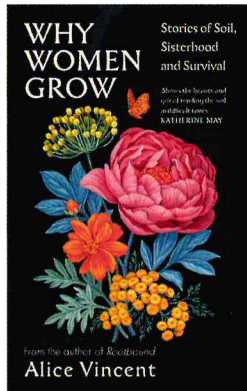


BOOK REVIEWS



WHY WOMEN GROW: STORIES OF SOIL, SISTERHOOD AND SURVIVAL
by Alice Vincent

Canongate, £16.99
ISBN 978-1838855437

Alice Vincent weaves her own gardening journey through women's narratives of change, connection and how we move into new ways of living.

Reviewer Charlotte Harris is a garden designer.

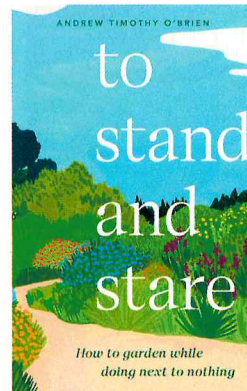
We all carry our own stories of what has drawn us to plants, to being closer to nature. My earliest memories are in our small garden with my mother, a single parent with a full-time job, and the garden as her tonic. It was the loss of her in my early twenties that fuelled my return to gardening after an adolescent absence. So it was with interest I opened the pages of Alice Vincent's follow-up book to *Rootbound*, her memoir of self-discovery and plants following her heartbreak and recovery. *Why Women Grow* is another journey from within; indeed perhaps the next chapter of that journey, as she contemplates how her life is changing – in love and with a new home, with marriage and motherhood on the horizon.

In calibrating these developments in her own identity and the fear of losing herself, Vincent is drawn to interviewing women who nurture garden spaces, to understand her place in the world, and her relationship with her own garden.

These are powerful and intimate tales of migration, recovery, identity, motherhood, loss and grief, set within growing spaces that are shared, private, public and institutional. The courage it takes for women to break ground both literally and figuratively, to make spaces on their own terms, is a strand that weaves through the book.

The conversations Vincent has with these women are thought-provoking; reader joins writer in being prompted to see things differently. A section on the late Bloomsbury group artist Vanessa Bell and her garden at Charleston in East Sussex was perhaps the only part of the book that felt gently disconnected from the eloquent exchanges with women in their garden spaces.

These are narratives of tenacity, perseverance and transformation. The stories of why women grow are intersectional and political, with a refreshing interrogation of the privilege of having access to a garden as well as the opportunity to garden.



TO STAND AND STARE: HOW TO GARDEN WHILE DOING NEXT TO NOTHING
by Andrew Timothy O'Brien

Dorling Kindersley, £16.99
ISBN 978-0241544013

Written by one who dares to think differently, this is a highly original and compelling exploration of the relationship between garden and gardener.

Reviewer Lia Leendertz is a garden writer.

Andrew Timothy O'Brien is a blogger and podcaster who has made his name online through thoughtful gardening musings and gorgeously moody photographs. A chance to hone your writing style away from the mainstream is never a bad thing, and in this case it has allowed O'Brien the chance to develop a unique voice.

This, his first book, feels fresh and gently radical. The central argument is the promotion of a low-intervention, highly thoughtful way of gardening that aims to create a beautiful place while also relieving the gardener of the guilt and (some of the) effort associated with gardening. His writing – a loosely linked collection of essays – is poetic, entertaining and hugely persuasive. I have rarely felt such kinship with the gardening I have found in books. It made me think, 'Yes, that is how I feel when I'm gardening.'

The garden O'Brien writes of feels exciting and dynamic, in constant growth and

impossible to ever catch up with, an absolute product of nature and very happy to go about its own business without any interference from us at all. Within it he places the gardener, with all of their foibles, weaknesses, memories, hopes and dreams. This is a book about this relationship, and how beautiful that compromise between wild and irrepressible nature and creative human can be. This is not gardening that seeks any kind of real mastery over its dominion, but rather gardening as 'holding the land at a tipping point', a recognition that we are only vaguely in charge, and a call to consider where we place ourselves on the spectrum of control freak to rewilder. What is really the basis of all of this is mindfulness, and a way for our gardens to nourish us as much as we nourish them. It is a manifesto for a new way of looking at your garden, perfect for this moment in time, and very appealing indeed.