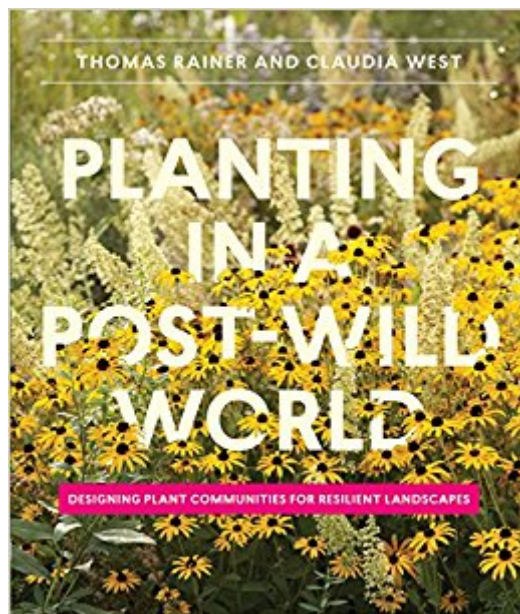




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# Planting In A Post-Wild World: Designing Plant Communities For Resilient Landscapes



## Synopsis

“As practical as it is poetic. . . an optimistic call to action.” —Chicago Tribune Over time, with industrialization and urban sprawl, we have driven nature out of our neighborhoods and cities. But we can invite it back by designing landscapes that look and function more like they do in the wild: robust, diverse, and visually harmonious. *Planting in a Post-Wild World* by Thomas Rainer and Claudia West is an inspiring call to action dedicated to the idea of a new nature—a hybrid of both the wild and the cultivated—that can flourish in our cities and suburbs. This is both a post-wild manifesto and practical guide that describes how to incorporate and layer plants into plant communities to create an environment that is reflective of natural systems and thrives within our built world.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

“This is the universal how-to guide to sustainable landscaping we have all been waiting for. A masterful accomplishment!” —Doug Tallamy, award-winning author of *The Living Landscape* and *Bringing Nature Home* “A real-world guide for creating beautiful, ecologically connected landscapes. There is not a designer or property owner that would not benefit from this approach.” —Larry Weaner, APLD, founder of New Directions in the American Landscape “A groundbreaking guide that lays out an alternative to traditional horticulture: designed plantings that function like naturally occurring plant communities. As practical as it is poetic, this is an optimistic call to action.” —Chicago Tribune “Sometimes one comes across a landscape design book

that simply demands to be read from cover to cover without pause. *Planting in a Post-Wild World* is one such book. Part ecological manifesto, part how-to planting guide, and part artistic statement, *Post-Wild* is a wonderful and refreshing addition to the world of landscape and planting design literature.

• "NYBG's Plant Talk • "We have driven nature out of our cities" but this need not be a one-way ticket. Thomas Rainer and Claudia West, two leading voices in ecological landscape design, present an optimistic call-to-action dedicated to the idea of a new nature—a hybrid of the wild and the cultivated that can flourish in cities and suburbs. The authors speak with conviction and authority, and offer a practical blueprint for the future.

• "The English Garden • "In this award-winning book, landscape architect Thomas Rainer and landscape consultant Claudia West present a groundbreaking new philosophy of planting design inspired by the way plants work together in the wild.

• "American Gardener • "The book outlines how to design and maintain an ecological landscape, and does so in beautifully clear, fluid language that is easy to read and absorb. . . . Let us follow *Planting in a Post-Wild World* into a future where humans respectfully manage landscapes for our comfort, our quality of life, and our very existence, while acknowledging (in our treatment of them) the inherent value of these living communities.

• "Garden Rant • "Every once in a while a book comes along that can truly be called a "game-changer"™ and sets people buzzing. This book fits the bill—this is an important book capturing the spirit of the time, and injects new energy into the field of nature-inspired design with plants. It will become indispensable for all garden designers and landscape architects, as well as enthusiastic and knowledgeable gardeners and horticulturalists who wish to extend the creative potential of planting design.

• "The Garden • "Most garden books simply confirm or amplify what we already know and like about horticulture, but this intelligent and thought-provoking book by Thomas Rainer and Claudia West is the rare exception. • "Other writers have suggested basing garden designs on the plant communities that thrive in the wild, but this may be the first time the theory and execution of this idea has been laid out so neatly.

