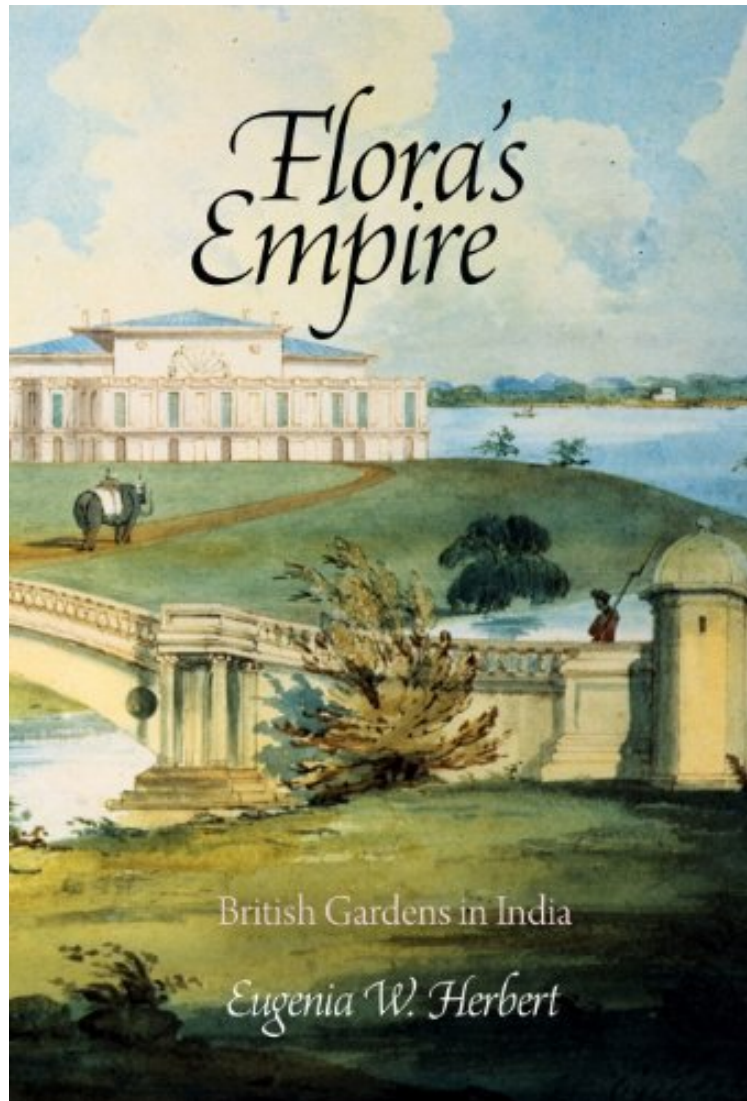


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Eugenia W. Herbert

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Eugenia W. Herbert : Flora's Empire: British Gardens in India (Penn Studies in Landscape Architecture)
before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Flora's Empire: British Gardens in India (Penn Studies in Landscape Architecture):

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Flora's Empire is a garden of delights for the reader interested in British India!By Dr. Elisabeth LenckosWho would think that reading about the gardens of the British in India would tell one so much about their way of life? A beautifully written work and very well researched, Flora's Empire is an excellent source of information about a bygone era.1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Interesting Facts.

A Good Read By Rajiv Chopra This is a very well-researched book, and quite well written indeed. The writing style is brisk and easy to read. It does not give a hint of deep erudition, which is good in that it makes the book approachable. I think that she was wise enough to confine herself to the British Gardens, with hints of information about the Mughal Gardens. Sadly our own literature does not seem to point in the direction of many gardens in the strictly Hindu tradition. I do think that we do need to be thankful to the Mughals for some of the great gardens that they created. These were works of art, as the book clearly demonstrates. The British Gardens, while being really good, are the creations of individuals who had a passion for gardening. This is good in a way, because it made the gardens more democratic. The book is replete with hidden facts, and is a pleasure to read.

Like their penchant for clubs, cricket, and hunting, the planting of English gardens by the British in India reflected an understandable need on the part of expatriates to replicate home as much as possible in an alien environment. In *Flora's Empire*, Eugenia W. Herbert argues that more than simple nostalgia or homesickness lay at the root of this "garden imperialism," however. Drawing on a wealth of period illustrations and personal accounts, many of them little known, she traces the significance of gardens in the long history of British relations with the subcontinent. To British eyes, she demonstrates, India was an untamed land that needed the visible stamp of civilization that gardens in their many guises could convey. Colonial gardens changed over time, from the "garden houses" of eighteenth-century nabobs modeled on English country estates to the herbaceous borders, gravel walks, and well-trimmed lawns of Victorian civil servants. As the British extended their rule, they found that hill stations like Simla offered an ideal retreat from the unbearable heat of the plains and a place to coax English flowers into bloom. Furthermore, India was part of the global network of botanical exploration and collecting that gathered up the world's plants for transport to great imperial centers such as Kew. And it is through colonial gardens that one may track the evolution of imperial ideas of governance. Every Government House and Residency was carefully landscaped to reflect current ideals of an ordered society. At Independence in 1947 the British left behind a lasting legacy in their gardens, one still reflected in the design of parks and information technology campuses and in the horticultural practices of home gardeners who continue to send away to England for seeds.

