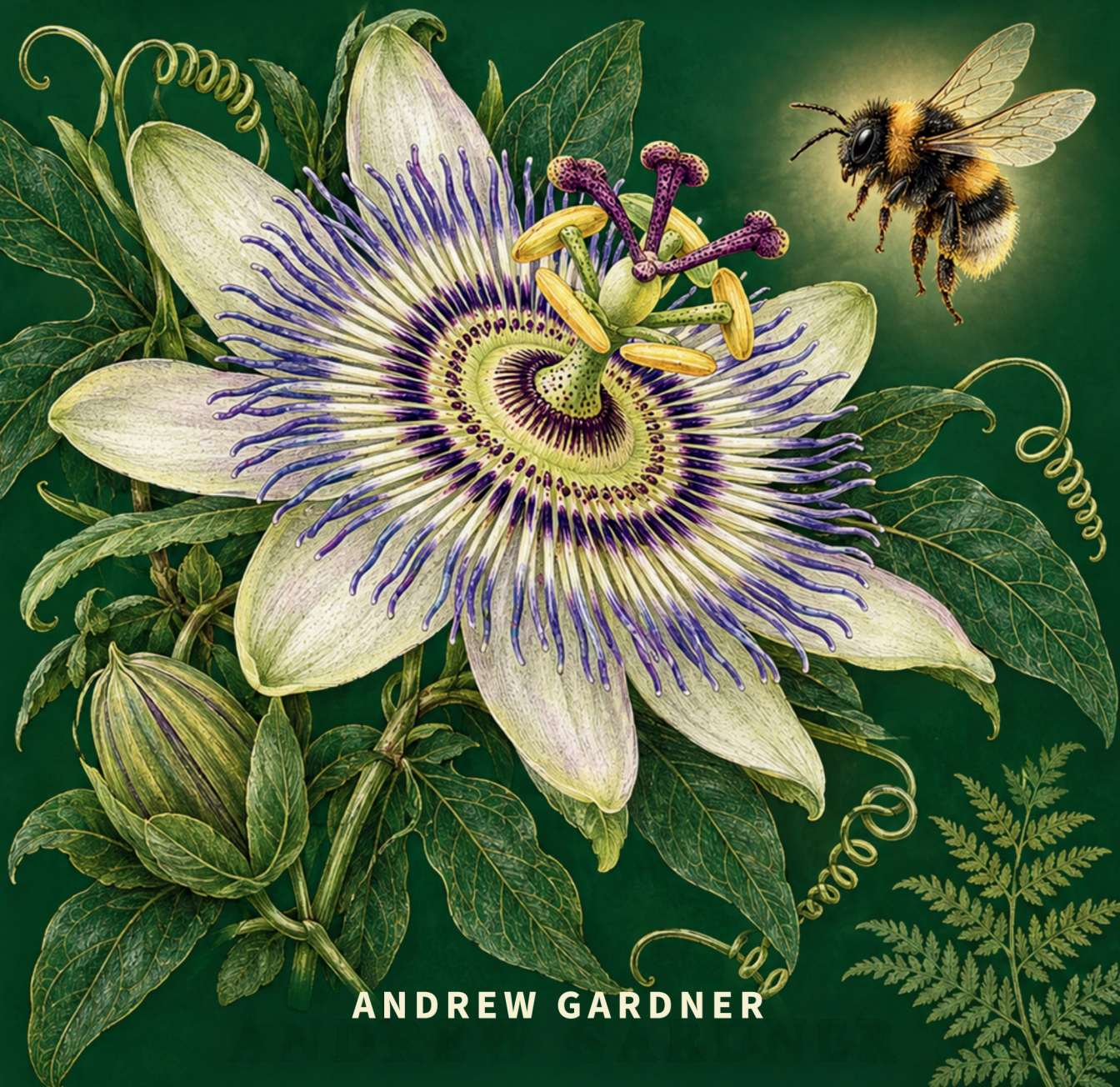


THE GARDEN IS STRANGER THAN YOU THINK

Plants, Myths & Hidden Histories



ANDREW GARDNER

The Garden Is Stranger Than You Think

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Andrew Gardner

Garden Above the City

Preview Sample

The closer you look at a garden, the less ordinary it becomes.

The Garden Is Stranger Than You Think

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The information in this book is provided for general education and enjoyment. Scientific knowledge, classifications, and records may change as new research becomes available. This book is not a substitute for professional horticultural, medical, or safety advice.

