



Green Desire: Imagining Early Modern English Gardens

Rebecca W. Bushnell

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For Rebecca Bushnell, English gardening books tell a fascinating tale of the human love for plants and our will to make them do as we wish. These books powerfully evoke the desires of gardeners: they show us gardeners who, like poets, imagine not just what is but what should be. In particular, the earliest English garden books, such as Thomas Hill's *The Gardeners Labyrinth* or Hugh Platt's *Floraes Paradise*, mix magical practices with mundane recipes even when the authors insist that they rely completely on their own experience in these matters. Like early modern "books of secrets," early gardening manuals often promise the reader power to alter the essential properties of plants: to make the gillyflower double, to change the lily's hue, or to grow a cherry without a stone. *Green Desire* describes the innovative design of the old manuals, examining how writers and printers marketed them as fiction as well as practical advice for aspiring gardeners. Along with this attention to the delights of reading, it analyzes the strange dignity and pleasure of garden labor and the division of men's and women's roles in creating garden art. The book ends by recounting the heated debate over how much people could do to create marvels in their own gardens. For writers and readers alike, these green desires inspired dreams of power and self-improvement, fantasies of beauty achieved without work, and hopes for order in an unpredictable world?not so different from the dreams of gardeners today.

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