



# Noah's Garden: Restoring the Ecology of Our Own Backyards

*Sara Bonnett Stein*

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Topic - Gardening. The author's "wonderful book tells of her conversion from a high-style conventional gardner into an excellent field ecologist and a visionary with plans for ending the harreness of America's sub-subdivisions."

## Noah's Garden: Restoring the Ecology of Our Own Backyards Details

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# From Reader Review Noah's Garden: Restoring the Ecology of Our Own Backyards for online ebook

## **LisaKaren says**

Picked up for fifty cents at a Friends of the Library book sale...So far I love it.

So to update, like so many would be great books, this one started and ended well but got a bit too long winded in the middle. Lots of good theories about creating habitat within the confines of our existing communities were muddled up when she began to outline the transformation of her own extensive New England property. Perhaps I just lost my way among all the unfamiliar flora, since I am a west coaster on a tiny suburban lot. I did enjoy her small observations throughout; the arrivals of various critters, the changes of season are beautifully described and illustrated.

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## **Rainbowgardener says**

This is a wonderful book on the importance of urban/suburban backyards in sustaining our eco-system. Given continuing population growth, we can't really avoid further habitat loss, but even in cities, we can provide some habitat to sustain native plants, insects, animals, and a healthy diverse ecosystem. She has a wonderful vision of suburbia where the wooded edges of my backyard flow (unfenced) into the wooded edges of my neighbors backyard, creating corridors. Very good on the science of why it is so important to plant native species and work on eliminating as much of the invasive exotics as we can. Beautifully written, lovely prose that is totally engaging.

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## **Troy says**

I was thoroughly impressed with everything Stein had to say in this book. Noah's Garden is essentially a testimonial of someone who went from being a typical ornamental gardener to a stewardess of ecological health. What Stein did to her yard is an inspiration that is only now beginning to catch on. The fact that this book was written in the 90's makes this even more impressive.

I aspire to have a yard like Stein's, and feel that it is not only environmentally responsible, but much more practical as well. I have always wondered why we spend so much time mowing lawns that see little to no use, and now I realize that you don't have to live that way.

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## **Adam says**

Less a how-to and more a belle-lettres ode to native habitat gardening. Stein does an excellent job sharing her experiences developing her backyard into a near-mimic of the wild forests of New England, with particular joy to be found in her intellectual explorations, branching from every bird species to ten plants, from every plant to ten insects, from each insect to 10 more insects, and ending up with both a biodiverse back yard and an intimate knowledge of the food webs and seasonal rounds that make it run.

In practical terms, then, what is most helpful here is to see the steps Stein took. Building from small pieces and following her own whims and synchronicities. and watching her perspective on the greater landscape change as she learns. These are some of the best aspects of natural history, and restoration is perhaps the most in-depth way to learn natural history, since it is practiced daily, not on an annual vacation to a Park or whenever the mood to walk strikes us.

Tallamy's *Bringing Nature Home: How Native Plants Sustain Wildlife in Our Gardens* would probably serve as a much better practical introduction, and it supplements Stein's readings well theoretically, too. I've also found Packard's *The Tallgrass Restoration Handbook: For Prairies, Savannas, and Woodlands* to be the most helpful in practical terms. And the internet.

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### **Stephen Kiernan says**

This book changed how I landscape around my home. Less work, more pleasure, more birds, more variety.

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### **Noah says**

I came across this title when searching for books that would help me in planting a garden and landscaping my yard using native plants. I was probably suckered by the title which plays to my occasional bouts of megalomania. But in all seriousness, this was a very fulfilling read.

Sara Stein's narrative approach to what could be a dull topic is very engaging and convicting. Although her home and acreage are in New England, it definitely gave me some ideas for here in Michigan...and potentially even for New Mexico some day. I don't expect to ever own a pond in my backyard, but there are certainly other things that I can do to restore the ecology of my own backyard.

Suburbia has created a gaping hole in the landscapes that native flora and fauna need to survive. If we each do our part to restore corridors for these creations, they may survive for the next generations. Sara's stories about the frogs and box turtles that she encountered as a child, but hasn't seen in years are saddening. It makes me wonder if puddles after the August rains in New Mexico still teem with polywogs, or if Jonah will ever be able to catch a garter snake in his backyard. I hope so.

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### **Jamie says**

Sara Stein documents her journey from being a conventional American gardener to a naturalist, ecologist and native-habitat restorer. Along the way there are wonders to behold and lessons to learn.

First a sample of one of the wonders: have you ever considered the life cycle of the aphid? Aphids are polymorphous, viviparous and parthenogenetic. Let's break that down.

Polymorphous: different generations have different body shapes.

Viviparous: they give birth to live young.

Parthenogenetic: they reproduce without fertilization. (They also reproduce with fertilization).

It get's stranger, but I won't go further into the aphids here.

Now for one of those lessons. Here's a quote from the book

How much water does it take to quench a butterfly's thirst? Give a dove a bath? Provide a laying place for toads? No more than a puddle.

But where are the puddles? Where are the dirt roads that you splashed in during your youth? Probably paved over with excellent drainage. The sad truth is that we've improved away our toads, doves and butterflies.

The problem with ecological restoration is that it takes education, whereas putting in grass, dousing it with water, and mowing it every week takes no thought.

Noah's Garden is a wonderful read with an important message.