• "Country Gardens • "An excellently written, wonderfully illustrated guide to designing, planting, and managing plant installations—The book will interest landscape architects and horticulturalists as well as more casual home gardeners.

• "Choice • "This lavishly illustrated manifesto applies broadly, to everything from water features to rooftops and vast acreages to urban backyards. Using detailed examples and simple graphics, Rainer and West make a convincing case for rethinking our relationship to plant design.

• "Architectural Digest Online • "Two of the leading voices in ecological landscape design set out to celebrate and explain how planting design that recreates and reworks natural plant communities can create landscapes that are resilient, beautiful and diverse. The concepts are

explained clearly with well-illustrated examples. Rainer's lyrical, passionate, and persuasive writing could convince even the most skeptical that it's the right thing to do. "Gardens Illustrated" best book of the year

The future of planting design. This groundbreaking guide presents a powerful alternative to traditional horticulture: designed plantings that function like naturally occurring plant communities. Thomas Rainer and Claudia West, two leading voices in ecological landscape design, reveal how plants fit together in nature and how to use this knowledge to create landscapes that are resilient, beautiful, and diverse. As practical as it is inspiring, this book is an optimistic manifesto for the post-wild world of planting design.

After the long tyranny of the lawn and hedge, there's a revolution underway. We want to replace the old paradigm of lifeless landscapes with gardens which not only delight the eye, but heal the land. We want and need gardens that function on many levels: gardens which can capture water, build soil, support pollinators, preserve native species, etc. The problem is that for all of our good intentions--us lawn remover types--we don't necessarily know how to replace the lawn and hedge paradigm with something both attractive and sustainable. We have precious few good models to follow. And for all our good intentions, sometimes our efforts fail. Now we have a guide. Authors Thomas Rainer and Claudia West show us how to mimic nature's patterns to craft landscapes based on cooperative communities of plants in order to build resilience and biodiversity. They ask us to design gardens imbued with the virtue of wildness. At the same time, they tell us how to frame and manage that wildness so the landscape looks planned and cared-for--thus avoiding unpleasant conflicts with neighbors and local authorities who may not be as enthusiastic about the welfare of native pollinators as you might be. *Planting in Post-Wild World* is not a simple how-to book. In fact, there's nothing simple about it at all--but it is very clear. Its goals are ambitious, and while it might seem like it was written for designers, it can be used by a determined home gardener. It has to be, because there aren't that many designers out there working this way yet. And while I firmly believe in the value of investing in professional advice, we can't all afford it. Basically, all of us need to be designers now, because the need is great and the stakes are high. This is an excellent book, destined to be a classic. I can't recommend it enough.

I picked up Rainer and West's book at the library recently, having read some favorable reviews here

and on Garden Rant and elsewhere. I have a somewhat different take on it. I thought it's evangelism for an ecologically-focused gardening was, in general, a welcome antidote to the horticultural industry's single-minded focus (responding, in all fairness, to client desires) to promote "Flower Power" by marketing the most highly ornamental, often new and unproven hybrids, without consideration of their adaptability locally, and frequently requiring extensive use of need to pesticides, herbicides, and fungicides. I think the book should be read with great caution, however, because its prescriptions for planting and maintenance require a wealth of experience and a detailed knowledge of plant husbandry very rare among self-taught gardeners and even uncommon among professional garden designers. There are also a number of what, to me, seemed peculiar assertions in the book about the natural world. "In nature, plants have an order and visual harmony," where traditional gardens are "arbitrary assortments" of plants chosen for "personal preference." To anyone who has grappled with a laurel-infested swamp, or cut a path through second growth mix of hardwoods, or fought with the woody invasives in an abandoned meadow, or a setting overtaken by highly aggressive honeysuckle, such broad statements about the harmony, balance, and inherent beauty of the natural world seem romantic in the extreme. And as for "personal preference," what is a garden after all other than a place that gives the gardener great joy. A knowledgeable gardener may well choose to temper his passions with an eye toward environmental sustainability (which is undoubtedly a good thing), but it is not the only thing. Of greatest concern, perhaps, is the intimation (often stated forthrightly) that the design of plant communities can be achieved, practically, with modest help. One of the most enthusiastic proponents of ecological gardening, Larry Weaner, was recently quoted in the Washington Post stating "It is difficult, if not impossible, for gardeners who want to move away from traditional garden models to find the labor and advice geared to ecological gardening." Many of the design goals promoted by Rainer are identical to those of the great plantsman, William Robinson, who in *The Wild Garden*, set forth many of the same principles -- naturalized plantings, using plants from the same climates (if not the same habitat), layered, with a focus on clear, defined edges to minimize chaos and impose some measure of structure. Gertrude Jekyll, although a fan of Robinson, cautioned that his designs, if they could be achieved at all, required much "coaxing and persuading." The garden writer C.W. Earle was even more critical, noting that wild gardening is an illusion and a snare, "requiring the most judicious planting with consummate knowledge and experience of plants." Rainer and West do acknowledge, at times, the resource and maintenance demands presented by their approach. They concede that choosing regionally appropriate plants "takes a high degree of plant knowledge." In portions of the book where they provide specific advice (in contrast to those in which they rhapsodize about the natural

