

# Drab, Fallow Winter Means It's Time for Gardeners to Dig Into Great Books

Thursday, December 13, 2012

By Tovah Martin

Who has time to read during the growing season? Besides a quick plunge into the pages of a reference book (Are scillas rodent-proof? What is the hardiness zone of *Muhlenbergia capillaris*? What's the name of the *astrantia* cultivar that reblooms?), finding a spare moment to savor a juicy book is not going to happen when the weeding rush is on. But now is your chance, and there are lots of good reads to dive into. Can you think of a better gift for your brothers and sisters of the spade? What you read during the off-season (when you have time to lay devious plans) can totally alter your path when the growing season finally rolls around again. In the meantime, slip out of those work boots, snuggle your hardworking back into a soft, cushy sofa, and start turning pages. This is the season to touch base.

## **The Layered Garden**

**by David L. Culp**

**(Timber Press, 2012)**

The Layered Garden sparked this column's winter-reading spin. There are gardening books that are a delight to browse lightly through, and then there are great reads that you delve deep into to become a better gardener. This book is both. What can I say? David Culp is brilliant. I hang on every bit of wisdom he shares, and he's a sharing type of guy. The sideline here is that I recently visited his garden. It was late autumn, the Pennsylvania garden that he tends together with his partner, Michael Alderfer, was slipping into its season of slumber (although the garden never really sleeps) but that didn't dilute the experience. At any interlude, Brandywine Cottage is magic. What Culp and Alderfer do on 2 acres will make you drool. You want to tuck the garden into your back pocket and carry it home with you. Barring that, you can now leaf through the book. Rob Cardillo's photographs capture the splendor and glory. But also, David Culp manages that nearly impossible feat of conveying his love affair with the land in the pages of "The Layered Garden."

That said, don't dismiss this as a flip-through. I hang on every word Mr. Culp writes—this fellow is the real deal. "The Layered Garden" is not one of those preachy books about a blemish-free garden. Not only does Mr. Culp confess to all his blips (and let's face reality—every garden has flaws), but he tackles some tough territory. For example, there's the view of the neighbor's very-exposed pool to maneuver around and the roses' inevitable midsummer nakedness to hide. My copy is stuffed full of sticky notes marking a narrative that wrestles issues and offers answers. Before you've really penetrated the book beyond the initial chapters, Mr. Culp has already given lists of plants that will thrive under black walnut (he's been reading my mind) and described novel ways to draw out a perspective in limited space (hint: with continuity). But the real theme of this book is bigger than plant tidbits. He talks about the full experience. Who doesn't want a garden that keeps its enthralling momentum going throughout the year? What Mr. Culp describes is a garden that fulfills on all levels: from the ground up, over a protracted period of time, throughout the seasons, and—even more importantly—to tingle every intellectual, spiritual, and aesthetic cell of your being.

URL: <http://www.countytimes.com/articles/2012/12/13/life/doc50ca424d1939e502366749.prt>

© 2012 The Litchfield County Times, a **Journal Register** Property