

# Monty Don's American Gardens



*Fronts piece: Monticello sbuckley. Creative Commons*

## *Monty Don's American Gardens*

*Written and presented by Monty Don. Co-host Sascha Bos (one episode)*

Produced by Daisy Newton- Dunn and Alexandra Henderson

Associate Producer: Catherine Catton (BBC Commission)

Cinematography by Mike and Steve Robinson

Music by Ty Unwin

Editing by Erica Lee and Alan Andrews

Production Company: BBC England

Release Date: 2020

Due to copyright restrictions no pictures are from Monty Don's series or his book version. All illustrations are from *Wikipedia* and the Public Domain. Full accreditations and copyright statements are on the last page.

This gardening show consists of three episodes, each of which examines gardens of differing types in different American regions.

Monty Don, who has done similar shows for French, Italian and English gardens, starts his examination by stating what he intends to do; to find out if there is an overall pattern to American gardens. Obviously, just on climate, terrain and differing wealth levels put into developing the gardens there cannot be even a broad overall pattern. What he does find is that the desire for innovations, adaptations, sheer inventiveness and originality are everywhere he looks – and he looks in very diverse American locales.

This review does add snippets of extra information, pictures of locales and personal observations.

## *Episode 1*



*Plate 1 Prairie Flowers Alanscottwalker, CC BY-SA 3.0  
<<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0>>, via Wikimedia Commons*

## *Missouri*

The word prairie conjures up grassy plains stretching as far as the eye can see. Once true that image is now usually a memory. In Missouri where prairie once covered around a third of the state, 99.9% has gone most of that going under the plough, roads and suburbs. The state's Prairie Preservation Trust has done just that, rewilding many acres. Yet tragically, what survives does so as a tended garden, albeit a large one. Fallacious images dispensed with here are include the short grass on the prairie. A trust guardian shows prairie grass growing to eight feet all (over seven metres). The idea that the prairie was useless for anything but grazing also goes out: the same official shows Indian footwear made from prairie plants and comments that some pairs are eight thousand years old. Herbs also come from such prairie flowers and plants

## *Chicago*



*Plate 2 Lurie Park Chicago. Señor Codo, CC BY-SA 2.0  
<<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0>>, via Wikimedia Commons*

Here Monty gives viewers more images which challenge stereotypes, that of Chicago as an ugly, grey place of cattle yards and multiple trainlines. In the city centre a garden of less than three acres has been cleverly planted with poor soil so that the assorted plants would not grow so high that Chicago's famous wind would blow them over. Poor soil and little plants are also lighter, a safety factor when the garden is really a roof over a car park. The pathways have also been sunken, making for appreciation of the smaller flora.

## *Philadelphia*

The focus here is on the gardens, fountains and conservatory on the estate of the Dupont family; Longview Gardens, located just outside the city.

Longwood Gardens started as a farm in 1730. An arboretum was built in 1798, with subsequent owners putting more plants and trees on the estate, but it was not until Pierre Dupont (1870-1954) started work on expanding

the gardens in 1906 that it was well on the way to becoming what it is today, not only a garden and a conservatory, but an educational facility and a centre for cultural events and performances.

Opulence, extravagance and awe are the first three words that the images of this garden, its fountains and its conservatory, conjure up. The latter is so wide, high and deep that humans look tiny within its interiors. Even the water pond lilies are gigantic, while some fountains shoot up jets of water about six times a human's height. Delightfully, those jets are lit up with different colored lights as each swirls in varied patterns.

These gardens are so large and varied in their flora and trees (with over 4,600 varieties of plants and trees) that they employ seventy regular gardeners and over eight hundred volunteers.

Monty shows gardens within the city and within the suburbs, where legally no picket fences (so much an iconic image of American suburbia) are allowed within fifty feet of roads. This means that lawns, hedges and rows of plants and flowers go down to curbs.