Sources and further reading are listed at the end of the book.

A Note from the Author

A garden can look familiar until we begin asking questions.

Why do some flowers smell like carrion? How can a plant count, move, generate heat, or survive almost completely dry? Why do the names of ordinary fruits and flowers preserve stories of explorers, emperors, myths, mistakes, and forgotten languages?

This book began with a simple idea: to gather the stories that make the world of plants feel strange again.

Its 508 entries move from unusual plant behaviour and the history of food to pollinators, famous gardens, gardening myths, record-breaking species, plant names, and the language of gardens. Some explain things you may have seen without noticing. Others uncover remarkable histories hidden inside a familiar flower, fruit, vegetable, or garden word.

The book is arranged for browsing rather than study. Open it anywhere. Read a single page or stay for an entire chapter. Follow the subjects that catch your attention, then return later and discover something different.

The material draws on botanical research, historical records, museum and garden archives, and other specialist sources. Complex subjects have been condensed for clarity, while scientific names, dates, and measurements have been retained where they matter. A note on sources and further reading appears at the end of the book.

I hope these pages make familiar plants look less ordinary and every garden feel a little larger.

Andrew Gardner Garden Above the City

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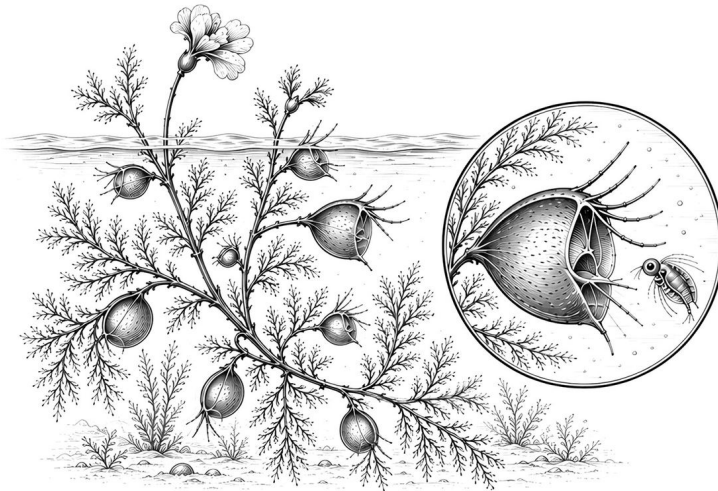
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A Carnivorous Plant Trap That Fires in Under a Millisecond



In water, bladderworts (*Utricularia*) actively pump water out of their tiny bladder-like traps, creating lower pressure and storing elastic energy. When trigger hairs are touched, the trapdoor can open in about 300–700 microseconds, and the prey is sucked in less than a millisecond. This is an active underwater suction trap. The mechanism is primed in advance, then released almost instantly when a small creature touches the sensory hairs.

The Passionflower's Fringe Is a Landing Pad for Bees



The colourful fringe at the centre of a passionflower is called the corona. It is more than decoration. In many species, its filaments guide bees to nectar and provide a landing platform. As a bee feeds below the raised centre, the anthers brush pollen onto its body.

A Pansy's Face Is Built Into Its Petals



The dark “face” of a pansy is not simply a splash of colour across the flower. Its pigments gather in specific areas of the petals, creating the familiar blotches and lines. The pattern develops as the flower grows, giving different varieties their own distinctive expressions.

Peonies Can Live for Decades



Peonies (*Paeonia spp.*) are long-lived perennials and can grow in the same place for many decades, often 50 years or more. They have been valued for centuries in gardens and culture, particularly in Asia, where they symbolise prosperity, honour and good fortune. With their large, showy blooms and remarkable longevity, peonies remain one of the most beloved garden flowers today.

Walled Gardens Protected Plants and Extended the Growing Season



Walled gardens have protected plants for centuries from cold winds, pests and harsh weather. Their walls create a warmer, sheltered environment that extends the growing season. Common on estates, monasteries and castles, they could contain fruit trees, vegetables, herbs and flowers. They also allowed more tender species to grow, often with glasshouses or other structures providing extra warmth.

Victorian Plant Hunting Brought New Species to British Gardens



In the 19th century, British plant hunters travelled worldwide in search of new and exotic plants, often exploring remote and dangerous regions. They collected seeds and living specimens for Britain, where plants such as rhododendrons, camellias and tree ferns became popular. Their work greatly expanded plant variety and transformed British gardens.

Explore More

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