

# \*How America blossomed

The early giants of American politics are revered as America's founding fathers, but in this superb book, Andrea Wulf argues that they thought of themselves first and foremost as farmers and gardeners.

In their vision of America, the self-sufficient farmer would create a truly independent republic, while the country's spectacular landscape would unite the 13 states in a patriotic sense of national identity.

A delight in flowers and trees, and an obsession with agriculture, was the shared hinterland of all four men.

As soon as he had defeated the British in the War of Independence, George Washington resigned as commander-in-chief of the Continental Army, hurried back to Mount Vernon and redesigned his garden. Filling it with trees and shrubs from across the different states, he created what Wulf describes as the first 'all-American garden'.

## The Founding Gardeners

By Andrea Wulf

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★★★★★

His future vice-president, John Adams, was every bit as passionate about gardening. On a diplomatic mission to London, he dived into a heap of manure to examine it more closely, and concluded gleefully that 'this may be good manure, but it is not equal to mine'.

After losing the 1800 election to Thomas Jefferson, Adams consoled himself that he could at least 'potter in my garden amongst the fruit trees and cucumbers, and plant a potatoe yard with my own hand'.

Jefferson, meanwhile, grew pots of roses and geraniums in the White House, keeping a set of garden tools in his desk so he

could regularly prune and deadhead them.

Every day at noon, he went on long rides to explore the countryside around the capital and talk to farmers. He described tree-felling as 'a crime little short of murder', and was so interested in the flora and fauna of the West that he briefly kept two grizzly bears on the White House lawn.

The Founding Gardeners ends with an argument for viewing the fourth President, James Madison, as the true father of American environmentalism. In 1818, he gave a speech arguing for sustainable farming practices.

His words still resonate today, and this book will fascinate anyone interested in gardening, agriculture or American history, offering new insights into four familiar lives and conjuring up the gardens of the new republic.

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