

Glorious Gardens

People need gardens for aesthetic, practical, even therapeutic reasons. Many artists paint gardens: Joan Miro painted a neatly organized Spanish vegetable garden; Vincent Van Gogh and Camille Pissarro left records of gardens near Paris; Henri Rousseau's garden was an imagined, tropical fantasy. Alan Gussow drew with sensitivity about his garden experiences; Blaine, Burchfield, Renoir, and Monet each painted their own garden idea. Through such artworks, students become aware of plants and gardens, their importance and beauty.

OBJECTIVES

Students will:

- study a variety of vegetable and floral garden images from seed catalogs, photographs, and artists' works
- become familiar with artists who draw and paint gardens
- create two artworks that show actual or imaginary gardens in pastels: 1) a close-up of individual plants; and 2) an impression of an entire garden

ART EXEMPLARS

Alan Gussow, *Putting Up Summer*, 1996. Pastel on paper.

Alan Gussow, *A Foggy Morning in Alan Chadwick's Garden*, 1992. Pastel on paper.

Charles Burchfield, *Flower Garden and Pillar of Clouds*, 1962. Watercolor.

Nell Blaine, *October's Bright Day*, n.d.. Oil on canvas.

Joan Miro, *Vegetable Garden with Donkey*, 1918. Oil on canvas.

Claude Monet, *The Artist's Garden at Vetheuil*, 1880. Oil on canvas.

Pierre Auguste Renoir, *Monet Painting in His Garden*, 1873. Oil on canvas. www.artchive.com/artchive/R/renoir/monet_painting.jpg.html

Henri Rousseau, *Woman Walking in an Exotic Forest*,

1905. Oil on canvas. www.dl.ket.org/webmuseum/wm/paint/auth/rousseau/rousseau.femme-exotique.jpg

RESOURCES

Bjork, C. (1987). *Linnea in Monet's Garden*. R & S Books.

Burnie, D. (1989). *Plant* (Eyewitness Books). New York: Knopf.

Gussow, A., (1972). *A Sense of Place: The Artist and the American Land*. New York: Saturday Review Press and Friends of the Earth.

Gussow, J. (2002). *This Organic Life: Confessions of a Suburban Homesteader*. New York: Chelsea Green.

Sawin, M. (2008). *Alan Gussow, A Painter's Nature*. New York: Hudson Hills Press.

Sawin, M. (1998). *Nell Blaine, Her Art and Life*. New York: Hudson Hills Press.

Waters, A. (2009). *Edible Schoolyard, A Universal Idea*. Chronicle Books.

Wildenstein, D. *Monet's Years at Giverny: Beyond Impressionism*. New York: Harry Abrams, 1995.

www.gardenguides.com

www.lagardencouncil.org

www.oasisnyc.net/gardens/resources

ABOUT THE ARTIST

Alan Gussow

At 21, Alan Gussow (1931-1998) was the youngest artist to win the *Prix de Rome*. Later, he helped set up the art department at the Parsons School of Design, and taught at Sarah Lawrence College, the University of Massachusetts, and the University of California at Santa Cruz.

Gussow's early interest in the environment led him to speak at legislative hearings on the importance of artful environments over damaging developments. By establishing criteria for evaluating scenic and natural beauty, he was able to contest the building of a power plant near Storm King Mountain in the Hudson Valley; Storm King later became a sculpture garden. He also convinced the National Park Service to initiate an "Artists in Residence" program, and served as the first artist in residence at Cape Cod National Seashore. Eventually, he left teaching to devote more time to environmental issues and to art.

His first book, *A Sense of Place: The Artist and the American Land* (1972), was a collection of work by artists who had a special affinity for particular places. A later book, *The Artist as Native: Reinventing Regionalism* (1996) continued a similar theme. Sawin's book (see Resources) shows the full range of Gussow's work, especially his brilliant, later pastels.