*Plate 3 Pierre Samuel Du Pont (1870-1954)*

*Unknown author. Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons*



*Plate 4 Longview, the East Conservatory*

*The original uploader was Katybeck at English Wikipedia., CC BY 2.5  
<<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.5>>, via Wikimedia Commons*



*Plate 5 The main fountains.*

*Henryhartley at the English-language Wikipedia, CC BY-SA 3.0  
<<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons*



*Plate 6 The Italian Fountains Plate 7 The Walkway  
Apollo900, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons*





*Plate 7: The Walkway [[File:Longwood Garden 004.JPG | Longwood Garden 004]]*



*Plate 8 The Fountains at night Sdwelch1031, CC BY 3.0  
<<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons*



*Plate 9 The main conservatory interior.*

*Geraldshields11, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons*

## *New York State*

As with Chicago, Monty shows realities that go against stereotypical images of New York as a bustling, grimy, dog-eat dog city full of arid streetscapes. Fifty-two gardening communities exist in the city, covering three thousand acres. Many of these are on rooftops and so have problems with drainage, but they survive, providing edible plants and herbs to residents; everything from chilies to sunflowers.

The city even has a large market devoted just to flowers. New Yorker Emily Thompson creates art in flowers, quite often with weeds – and it works.



*Plate 10: The pond, Central Park Ajay Suresh from New York, NY, USA, CC BY 2.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/2.0>>, via Wikimedia Commons*

New York's most famous park would also have to be the world's most famous park - Central Park. It and is so large that it contains an English garden, another garden dedicated to John Lennon, a large pond, and an open air-theatre. It was designed and created by Frederick Law Olmstead (1822-1903) and was opened in 1868. Although he had few qualifications and none in architecture, his design for Central Park won the city's competition for the best design. Olmstead would go on to show that this was no fluke.

His organizational abilities, generosity and energy would combine to develop other sites and then go into different causes, particularly sanitation forerunners of the Red Cross, business ventures and philanthropy.



*Plate 11: NYC West Side Community Garden. Joseph Segila New York 2008*



*Plate 12: Central Park Jim.henderson, CC BY 4.0  
<<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>>, via Wikimedia Commons*

On Long Island we are shown two gardens. In the first, an individual's organic permaculture garden, nothing goes to landfill. Even infected things

are placed in a special pile where nature will eventually break things down.

The second garden is almost unplanned; an artist with almost no knowledge of gardening and no overall plan, added bits to it and decorated it without uniformity, yet that to has a serendipitous charm, a whimsicality.

## *Episode 2*

### *Washington D.C.*

Don Monty looks for a British influence in American gardens and finds a perfect British garden - in the British embassy! Here Ambassador Garrick explains the very traditional, very English 1920s garden.

### *Virginia*

The building of Thomas Jefferson's mansion at Monticello was completed in 1772, but the garden and agricultural areas devoured more time, then and later. Both home and land were high maintenance. Jefferson would give himself breaks from his writings with physical work in his garden – but only for half an hour at a time. His garden was not only ornamental, but supplied food for his household and staff. Widely accredited an agricultural success story, Monty reveals a more complex reality. Yes, as he says first, Jefferson introduced sweet potato, peanuts, sesame and squash into Monticello and therefore into America. However, these were amongst 330 species introduced by Jefferson and most failed. There was also the problem of slave labor on his properties. One reaction is that cannot we even see a gardening show without racism coming into it? Another is that Jefferson was not a blithely happy hypocrite writing declarations of liberty while lashing the slaves, In Fawn M. Brodie's biography *Thomas Jefferson: An Intimate History* (1974) she presents much evidence that he was

preoccupied with ending slavery and he did make transporting slaves into America illegal, facts which are not presented here.

While many of Jefferson's food importations failed, he was behind one of the globe's biggest success stories in the history of food distribution. While resident in France he took up a little known new French culinary development: what we now call French fries in the USA and chips in the rest of the English-speaking world. Bringing the invention back to America, it spread beyond his wildest dreams. Poor Jefferson, who if not financially poor, was financially strapped for most of his life, never patented the French fries. If he had, he would have been a millionaire at least.

