden so lovingly maintained. That the Greenhoughs enjoy seeing children play in their newly designed gardens. That Longfellow is content to sit among his flower beds as he reads new poetry. And that Caroline is happy with the new variety of plants that are growing at Shirley Place. Sometimes I think I catch a glimpse of her smiling at us as she watches through the window.

Massachusetts Master
Gardener Association Presents

Fall Gardening Know-How

Topics Include

- Growing Bulbs
- Saving Seeds
- Organic Gardening
- Preparing the Garden for Winter

Join us ONLINE

August 12, 19, 26 September 2
7-8:30 PM

Registration closes August 9th, 2026

To learn more and sign up, click to
visit our website. Questions? Email us
at knowhow@massmastergardeners.org

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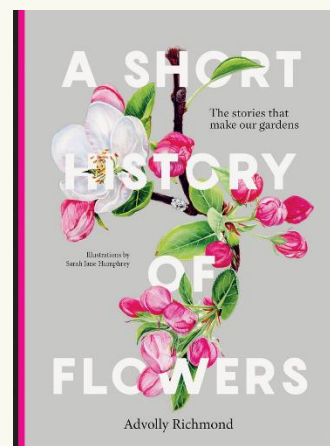


Monthly Book Review

***A Short History of Flowers*, by Advolly Richmond**

Reviewed by Madeline Chamberlain, SPMG

Did you know that English bluebell roots (*Hyacinthoides non-scripta*) were used to starch linens in the 1500s? Or that nigella seeds (*Nigella damascena*) and bacon fat make a — supposedly — effective lice treatment? Or that lily of the valley (*Convallaria majalis*) was fashion designer Christian Dior’s “lucky flower” and that his house seamstresses embroidered a sprig onto each of the house’s hemlines? British garden historian **Advolly Richmond’s** *A Short History of Flowers* is filled with such fascinating facts and interesting botanical lore.



In her first book, **Richmond** has gathered a bouquet of 60 flowers and briefly profiled their unique histories. Another great bedtime read, each chapter is no more than three pages. While each flower’s history isn’t deeply extensive, Richmond has sifted through the chaff to pull some really interesting gems to entertain and inform any gardener. History buffs will enjoy anecdotes about Empress

Josephine’s ability to stock her garden in the midst of the Napoleonic Wars. Stunningly, British admirals had orders to send on her plant orders post-haste from any French ship they captured. And while we’ll all appreciate the brief mention of the Arnold Arboretum’s hand in introducing Rock’s peony (*Paeonia suffruticosa* ‘Rock’s Variety’) in our gardens, Richmond places more emphasis on the unsung heroes of our gardens. She gives due credit to horticulturalists such as the 18th century **John Ystumllynn**, the first well-recorded Black horticulturalist in North Wales (David Austin roses has named a rose to honor him) and to John Sinkins, master of a workhouse in England— and breeder of the Dianthus ‘Mrs Sinkins.’

While this book is enjoyable for the stories alone, the pictures are stunning. Artist Sarah Jane Humphrey provides beautiful botanical illustrations of each flower, illuminating their colorful histories. Additionally, she has included supplemental pen and ink drawings of birds, landscapes and even some historical stockings featuring cardinal flower.

Learn about anemone seed-stealing, drying daylily buds, jasmine crowns and Victorian mourning colors in *A Short History of Flowers*. Find a copy to read in one sitting or, as I do, to enjoy a chapter a night. And after that, perhaps explore

some of **Advolly Richmond's** garden history podcasts or find her occasionally on **BBC's Gardeners' World**.



The Massachusetts Master Gardeners Association
invites you to a free community event

Food: The Ultimate Climate Change Messenger

Presented by Mike Hoffmann



Climate change is changing everything on the menu. Everyone can tap the power of food to confront climate change. Join professor and author Mike Hoffmann for an evening focused on a solution for our changing times.

August 26, 7pm

Click to register for this free virtual event

Special Feature:

**Excerpts from the MMGA
"Visit a Master Gardener" Program**

One of the greatest benefits of being a Master Gardener is the free continuing education offered to members. Some of our educational options include Zoom classes by horticultural experts, in-person workshops at select gardens, and the popular "Visit a Master Gardener" (VAMG) program. In the VAMG, certified master gardeners of all levels invite the community to their homes to see their gardens. The gardens range from urban to rural, new to well-established, and small plots to large acreage. "Project gardens" are included as well; these have a particular focus, such as food production for a local community. In this issue of the Dirt, certified master gardeners and class of 2026 students share their notes and images from the gardens they visited. Enjoy this captivating collection of horticultural creativity and personal choice!

Click [here](#) to download the full special report!



Visit a Master Gardener's Garden

In this special issue of the Dirt, master gardeners and class of 2026 students share their notes and images from the gardens they visited. Enjoy this captivating collection of horticultural creativity and personal choice!

Seasonal MMGA Learning Resources

Ask us your questions in person! Trained volunteers staff Ask-a-Master-Gardener (AAMG) tables at dozens of events throughout the growing season.

- The AAMGA is coming to a community near you, so check our [AAMG Calendar](#) for dates and times.
- Belong to a local organization that would like to host an AAMG? Contact

Outreach@MassMasterGardeners.org

Why guess? Test! Get your soil pH tested - for free!

- Visit a soil testing clinic near you: [Soil Testing Calendar](#).
- To request an MMGA Soil Testing event for your organization's event, contact SoilTesting@MassMasterGardeners.org



Year-round MMGA Learning Resources

Have a plant problem? Email our volunteers your questions...and they'll get back to you. Please include your name, phone number, and as much detail as possible, including photos.

- Massachusetts Horticultural Society at MHSHelpline@MassMasterGardeners.org
- New England Botanic Garden at Tower Hill Hortline@NEBG.org

Speaker's Bureau: If you're a member of a garden club or other organization, check out our lecture topics here. If you need information on how to schedule a talk for your group, contact our Speakers Bureau Manager at Speakers@MassMasterGardeners.org.

Credits

Featured Articles & Columns

Featured Garden: Mary Lou O'Connor, LMG

Featured Book Review: Madeline Chamberlain, SPMG

Special Edition, VAMG: Names included in the download

Pictures (in order of appearance)

Dorothy Quincy Homestead, by NSCDA Massachusetts

Loring Greenhough House, by Loring-Greenough House

Longfellow House, by NPS.gov

Shirley Eustis House, by Mary Lou O'Connor; Shirley Eustis House

Avolly Richmond, by advolly. co. uk

Monarch butterfly, by Lynne Larson, PMG

Editorial Staff

Executive Editor: Madeline Chamberlain, SPMG

Editor: Lynne Larson, PMG

Content Specialist: Kathy Donnelly, PMG

Copywriters: Madeline Chamberlain, SPMG, and Carolyn Alessi, CMG

Circulation: Nancy Kedersha, PMG, and Chip deVillafranca, CMG



Who We Are

The Massachusetts Master Gardener Association is an independent non-profit organization whose mission is to share research-based horticultural knowledge and experience with the public. We meet that goal through Master Gardener Certification, outreach, education, volunteering, and public gardening programs for the advancement of best practices in sustainable, regenerative horticulture.



Massachusetts Master Gardener Association, P.O. Box 1369, Framingham, MA 01701
massmastergardeners.org