

GOOD LIVING

Garden



A Garden With Lessons to Teach

For both landscape-design professionals and plant lovers, Stonecrop Gardens offers an education in beauty and horticulture.

PHOTOGRAPHED BY ADRIAN GAUT

IN AN ERA of low-maintenance gardens, Stonecrop Gardens, in Cold Spring in New York's Hudson Valley, stands out. "You've created the world's most labor-intensive garden," its eminent owner, the late Frank Cabot, once joked to its director, Caroline Burgess. Decades later, she still smiles at the memory—but is unapologetic about the work it entails. Such toil, after all, is the best way to teach.

Opened to the public in 1992, Stonecrop's 12 acres of display gardens showcase a cornucopia of the beautiful and rare. Perennials and annuals, an alpine collection, and specimen trees are planted with the harmony that only

sensitive design and constant attention can achieve. Such horticultural finesse would be unusual in a private garden—which is how Stonecrop, created by Cabot and his wife, Anne, began in the late 1950s. But in a public garden, it is astonishing.

Soon after its public opening, Burgess launched its School of Practical Horticulture. The popular short courses cover topics like bulb planting and trough building. Then there's the long course, a yearlong program for professionals and deeply committed enthusiasts, for which up to six applicants are selected each year. They work one-on-one

Clockwise from top left: Caroline Burgess, director of Stonecrop Gardens, inspects the beds in the enclosed flower garden, which is divided into a series of color-themed beds; each year the gardeners experiment with new plant and color combinations there. Warm-colored plants in yellows and

oranges are mixed with those in various shades of green; since this is a teaching garden, plants are identified by name. The potting shed is a flurry of activity—to keep it tidy, tools are hung in designated locations.

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Clockwise from top left: A whimsical terra-cotta teapot is planted with tiny succulents. In the potting shed, a student propagates begonia 'Little Brother Montgomery'; the students have a range of horticultural experience, with many in their 20s and 30s, though some are older. A moon window in the wisteria pavilion frames a view of the lake. Learning happens indoors as well: a lesson on seed structure in the well-stocked library. Plants are numbered for an identification quiz.

with Burgess and other master gardeners, learning all aspects of the propagation and cultivation of plants and the creation of garden spaces. Students keep diaries, live together in the gatehouse, receive a stipend—and inhale the bounty from the garden they help create.

Burgess based the training on her own. At age 13, she began a long apprenticeship with Rosemary Verey, the great English garden designer whose illustrious client list included Prince Charles. This was followed by a diploma from the Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew, the rare-plant center of the world. Apprenticeship and plant knowledge are key to Stonecrop's curriculum. Students absorb more than verbal instructions. Nearly lost arts—

the perfect angle at which to work a spade, how to stake plants with flair—are conveyed. The great variety of plants, from cabbages to katsura trees, is minutely observed through the journey from seed to seed.

The gardens themselves are the ultimate textbook. From the tiny blue Chilean crocus flowering in the pit house in spring to the fiery bronze of the dawn redwood grove in autumn, everything thrives. At year's end, students receive the Stonecrop certificate; many go on to become professional gardeners in private gardens or for prominent public institutions. But for even the casual visitor, a stroll through Stonecrop Gardens is itself a gardener's education. —Carol Williams

Seed Studies

Like Stonecrop (stonecrop.org), these institutions offer classes in horticulture.

FILOLI

Located in the San Francisco Bay Area, this property of the National Trust for Historic Preservation offers both a six-week apprenticeship and a 10-week internship. filoli.org.

NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN

Since 1919, the garden has been providing a range of horticultural classes. The esteemed School of Professional

Horticulture combines academics with in-the-field training. nybg.org.

MISSOURI BOTANICAL GARDEN

Established in 1983, the St. Louis Master Gardener Program melds community outreach and horticultural education. mobot.org.

LONGWOOD

The Philadelphia-area garden offers a tuition-free two-year professional gardener program. longwoodgardens.org.