

Harvest and Other Books
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The winter months are always a good time for reading. And books make good Christmas gifts. So I would like to mention three that I have enjoyed: *Harvest* by Richard Horan, *Founding Gardeners* by Andrea Wulf, and *The Heirloom Garden* by Viola Shipman.

Harvest by Richard Horan has a subtitle of “An Adventure into the Heart of America’s Family Farms.” The author, who is a novelist and nature writer, decided to explore organic, family farms during the harvest season. He actually worked on the farms to get firsthand experience.

The book is divided into ten chapters with an introduction, interlude, and an afterword. Each chapter takes the author to a new farm and a new crop. Interesting stuff.

The first chapter is on Turkey Red Wheat on the Stephens’ Farm in Jennings, Kansas. The discussion gets us right into the middle of the GMO and use of chemicals on farms and a lawsuit against Monsanto. The author helps Bryce Stephens take a moisture reading of the wheat and then later helps use a combine for part of the harvest.

The two chapters that I remember the most are on cranberries and potatoes. I had never really read anything about harvesting cranberries. This time the author was in Massachusetts at Brenda Cobb Cranberries, a five-acre bog.

On a near by farm the cranberries were wet harvested for use in juice and cranberry sauce. The author got to watch Gene Cobb on a fifty acre bog operate a reeler, a contraption he had built himself, to get the cranberries off the bushes where they would float to the edge of the bog where a taller structure hosed up the berries to send them to appropriate destinations.

The next day he helped Brenda Cobb dry harvest her acres with two harvesters, a wheelbarrow, burlap bags, and a tractor with a flatbed trailer. He helped gather the cranberries into the bags and witnessed the whole operation.

The potato chapter interested me because I had been to Idaho and seen the storage facilities but not known what they were. Here the farm is in Maine and at the time of writing, the schools were out at harvest time so the kids could help. Horan did help with the harvest – on the line that picked out rock from the potatoes. The farm grew 18 varieties of potatoes on 40 acres.

For a more historical approach to gardening, *Founding Gardeners* is the book to read. Here we learn about Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Benjamin Franklin, John Adams, and George Washington and their interest in gardening. When I am able to travel again, I hope to go to Monticello, Montpelier, and Mount Vernon and spend time looking at the gardens. I will reference this book before I go.

Founding Gardeners tells how these men tried new plants – Franklin sent seeds from Europe back to his wife Dorothy - and new ways of cultivation like the terraces that Jefferson planned for Monticello. We are also introduced to John Bartram, 18th century plant collector and botanist. We are told of the tours that Jefferson and Adams took including Wooburn Farm and how Washington tried to plant native trees at Mount Vernon.

And finally a lighter book, *The Heirloom Garden* by Victoria Shipman. This fictional account is set near Grand Haven, Michigan where a WWII widow has walled herself in with her fantastic garden. Her new neighbors, an Iraq veteran with PTSD and his wife, have a daughter Lilly who breaks down the barrier. She teaches them how to grow flowers.

The author, whose grandmother was an avid gardener, discusses how to hybridize daylilies, how to grow black eyed Susans and lilacs, and Christmas cactus. The book abounds in flowers and their description. The story is good – perhaps lacking a little in depth of character – but still enjoyable to read.

All of these books expanded my knowledge of gardening and agriculture. All were interesting. Perhaps one of your friends or family would enjoy reading them.