"An excellent history of British gardens in India. . . . [Herbert] writes with gentle wit, elegance and love of her subject which are rare in books on garden history." —Financial Times "I found myself entertained on every page. Herbert's achievement is that under the guise of a study of Britannia's role as gardener she has written a thoroughly scholarly — indeed, groundbreaking, in every sense of the word — history of the British entanglement in India. She has flung her net far and wide, and drawn in a wealth of unfamiliar sources, both exotic and homely, to build up a rich tapestry of the Indian landscape. . . . full of insights and wonderfully readable, *Flora's Empire* is as much a treat for the general reader as it is for those who relish 'the glory of the garden.'" —Charles Allen, editor of *Plain Tales from the Raj*

About the Author Eugenia W. Herbert is Professor Emeritus of History at Mount Holyoke College and the author of several books, including *Twilight on the Zambezi: Late Colonialism in Central Africa*. Excerpt. copy; Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.

Preface The novelist Penelope Lively devotes an entire chapter of her autobiography to her grandmother's gardens over several generations. With their lawns, informal walks, lily ponds, snowdrops, bluebells, and roses, they are virtual palimpsests of English garden history as it is most familiar to us: "Essence of Englishness, you would think, the English garden." But in fact, as Lively points out, there is hardly anything in these gardens except the yew trees and primroses that is native to the British Isles. The garden is rather a "cacophony," filled with plants from all over the world. And when her family moved to Egypt, her mother created a garden there that was "unashamedly English in design," even if many of the shrubs and trees were perforce adapted to a warmer climate. A walk through Kew Gardens reinforces this experience of gardens as a "global reference system." On a May morning Rhododendron Dell is ablaze with the blossoms of these glorious shrubs. But while the dell was laid out by Capability Brown, giant of eighteenth-century English natural landscape design, it had to wait until the next century for the rhododendrons that Joseph Dalton Hooker brought back from the Sikkim Himalayas. A few years ago I had taken a similar stroll through Haidar Ali's Lal Bagh in Bangalore. Just inside the main gate, I was surprised to come upon a colony of plaster gnomes, statues, and other assorted paraphernalia in a garden initially inspired by Mughal prototypes and later redesigned to accommodate English flowers and flower beds and walkways. At the far end I came to the glasshouse, a miniature Crystal Palace, with the annual Republic Day flower show in full swing. Around the periphery of the Lal Bagh, nurseries clustered, meeting the needs not only of locals but also of patrons from all over India. It has often been said that the English are a nation of gardeners, with a passion for plants and flowers surpassing that of all other people. "Our England is a garden," wrote Rudyard Kipling. They are also a nation of empire builders, with Kipling in the forefront. Wherever they went, they took with them as part of their cultural baggage their love of gardens and their certainties about what a garden should look like. Nowhere was this more evident than in India. It was one thing to show off tropical exotics in English conservatories or even coax them to grow outside for a season, quite another matter to live in the midst of these exotics in all their terrifying luxuriance. The farther from home one ventured, the more one longed for familiar cowslips and hollyhocks and Michaelmas daisies,

for well-trimmed lawns and neat flowerbeds. Much has been written about architecture and imperialism, little about gardens and imperialism, perhaps because gardens are far more ephemeral and harder to document, perhaps because they seem less serious. And yet almost two decades ago, the garden historian Charles Quest-Ritson pointed out that the history of the gardens of the Raj remained to be written. The present work is intended as a first step in telling the story of the gardens Britons created, or attempted to create, for themselves in India. The gardens are as varied as the characters in the story, from viceroys and their wives to unremembered officials (and their wives) in the remote reaches of the mofussil to professional botanists, soldiers, and retirees. The reader will find the text liberally seasoned with quotations from the wealth of memoirs and letters they have left behind in order to let their own voices be heard. To be sure, other imperial powers imposed their gardens on subject lands as well, but it was the British who came to paint most of the world red and whose gardens had the most profound effect. In the end they left a lasting horticultural mark on India, just as India did on them.