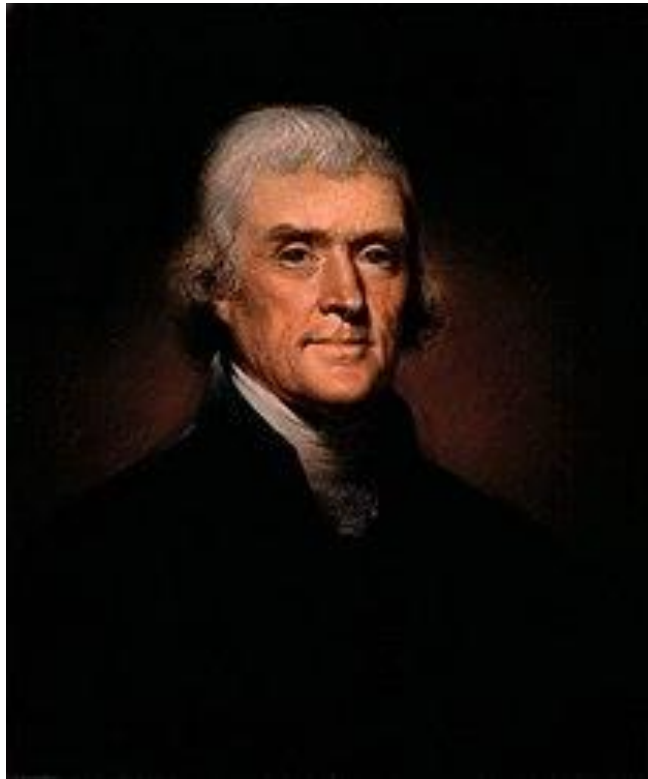


*Plate 13 Jefferson's estate garden and planted crops*

*Billy Hathorn, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons*



*Plate 14 Jefferson's Gardens GNU Free Documentation License, Version 1.2 or any later version published by the Free Software Foundation*



*Plate 15 Thomas Jefferson [[File:Official Presidential portrait of Thomas Jefferson (by Rembrandt Peale, 1800)(cropped).jpg*

Monty goes to another Virginia garden at Oak Spring. One of many designed by Rachael Mellon (1910-2014). One of America's richest and oldest women and one of the nation's most influential gardeners. Some of her work with Perry Hunt Wheeler included gardens in the White House. The garden in her own home, while not small, was surprisingly unpretentious, featuring a favorite, apple trees. When workers accidentally chipped the corner of a paving stone, she decided that she liked the look and chipped others, sprinkling herb and flower seeds in the exposed earth. This was part of an unpretentious natural look. As Monty says, to make things look as if they are natural, meticulous attention to detail is needed.



*Plate 16 The White House Gardens, designed by Peggy Wheeler and Mellon. The walker is President Obama.*

*White House (Pete Souza) / Maison Blanche (Pete Souza), Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons*





*Plate 17: The Middleton Oak. [[File:Middleton-place-SC-oak.jpg | Middleton-place-SC-oak]]*



*Plate 18. The original, restored mansion Brian Stansberry, CC BY 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>>, via Wikimedia Commons*



*Plate 19: A Middleton Place garden.*

*Bms4880, CC BY 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>>, via  
Wikimedia Commons*



*Plate 20: Not all of the estate is tamed. Brian Stansberry, CC BY 3.0  
<<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>>, via Wikimedia Commons*



*Plate 20 The artificial rice ponds. Brian Stansberry, CC BY 3.0  
<<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>>, via Wikimedia Commons*

Visitors can now enjoy the gardens and the museum.

