

The garden as life.

Post by “Adrian” of February 17, 2023 at 3:48 PM

The garden is a place of healing, health and friendship. There are many images of the Epicurean garden, and perhaps my favourite is that by JMW Turner. I imagine that other than simply sitting and conversing in the garden that the lovers of wisdom would have looked after the soil and tended the plants. Presumably the range of plants would be similar to those seen in a Greek garden today.

The garden is a place of healing as the Victorians knew full well. The Victorians had gardens built as an essential part of both general and mental/psychiatric hospitals. There is healing in contact with nature which we have forgotten or neglected, and this is shown by even a cursory look at the contemporary hospital which has become a factory for healthcare. My local psychiatric hospital in a species of Orwellian newspeak is called ‘Greenparks House’ – it is not green and has no park.

The Victorians built parks in the towns and created school playing fields. Many of these have now been built over and lost. They also constructed allotments in the towns for the use of the countryfolk who had moved there. My wife and I have an allotment and we feel very Epicurean working in the sunlight, tending our fruits and vegetables, and talking with our allotment neighbours. And so much of the sterility of our modern culture can be seen as being related to our alienation from the natural world.

The best place to read and think is when surrounded by vegetables and birdsong.

Post by “Joshua” of February 17, 2023 at 5:32 PM

Turner was a phenomenal painter all around. By another hand I might call that a pastiche of classical harmonies, but his fingerprints are all over the middle and far distance, where light, color and blank space are used to suggest form rather than insist upon it. You're right to cite his *Garden* as one of the better ones.

One of the books I read while I was surveying was *Measuring America* by the Scottish historian Andro Linklater. Thomas Jefferson had an image in his mind for what land use would look like if put to the service of maximizing his democratic ideals. As you say--plowed under or built over now.

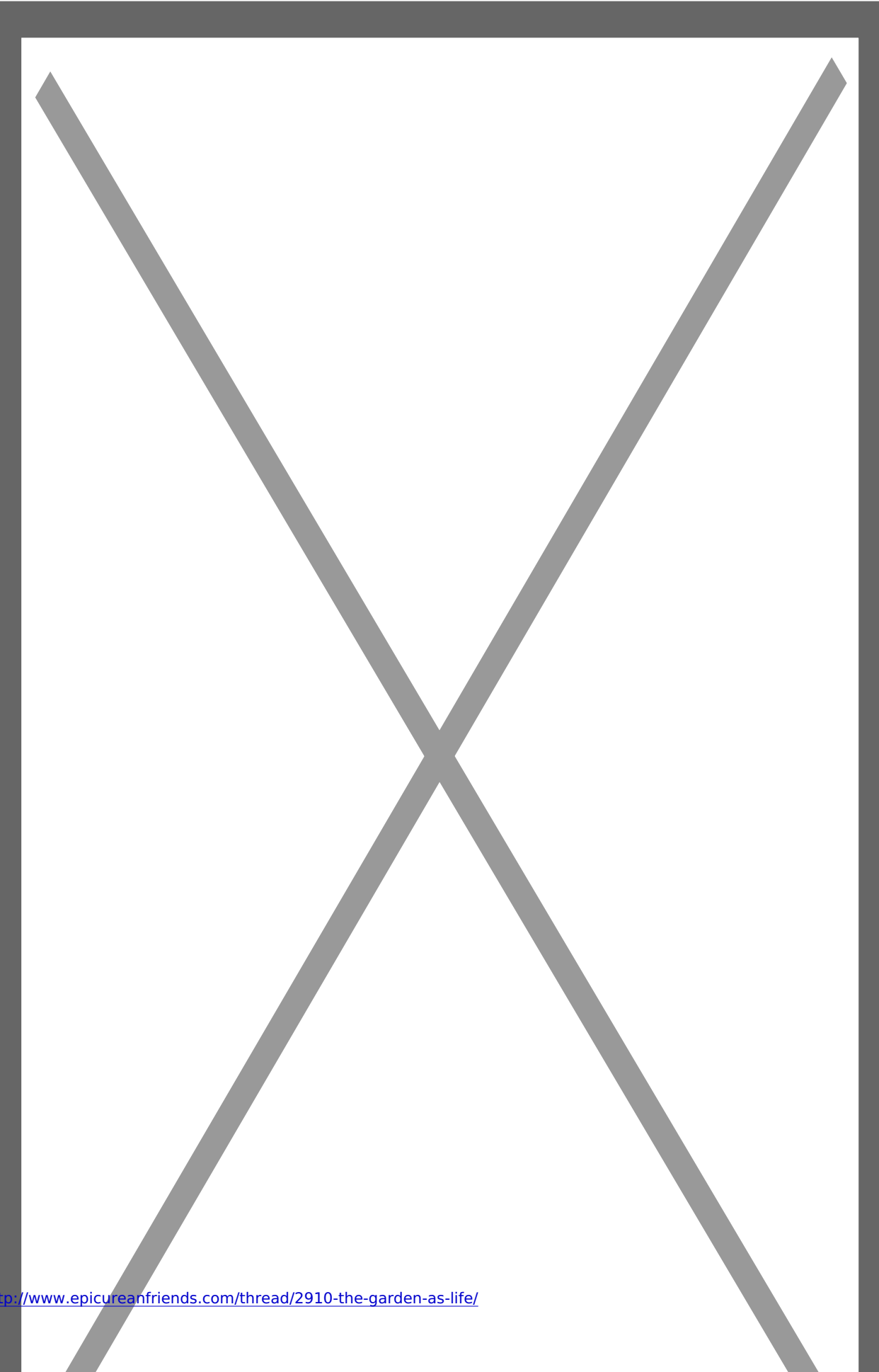
Post by “Adrian” of February 20, 2023 at 4:34 PM

I made the post above because the subjects of Gardening / Farming / Agriculture are so important and nothing was written under this heading in the forum.