The garden Gussow and his wife created was his natural world, and it was his unique vision, skill, passion, and love of nature that enabled him to capture in paint or pastel the movement and excitement of daily garden life. For Charles Burchfield and Arthur Dove, art involved all the senses, and Gussow used them all as well. It was the action and essence of planting, composting, growing, and harvesting; the crackling frost, the heat waves of summer, the bursting buds of spring, and the deep respect for the earth that inspired this artist, and ultimately his viewers. John Muir has been called a shaman for the environment; perhaps Gussow was a shaman for art and his natural environment.



Alan Gussow, *Putting Up Summer*, 1996. Pastel on paper, 38 x 50". Courtesy of Babcock Galleries, New York.

MATERIALS

- oil pastels (recommended for younger students)
- watercolors (for older students)
- #2 line brush, #12 round brush
- water container
- paper towels
- white watercolor or construction paper 9 x 12"
- practice paper
- photographs of vegetables and vegetable gardens from nursery catalogs, or actual vegetables (consider no-longer-saleable vegetables from local grocery store)
- photographs of common animals

MOTIVATING DISCUSSION

- How does Gussow's drawing differ from realistic plant illustration?
- Why might Gussow like using bright, unrealistic colors?
- How does working with pastels differ from working in watercolors? Which do you prefer and why?
- How can you tell it is a summer garden? What feeling do you get from the painting?
- Discuss small animals that might live in a city garden.

MOTIVATING EXPRESSION

1. In two exercises, show how you would draw the action of: a duck swimming, a bird flying, plants growing, rain, wind, and summer heat.

2. Bring interesting vegetables and fruits to class and have students draw two quick full-page color sketches on 9 x 12" paper, one item to a page, touching at least two sides of the paper. Then draw an arranged still life of fruits and vegetables. Bring a bowl, plastic forks, dressing; the class can make a salad of the still-life, then eat it.

3. Sketch an individual plant in a school garden or other garden on site. Then sketch an entire garden. If working outside is not possible, work from photographs.

4. Have students, while standing up, make two practice pages (using 12 x 18" newsprint paper, #12 round brush, watercolors) and experiment with different kinds of lines to draw a garden animal: insect, turtle, possum, wood rat, garter snake, frog.



Student work, grade 4.



Student work, grade 4.



Student work, grade 4.



Student work, grade 4.

ECO AWARENESS

- Define garden. Make a list of different kinds of gardens (*vegetable, flower, rose, succulent, cactus, formal, Japanese, English, bonsai, orchid*). Why are gardens important?
- What shrubs or bushes have you seen? (rose bushes, topiary, hedge, for example)

What vegetables would you plant in a garden? What kinds of flowers would you plant?

- Make a list of things to think about when planting flowers, vegetables, or shrubs (*eventual size, color, shape, preference for sun or shade, hot or cold, wet or dry, winter or summer, colors desired in seasonal blooming*).
- How would you go about planning a garden? Decide its function (recreation, beauty/decoration, entertaining, attracting wildlife, growing food). How much maintenance can you do? What is the climate, available water? Structures needed (pool, bench, gate)? How much money can you spend?
- What is the difference between a gardener and a landscape architect?

- How are bushes important? (*provide beauty to a landscape with fall colors or spring blossoms, act as a fence to give privacy, line a path or driveway with decorative shapes*)
- How are worms, flies, snakes, lizards, spiders, birds important to the garden ecosystem?

ECO ACTIVITIES

- See student gardens: www.atlanticava.org/webandcamsites/childrensgardening.html
- How and why would you start a school garden? What might you learn? Who could help? How might you pay for it? (Students in fifth grade or above could participate in creating an actual garden while learning about the nutrition, food cycle, sustainable agriculture, and community gardening.)
- Investigate garden organizations such as Citysprouts (www.citysprouts.org) that help develop gardens in collaboration with public school communities. A middle school, using Alice Water's book, *Edible Schoolyard*, planned, constructed a school garden, studied gardens and food, raised, cooked, and ate the fruits of their labors.