Monty then travels five hundred south to examine America's oldest surviving landscaped garden. Middleton Park, South Carolina. Located twenty miles upriver from Charleston, this is a very different climate to that of Virginia, being humid and almost permanently hot. Middleton Park was started in 1676 by the Drayton family and expanded and developed over subsequent centuries until it contains innumerable hydrangeas and oaks and over a hundred thousand azaleas and ten thousand camelia japonicas. Amongst its many oaks draped with Spanish moss one has gained fame for its age; estimates for the Middleton Oak's age go between nine hundred and a thousand years. During the days spent filming there a savage storm hit, bringing down one of this tree's major branches. Several artificial lakes and ponds decorate the park and some of their residents, crocodiles appear, safely filmed at a distance. The

lakes were initially not decorative, but productive, being created to grow rice, which was so lucrative that it was known as “Charleston Gold.”

Although Monty does not mention it, the Middleton family imported both African water buffaloes (for working with the rice) and camelias into the park. Both were the first importations of these species into America.

Despite the glories of Middleton Place, not everything is rosey in South Carolina’s parks; pun intended. Susan Massamilo of Charleston, who edged her pool with planted greens, notes that roses used to be perennial in Charleston, but due to increasing heat from climate change, are now annuals. Even several tropical fruits, including lychees, longan and mangoes, once such successful crops, are also being badly affected and are no longer so reliable as a seasonal crop.

At Biscayne Bay, easily within sight of Miami Florida, James Dearing (1859-1925) eventually built his Italianate mansion and gardens, named Vizcaya. Eventually remains the key word here, for he started work in 1912 (according to Monty, 1910 according to *Wikipedia*) and it was not complete until 1922. Obviously, the massive size of the estate was one cause for the delay; over a thousand workers were used for the construction, but building on a mangrove swamp in a locale where hurricanes hit were other causes. Both the mansion and the gardens were in the Italianate style of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Was this Vizcaya the model for the Florida palace of Xanadu in *Citizen Kane*? Like Kane’s palace, this was also furnished with European art. Oddly, Dearing’s house and garden do not appear incongruous with Florida’s coastal landscape, perhaps because being so large and extensive, they dominate it. Dearing had little more than three years to enjoy his triumph, dying of pernicious anemia aged sixty-five. His inheritors, two nieces, lived there until 1952, but finding maintenance costs prohibitive, they donated Dearing’s achievements to the state. Is that all there is to it? Palaces can easily overawe and dominate personalities; factors which make it difficult to relax. Monty does not develop this idea, but perhaps he should have.



*Plate 20: The view from the Italian gardens at Vizcaya*

*Tom Schaefer, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons*

In New Orleans Monty rejects the idea that this city is a dull town when it comes to gardens. Showing us that city's streetscapes, his camera crew go behind a high wall facing a city street into one French colonial home, owned by Celia Collins. She has developed a luxuriant, tropical green-colored garden in her yard, which while not extravagantly large, reveals how she has utilized the space wisely.

Just north of the city is Long Vue, an estate similar in style and size to Middleton Place. It differs, first in being an initial failure. Both house and gardens were started in 1924, with work on the mansion going on into the 1940s. Intended to be a recreation of Spanish gardens, it failed as such, because southern Louisiana was too wet and too humid. Eventually the workers succeeded because those who its cared for it planted mainly native trees and flora. Camelias and tulips were amongst the few imported species that did succeed. Cyclone Katrina's great strike in 2004, did cause devastation here, but repair work was generally successful.



*Plate 21 Longue Vue - The back yard!*

*Navin75, CC BY-SA 2.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0>>, via  
Wikimedia Commons*

## *Episode 3*

### *Arizona*

In this episode Monty goes west, exploring cactus species in Arizona. Hundreds of different sub species exist. Differentiation can start with color, ranging from cream, through the different shades of gray, gray-blue, yellow, orange, brown and green. Size is another factor for differentiation. Some potted cacti can be held in a hand, while others can grow to three times the height of an adult human. Spikes also vary, from the short and bendable needle thin to those resembling a rosette. America's desert dwellers are rapidly giving up on traditional gardens and grasses, as both are great devourers of water and frequently unable to resist the deserts' strong heat. Instead, rock gardens featuring different cactus species, needing little if any water and maintenance are now popular.