world), they do caution that ecological gardening "requires a rich collaboration with contractors and garden staff" and "complex plant communities only persist if designers and land managers collaborate," and strongly recommend ongoing "consulting with soil scientists to read and interpret soil tests," and the use of plant designers (like Rainer and West) as part "of a plantings life as regular and ongoing consultants." Basically, it seems to me, they are talking about New York's High Line, or the Longwood Meadow Garden, or other institutional or municipal gardens with a staff of volunteers and long-term consulting contracts with a "garden design firm." Recognizing the difficulties inherent in ecological gardening given the diversity of natural communities, they also try to provide some practical design guidelines. They walk the reader through various models and taxonomies used to organize and design plant communities worldwide and propose an alternative approach based on what they call "archetypal landscapes" -- grasslands, woodlands and scrublands, forests, and edges, together with some design concepts (functional, seasonal, structural layers) to apply to various settings. These are helpful, on balance, but also fairly vague. The archetypes seem to revere a pre-Colombian world, not the suburban or highly urban world many of us live in. The authors correctly say that plants should enhance a sense of place and memory, but that often means -- to many gardeners -- the peonies of their grandmother, or the favorite Southern camellia, or even the highly drought-sensitive magenta azalea -- not the remnants of a midwestern Great Plain. When the authors talk about exploring a site for its emotional resonance and directing one's attention to where a "dense thicket of existing shrubs may be used to line a path that opens into a sunny, low meadows" they seem to be talking about design advice for the high net-worth hedge fund manager wondering how to best disguise his helicopter pad at this house in the Hamptons. They're not talking about the middle class 100' foot lot with the neighbor's propane tank in the background, and the circle of earth left by the old above-ground swimming pool in the foreground..I tend to think that their goal is worthwhile. Maybe this book will be the progenitor for others for "the rest of us" -- who wish to make our backyard gardening more sustainable and beautiful, at reasonable cost.

This is a great book for those interested in how to design a garden that utilizes the best traits of plants for a naturalized appearance with minimal maintenance. It's a great read and incredibly informational. I love this book and look forward to sharing it with others.

Finally easy to apply method to create nature like environments in planting beds.

This is the only helpful text I have read as I'm trying to design a native no mow lawn/plant community. Even though most of it is way above my head I have benefited tremendously from this book

This book has gotten me back into the dirt. I'd recommend it to all my friends, but I think most of them are here already. Still, this is beautifully written and illustrated, and gives a great overview. Will I see a changed aesthetic in my lifetime? I really think I might.

This book is a must-read for anyone working to create a more-natural beautiful landscape. I have been muddling through with some success and some failures, but could not necessary put a finger on why one area was a success and others were lackluster. This book immediately clarified my struggles in a real, tangible way. While I had been trying to create a mixed landscape, I was pulling plants from all kind of different landscapes, resulting in a blend that neither functionally or aesthetically really worked. There have been plenty of pretty garden moments that has fostered wildlife, but my yard has still lacked any kind of real cohesion. It did not take long to understand my many mistakes and get inspired for spring!

Great resource for anyone planting a woodland garden, or any natural garden for that matter.

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