

## *Book & Garden Review*

### **Monet's Garden: Through the Seasons at Giverny**

Vivian Russell

New York: Stewart, Tabori & Chang, 1995

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*Debbie Moore Clark*

I haven't a clue as to the growing zone of Claude Monet's Garden at Giverny, France, but many of the plants that grow in this carefully-tended and highly-trafficked garden appear as those one might grow in a garden of the Southern Piedmont of North Carolina. While Giverny, France is not a local destination, the garden of the famed painter is certainly a garden many local gardeners aspire to visit. As gardeners know well, visiting gardens is both an inspirational and educational experience.

In preparation for my once-in-a-lifetime visit on August 26, 2011 to the master's garden, I read a beautiful book by Vivian Russell, titled *Monet's Garden: Through the Seasons at Giverny*. Russell opens the book with a biographic sketch of Claude Monet (1840-1926) and the history of the 2.5 acre garden: his move to the property in 1883; the garden's detailed crafting and perfecting over the next 43 years; and its ultimate decline following Monet's death in 1926. The balance of the book covers the painstaking behind-the-scenes care of the garden during its open (April 1 – November 1) and closed seasons.

Those who garden know gardening is an art form something akin to painting. Both genres use light, color, texture, scale, contrast, repetition. For the gardener, the canvas is a blank landscape of soil. In this Russell concurs: "A new garden is often compared to a canvas waiting to be painted," she writes (22). Monet's paintings gave a name to Impressionism, the art movement that focused on capturing light and natural forms. Lavishly, the great artist filled his paintings, along with his house and its lush landscape with color. "For Monet," Russell writes, "his garden, his art, and his emotions were essentially part of the same experience" (19).

Monet was never tempted by "winter interest" and his garden does not come into its stride until March or April (52). May to early June, the garden is "a vision of blues and mauves" (95), which in June turn to reds and rosy pinks (110).

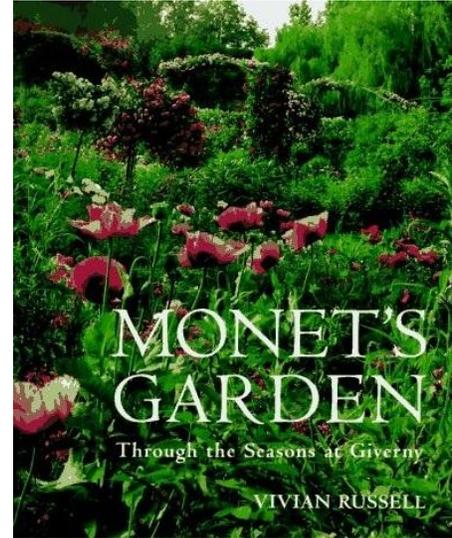
Perfectionistic and detailed, Monet preferred informal gardens, lush with plants, vivid with color. His favorite plants were nasturtiums, water lilies and dahlias. In the late summer-to-fall life of his garden, "nasturtiums figured prominently" (144).

*The winter that fell on the garden with Monet's death lasted metaphorically until it was restored fifty years later.*

**Vivian Russell**

of autochromes" (57). Beyond these, however, "A record of how Monet planned his garden and organized his gardeners does not exist. There are no planting plans or notes other than the names of plants scribbled in a sketchbook, scraps of letters, visitors' accounts..." (55). Yet, for those of us who journal, scribbles and scraps are two viable means of recording the work and progress of a garden.

The natural world that fascinated and inspired Monet is revealed in numerous paintings from Giverny. These many paintings famously provide us glimpses of the artist's ever-dimming vision of his precious world. (He developed cataracts in his later years.) Among his prolific outpouring of paint and soul at Giverny are Artist's Garden at Giverny;



Bridge at Giverny; Main Path through the Garden at Giverny; Trees in Bloom at Giverny; Sunset at Giverny; Water Lilies at Giverny; and more. (For pictures of Monet's paintings inspired and painted at Giverny, Google: Paintings by Monet at Giverny.)



Monet's pink house with green trim at Giverny, August 26, 2011, Debbie Moore Clark. Used with permission.

Visiting the garden was a thrilling experience, and luckily, hubby and I experienced a lull in the crowds which allowed us to backtrack through the flower garden for a second look. A visit to Monet's Garden at Giverny begins with the Japanese-inspired Water Garden with its much-photographed Japanese bridge. The pond, grown with water lilies and overhung with weeping willows, poplar and laurel is central to the Water Garden, which provides a serene and upside-down world of reflection, which captivated the imagination of its artist owner. After circling the pond, visitors progress to the flower garden called Clos Normand in front

of the house, and then into the house, which includes a view overlooking the flower garden from the window of Monet's upstairs bedroom. Clos Normand is thick with plants, replete with graveled paths, and bursting with color.

Rebar plant stakes painted green to match benches, arches, trellises, and the house's characteristic shutters, porches and railings accent the garden. The almost-teal green vibrantly, yet pleasantly, connects hardware to plant life in both gardens. The happy green paint is found also on the Japanese footbridge and artistically-placed green rowboat of the Water Garden. *DMC*



The Water Garden at Giverny, August 26, 2011, Debbie Moore Clark. Used with permission.

For more information, visit these sources:

#### Monet's Garden

<http://giverny.org/gardens/fcm/visitgb.htm>

#### Biography

<http://www.biography.com/people/claude-monet-9411771>



Debbie Moore Clark, an Extension Master Gardener Volunteer since 1995, loves to visit and photograph historic gardens. At home in her suburban garden, she grows herbs organically for culinary and ornamental uses, including Monet's beloved nasturtiums.