*Plate 22: An old growth saguaro cactus near Phoenix Arizona.  
Saguaro Pictures, CC BY 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/3.0>>, via  
Wikimedia Commons.*



*Plate 23: Cactus Flower*

*Dr. Thomas G. Barnes, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons*

### *California*

Palm Springs California with its regular population of just under fifty thousand, by being in the Sonora Desert, has the feeling of an oasis. Located 110 miles (177 kilometres) east of Los Angeles, it is a holiday destination for urbanites and retirees. Regular water supplies from the springs means golf courses and gardens abound. Being one of America's richest cities means abundant spending goes into landscapes. Regular sunlight and water means that for fruit, vegetables and feed, four crops a year can be grown there.





*Plate 24 Palm Springs A golf course is in the middle ground.*

*Visitor7, CC BY-SA 3.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/3.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons*



*Plate 25: Hotel California Palm Springs. No connection applies to the Eagles song.*

*Carol M. Highsmith, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons*



*Plate 25. A Hollywood sculpture Garden*

*Scotwriter21, CC BY-SA 4.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>>, via Wikimedia Commons*

Amazingly in Los Angeles, some schools have their own gardens, so that children can be attuned to nature, grow sustainable crops and eat healthy food.

The Hollywood segment features a bizarre garden, made so by the included features, which are old film props. One such prop would be

incongruous, but several establishes a theme. By itself this garden would alienate, but it makes a welcome contrast to the others, so neat, orderly and predictable.

The last segment of *America's Gardens* features a tropical garden established on reclaimed land in Seattle, which in the immense Washington Park Arboretum has various different parks. Monty visits a nearby family estate, much smaller than those filmed in most of the other segments, but its owners show the same dedication and inventiveness put into its shaping.



*Plate 26: The Washington Park Arboretum*

*frted*, CC BY-SA 2.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0>>, via  
*Wikimedia Commons*



*Plate 27: The wetlands within the Washington Park Arboretum*

*[[File:UWArboretumwetlands.JPG | UWArboretumwetlands]]*

Monty has certainly shown the extraordinary variety and beauty of several American gardens. He has done this successfully, being entertaining and not avoiding the battles against natural threats, outright failures and other problems. His focus has been on estates, with a few smaller home gardens as a welcome contrast.

The whole series makes a welcome contrast to the pessimistic outlook of so many television documentaries. People can do wonderful things.



*Plate 28: Monty Don*

*jo-h, CC BY-SA 2.0 <<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/2.0>>, via  
Wikimedia Commons*

## Copyright concerns

### Illustrations:

All pictures are from Wikipedia/Wikimedia, Wiki derived sources and Creative Commons. They are also allowable under Australian law through two rules. Permission is granted for using illustrations for review purposes. Teachers are also allowed to recreate and use images for study from websites., but not to sell. The author is a qualified, registered and active teacher. Similarly, under American law 'Fair Use' allows images for non-profit, educational purposes and these apply here. Those same laws indicate that attribution should be given. Where this is easy, as with a source such as *Wikipedia* or *Creative Commons*, attribution comes with the caption. Others have attribution problems. Ownership can change as companies buy up sources. Others give their names with images that may not originate with them. In both cases I recommend that readers find the original attribution by holding the cursor arrow over an image. This will give the first credit, which may or may not be the original source. Frequently further links can be made by holding shift and a left click simultaneously. If any illustration used here appears against the owner's wishes the owner can either request acknowledgement under the caption in words of their choosing or ask for removal.

Unless you are a reviewer working under Australian law or a qualified Australian teacher doing your own research, do not lift pictures from this work as you might be in legal trouble with the owners for copyright violations.

Under American law "fair use" is allowed for non-commercial, educational purposes with attribution.

**Text:** © The text is copyright. Fair dealings for purposes of study or criticism is allowed. For the whole book storage in electronic systems or bound printed out copies for library research is also allowed. Communication on this would be appreciated. Selling copies becomes another matter and is not allowed without permission.

Copyright ©