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### **J.Aleksandr Wootton says**

The day is not far off when we will be forced to admit that suburbs are bad for us.

Its symptoms are varied, but the root problem can be stated simply: suburbia encourages connections neither with our neighbors, nor with the land. Ecology is sterilized by permanent real-estate-listing-style landscapes; community is sterilized by automatic garage-door openers; time, energy, daylight, and resources are wasted on long commutes; genuine interaction is discarded in favor of inarticulate posturings, silent aesthetic consensus, and denial.

I could sum up, and thereby dismiss, *Noah's Garden* with brief sentences. I could say it's about the advantages of native-plant gardening. I could say it exposes the divorce between high-maintenance horticultural gardening and the needs of local ecosystems. I could say it chronicles the author's journey of exploration and conversion from "traditional" gardener to backyard conservationist, conveying a staggering - and *wonderful* - amount of ecological knowledge along the way; but I would not be doing Sara Stein's book justice.

In *Noah's Garden*, Stein has given us nothing less than a blueprint for the redemption of the suburbs. I cannot recommend this book strongly enough to anyone who is caretaker of "a bit of earth."

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### **SusanD says**

Terrific book - should be required reading for anyone remotely interested in birds, gardening, and/or nature and wildlife.

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### **Jen says**

I thought I was really going to like this book about "restoring the ecology of our own backyards," especially considering that, having just bought a new house, we are starting a backyard from scratch. However, I found it repetitive and unorganized, and I ended up mostly skimming the last two chapters. I realize that this was

intended as a story of how Stein and her husband manage their lot rather than a how-to book, but I found the structure of the book confusing. I wish she had defined at the outset what she considers the true ecology of her area and what her land management goals are. Sometimes it seems like she wants to restore the land to what it was like in the 1800s, but then she points out that even then the land had been tampered with by settlers and even Native Americans. At what point does a transplanted species become a native plant? I felt the book lacked a vision and focus. Basically what I learned is that, what we've done so far (planted a Colorado spruce, a Norway maple and some grass) is "wrong" -- at least in Stein's eyes. Oh, well.

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### **Ashlynn says**

Inspiring and informative! Tallamy introduced me to the importance of native plants and ecosystem gardening, and Stein's book provided even better context and answers to many of my "I wonders." My worry that this book would somehow be a rehash of the others I've read was proven completely unfounded. It may be an older, longer, less flashy book (alas, there are only a scattering of illustrations--and no native garden photographs!), but it's probably the best I've read so far.

It's thanks to people like Tallamy, Stein, and the local ecosystem gardeners I've met that I now look at tidy lawns and invasive-crowded traditional gardens as, in Stein's words, "an appalling blankness."

If you own a piece of land, no matter how small, give this book a try. It's eye opening.

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### **Sandy D. says**

This was written in 1993, so it is actually a bit dated in terms of the trend towards using native plants in your garden & yard. It is also a bit depressing - despite the fact that it's cool to have jack-in-the pulpit or marsh marigold in your yard (and there are now plenty of places to buy native plants), the basic trend towards huge subdivisions with acres of sterile lawn, white gravel, and a few isolated trees and run of the mill shrubs like gas-station yews seems to have prevailed.

Stein isn't too preachy, and "Noah's Garden" is well-written and sometimes humorous, but it isn't exactly a super fast read.

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### **Brandon says**

I was tentative buying this book, thinking it might be some religiously angled book, even though I didn't notice any such thing when leafing through it in the bookstore. That used book shop seems to be a bit heavy on the Christian literature so I wasn't sure... but I bought it anyways. Glad I did. There's a lot worthwhile in this book. At the very least it's an interesting read about one woman's attempt to create a natural, native garden from her former, more conventional one. But there are long musings in each chapter, each of which tends to be related to one aspect of her land and its transition (say, about lawns, or wetland ecology), that give a ton of fascinating facts about each topic. It's inspiring me as I tinker about in a small garden, putting in native plants and such. I feel this book gives me ideas, and is a place to start, with helpful stuff in the appendices too, as far as books to check out and such.

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## **Maggie says**

Excellent book about planting native plants and designing landscapes so as to attract and sustain wildlife.

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I find that I need to re-read this book every so often. It speaks to me in a way that I can't quite articulate. I love puttering in my garden - and though I certainly don't hew to an all native plant palette, I do try to plant natives, and plant fruiting shrubs that the birds will like (and the deer won't). Here's a quote:

"I want us as a culture to depart from the old tradition of evaluating land according to what can be extracted from it as commodity or abstracted from it as social asset and turn instead toward a new tradition of valuing land by the life it harbors."

Not only does that speak to the issue of lawn/no lawn, and other issues in designing & cultivating a little suburban plot, it sweeps the bigger issues under the same umbrella - fracking, strip mining, poisoned waterways. We need to treat the earth better - in small ways and in big ones.

My introduction to Sara Stein was her obituary, in the New York Times in 2005. It was shortly after we'd bought our house, and the obit stood out - not only was it headlined "Garden Advocate for Use of Native Plants", but it turned out that she lived not far from us. I'm sorry not to have met her, but grateful that she lives on via her book. It's become talismanic for me. Re-read every couple of years, absorb, think, and plant *cornus racimosa* and nurture the chokecherry tree.

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## **Ann says**

A first hand restoration of a rural yard. A process of discovery without any easy answers. One of the first proponents of wildlife corridors.

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