

KPOV – *The Point*  
Gardening: Get Good at It  
“Heritage Gardens”  
July 3, 2018

Every year in July, I renew my patriotism by reading the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution of the United States. I consider the grandness of our founding fathers and what a great, gallant, and difficult task it must have been to draft documents that live far beyond their own lives. We are a nation of graces and challenges. In that spirit, my intent was to investigate our most famous heritage gardens. Each is a national treasure: Washington’s Mt. Vernon, Jefferson’s Monticello, James Madison’s Montpelier. But I found myself redirected in my research by Andrea Wulf’s book, “Founding Gardeners.” I was lost in a character sketch of our Nation’s founding fathers as our Nation’s founding gardeners.

Returning to Mt. Vernon after the war, George Washington was focused. Since 1607 colonists tried to recreate gardens they’d left behind in the old world. Washington believed the old world should be left behind and that this land was a new nation with a need to reflect the new republic as much through its gardens as its politics. The future of the country lay to the West. Washington ordered plants and trees from the North and South, from the mountains to the West and the coastal plains to the East. His gardens of tall trees, understory and ornamental shrubs, and fragrant flowers were Washington’s “horticultural Declaration of Independence - a patriotic statement planted into his soil.”

Our second president, John Adams and our third president, Thomas Jefferson regarded the garden as a declaration of separation from England. While in England, during a negotiation attempt, the two men toured English gardens and it was at the Stowe garden with its vistas of the countryside that captured their thoughts. Both men returned home to build vistas of rugged America into their landscapes alongside pastures and pleasure gardens as a statement of political independence.

Jefferson’s gardens at Monticello were a personal politic - his personal garden to the community garden to the collection of native plants from the Lewis and Clark expedition. Jefferson, like Washington, found time to journal his successes and failures at Monticello. He grew 130 varieties of fruit trees and over 300 varieties of near 100 species of plants and vegetables. Jefferson was nuts over vegetables. He loved lettuce. He ate lettuce every month of the year. His garden journals document lettuce seeds planted every Monday from February 1 through September 1. He was a seed collector, bringing seeds back from France, trading seeds with friends. Jefferson wrote, “The greatest service which can be rendered any country is to add a useful plant to its culture.”

James Madison, our 4<sup>th</sup> president, was as passionate a gardener as he was a statesman. His home at Montpelier was designed with a 4-acre vegetable garden. His love of trees led him to set aside 400 acres of old growth forest that are still virtually undisturbed. The Montpelier gardens were a mix of vegetables, fruit trees, flowers and ornamental shrubs - truly edibles incorporated into the landscape design.

In 1818, Madison gave a widely publicized speech. He outlined the need for Americans to address their currently poor agricultural practices. The delicate nature between man and nature was threatened. In Madison’s words, “Man had to return what he took from the soil.”

Gardening is politics. Our founding fathers knew this as our “founding gardeners.” We, the people, are a body politic when we: use compost over chemicals in our soil, avoid or limit use of pesticides, purchase local produce, base our gardening choices on good healthy practices considerate to our environment. Gardening feeds people and empowers nations. Our founding fathers knew this. Tomorrow is the Fourth of July. I wish you fireworks! Happy Independence Day!

For more information about our national heritage gardens and other topics, go to [www.gocogma.com](http://www.gocogma.com) and click the KPOV tab on the orange bar. Thanks for listening to Gardening- Get Good at It on KPOV, The Point.

Resources:

Wulf, Andrea. *Founding Gardeners. The Revolutionary Generation, Nature, and the Shaping of the American Nation*. New York. Vintage Books, a division of Random House. 2011

Founding Gardeners. The Revolutionary Generation, Nature, and the Shaping of the American Nation, Andrea Wulf, 2013

<https://agrarianstudies.macmillan.yale.edu/sites/default/files/files/colloqpapers/04wulf.pdf>

English Gardens (The Ha Ha)

<https://www.calpoly.edu/~gnewell/ehs122/pages/part2/sld018.html>

Surprise, A Ha Ha Wall

<http://cms.business-services.upenn.edu/morrisarboretum-blog/285-surprise-a-ha-ha-wall.html>

John Adams Farmer and Gardener

<http://arnoldia.arboretum.harvard.edu/pdf/articles/2002-61-4-john-adams-farmer-and-gardener.pdf>

Thomas Jefferson the Gardener Set His Sights High to Reap the Earth’s Bounty

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2009/04/03/AR2009040302181.html>

George Washington’s Mt. Vernon

<https://www.mountvernon.org>

Thomas Jefferson’s Monticello

<https://home.monticello.org>

James Madison’s Montpelier

<https://www.montpelier.org>