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# The Illustrated Garden Book: A New Anthology by Robin Lane Fox

*V. Sackville-West*

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**V. Sackville-West : The Illustrated Garden Book: A New Anthology by Robin Lane Fox** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Illustrated Garden Book: A New Anthology by Robin Lane Fox:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. "My garden is all overblown with roses, my spirit is all overblown with thyme..." By Owl Thus begins July, with a sonnet mingling the carouse of verse and rose so intoxicating to Vita Sackville-West who excelled as a writer and a gardener. The guineas from the prestigious award for her long poem "The Land" she spent on flowering trees for the great gardens at Sissinghurst. We are indebted to her susceptibility to catalogs, nurseries, other grand gardens and gardeners for this glory of a book. She had to write to pay for those hundreds of plants their care. For ten years after World War II, she offered a weekly column on whatever came into her mind on gardens for The Observer. These columns had been collected into four books before this 1989 "The Illustrated Garden Book." The essays are by Vita and the 1989 selection is by anthologizer Robin Lane Fox, himself a fine writer and widely admired gardener. Some of the essays have been anthologized before; some appear for the first time since The Observer in this collection. It is a happy collaboration. The essays are arranged by the gardener's year, beginning in January. What might Vita be thinking about each month? Plants. How to bring them to fullest splendour. Where to place them, particularly with regard to colors and the effect the gardener wanted. And occasionally, a cry from the heart such as a gardener may know. As a sample, here are the titles for the July essays:--A Cool White Garden--Summer Mulleins--Through Tinted Spectacles--Pale Climbers--The Incense Plant--My Favorite Roses--See-

through Flowers--Tree Poppies--Hardy Hoheria--Dead-heading the Roses--Time for Alstromerias Continuing with an example of what readers can expect, what had she to say about Alstromerias? That they brightened the July garden, otherwise wan (her words) middle-aged. That one "should keep the orange away from the coral, for they do not go well together and whoever it was that said Nature makes no mistakes in colour harmony was either colour-blind or a sentimentalist." (p. 111). She tell us Alstromerias should grow from seed, sown where we want them; sow the seed when freshly harvested or in spring; sow them in a sunny, well-drained place; give them some winter protection; and prop them up so their fragile stems stay intact. There, in one and a half pages, is enough information about Alstromerias to get most of us started, should our Julys be too wan. And so it is with all of these wise, well-informed essays, which have the voice of a friend who gives advice if asked. This friend is not stridently opinionated but has vivid opinions, vividly expressed---the Alstromerias are "so suspicious of transplantation that even seedlings carefully tipped out of pots seem to sense something precarious and unsettling is happening to them and resent it in the unanswerable way of plants by the simple protest of death." Readers who rejoice in such a voice will cherish this book for the words alone. But there is more. Every page has generous illustrations, bright with color and laid out with an artist's hand. Some are drawings by Freda Titford and splendid photographs of Sissinghurst plants gardens by Ken Kirkwood. The drawings are so beautiful one wants to frame them like pages from manuscripts. Both deserve but do not get star billing on the cover. Any reader alerts? Yes. First, the table of contents lists the months but not the title of the essays. The index lists only plant names, so readers may have to make their own table with essay names to find them again. Grumble! A small thing perhaps but such can seem ungracious of the publisher. Second, the articles date from about 1945 to about 1955 (estimates, since alas no dates are given). Vita describes the merits of one cultivar over another but by 2013, some of these may not be available or may be superceded. Third, a book with a similar cover photo is a fairly brief guide to the Sissinghurst gardens. Care is needed to find buy this book if the essays are wanted. OVERALL: V. Sackville West's "The Illustrated Garden Book" 1989, Atheneum New York edition, is a joy to read in all seasons, a bedside book, an idea-book, a delight for eye and mind, as Sissinghurst itself is and as our own gardens can be. At used book prices, some as low as pennies, this is an extra-ordinary value not only for the contents (about 120 essays) but also for the fine quality of the paper, the care given to the lavishly reproduced colors of drawings photographs, and the reader-friendly layout. It is not a detailed how-to book yet in every essay, readers who are not expert or professional plantswomen and men may find knowledge as well a great, very great, pleasure. 1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Timeless, Eloquent, Opinionated Advice from the Poet-Gardener of Sissinghurst Castle By Sarah Timeless, eloquent, opinionated garden advice from the writer/poet Vita Sackville-West who, with her husband, Harold Nicolson, created the amazingly beautiful garden at Sissinghurst Castle. 3 of 3 people found the following review helpful. Garden Delight By Judith Brown This was a book club read and we all loved it. I give it five stars for the content and style. Vita is a very down to earth gardener her writing style is exactly like her gardening beautiful and relaxed but very entertaining. She breaks the book into months and you can pick the book up and read just the month not the entire book if you don't have time. This is not a how to book but rather essays on what she loves about her garden. Of course you cannot help but learn a little along the way. A delightful read any time of year.

Nurtured for over thirty years and transformed into a place of beauty, Sissinghurst Castle, Kent, is owned by the National Trust and is the most visited garden in England.

From Publishers Weekly Vita Sackville-West (1892-1962) liked a tidy garden and wrote a tidy essay. This book offers a sampling of her acclaimed gardening columns from the London Observer, grouped here by the months of the year. Sackville-West covered everything from the genesis of her white and gray summer garden to humorous ways to ward off birds (including "potatoes stuck with pheasants' feathers"). She didn't mince words ("one of the secrets of good gardening is to remove, ruthlessly, any plant one does not like"), yet was a poet at heart ("The flowers of Magnolia grandiflora look like great white pigeons settling among dark leaves"). Her vivid prose and fresh insights into gardening make this book a delight for armchair and active gardeners alike. There are lovely color drawings of some plants that she mentions and color photographs of her award-winning gardens, which still thrive at her home, 500-year-old Sissinghurst Castle. Copyright 1986 Reed Business Information, Inc.