Farming and agriculture now seem industrial in nature, and the modern ‘factory’ farm seems far removed from the farming methods used before the Second World War. Much has been written about the diminishing mineral and vitamin content of vegetables since the introduction of these new agricultural techniques.

I have read that Epicurus would have grown the Greek artichoke in the garden. The artichoke has been described as the 3,000-year-old Greek superfood. In the Greek myth, the first artichoke was a beautiful young mortal woman named Cynara who lived on the Aegean island of Zinari and was loved by Zeus. The artichoke has a spectacular spiky purple blossom, to match the beauty of Cynara.

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[Artichoke Plant History: Origin Of Artichokes In Cooking And Gardening](#)

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What else should I grow for an Epicurean allotment? Olives would grow better in Greece than in South London. I have a small olive in a pot in the patio in my back garden.

Post by “Joshua” of February 20, 2023 at 6:36 PM

The 'true myrtle' or common myrtle, sacred to Aphrodite.

Onions were a staple vegetable, along with chickpeas which are universal around the Mediterranean. Leafy greens, whether cabbage or lettuce.

Wormwood was Lucretius' metaphor for the bitter medicine of philosophy as some see it.

I think the right answer is 'whatever you please'!

Post by “Adrian” of February 21, 2023 at 4:50 PM

The garden as an Epicurean space is a reality and not an image or metaphor. We are centred when we are in contact with the soil and with life. The further we are away from nature the more deracinated we become. We need roots, and when we are deracinated we are uprooted from our natural geographical, social, or cultural environments. We need friendships - human, animal and vegetable. This is why gardens are so special. And our relationships with plants are special, and I have plants that I have had for decades (or have they had me), and one that I have had since I was a medical student and visited a hospital in South London.

I was given a 'true myrtle' or common myrtle that is sacred to Aphrodite for my allotment. It was a present from my sister-in-law and is just about holding its own following the recent frost. Next to the myrtle is a *Ugni molinae*, known as Chilean guava berry, or strawberry myrtle. This shrub is native to Chile and southern Argentina. The local Spanish name is murta, and the Mapuche native American name is Uñiberry. It is in the same botanical family as the guava. Ugni fruit was introduced to Europe in 1844, but has been a staple in indigenous Araucano and Mapuche cuisine for centuries. It was a favourite of Queen Victoria and thrauco. The thrauco is known in Chilean folklore and mythology, and is a small creature, that always carries a stone axe and leans on a twisted walking cane. The thrauco loves climbing trees, and eating ugni

berries. The thrauco loves nature., but hates people. The ugni berries are its main source of sustenance, and favourite delicacy. In rural Chile the children are cautioned about going into the ugni bushes to pick berries. The thrauco scares children away from his favourite food, and if he finds a young woman he might get her pregnant (pregnancies outside marriage are often blamed on the thrauco). It's interesting to compare myths from different cultures.

And our schools, universities and hospitals need gardens. Dare I say that our philosophy departments need gardens? The preservation of our green spaces and gardens should become almost an obsession. We need to have animal, plant and human friendships.

Post by "Joshua" of February 21, 2023 at 7:22 PM

Quote

Dare I say that our philosophy departments need gardens?

One of the many reasons I love Friar Laurence from *Romeo and Juliet*;

The grey-eyed morn smiles on the frowning night,

Chequering the eastern clouds with streaks of light,

And fleckled darkness like a drunkard reels

From forth day's path and Titan's fiery wheels.

Now, ere the sun advance his burning eye,

The day to cheer and night's dank dew to dry,

I must up-fill this osier cage of ours

With baleful weeds and precious-juiced flowers.

The earth that's nature's mother is her tomb;

What is her burying grave that is her womb,

And from her womb children of divers kind

We sucking on her natural bosom find:

Many for many virtues excellent,

None but for some and yet all different.

*O, mickle is the powerful grace that lies
In herbs, plants, stones, and their true qualities:
For nought so vile that on the earth doth live
But to the earth some special good doth give,
Nor aught so good but, strain'd from that fair use,
Revolts from true birth, stumbling on abuse.
Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied;
And vice sometimes by action dignified.
Within the infant rind of this weak flower
Poison hath residence and medicine power:
For this, being smelt, with that part cheers each part;
Being tasted, stays all senses with the heart.
Two such opposed kings encamp them still
In man as well as herbs, grace and rude will;
And where the worser is predominant,
Full soon the canker death eats up that plant.*

I highlighted the parallel passages between that monologue and the fifth book of Lucretius in [this](#) thread. In a later passage he recommends to Romeo "Adversity's sweet milk, philosophy".

Thank you for advising me on the many dangers of the Ugni fruit! It sounds like you have far exceeded my meager knowledge on plants. And cheers on the myrtle: I've always wanted to grow a myrtle, since learning of the connection.