



BULLETIN



A Modern Arcadia, Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr. and the Plans for Forest Hills Gardens by Susan L. Klaus

University of Massachusetts Press with Library of America
Landscape History.

208 pages. Many black and white photographs and plans

This handsome book clearly shows the many years that the author states were spent in accumulating the material and in writing and editing. It is the third volume in the Designers and Places Series and is intended for "both professionals and general readers." The name Olmsted is well known, but this is the first major project of Frederick Law Olmsted, Jr., who became a planner and landscape architect for the project conceived as an experiment by the Russell Sage Foundation.

Wealthy New Yorkers were moving to country estates to escape the crowding brought on by huge immigrant populations. Forest Hill Gardens was planned as a well-designed alternate housing for the middle class, only fifteen minutes from the city by the Long Island Railroad.

Non-New Yorkers will be familiar with the Forest Hills name today because of the tennis tournament there, and there is a remarkable old photograph of the village green lined with vintage automobiles during the U.S. Open.

The first part deals with the early life and education of the son of a well-known, demanding father. After his death, the firm, changed to Olmsted Brothers, lasted for the next sixty-three years.

At Forest Hills Gardens, "outdoor activities were very popular ... Gardening was a favored activity. The Women's Club offered lectures on the topic." The Olmsted firm was congratulated on "the planning and continuous succession of flowers" which were "a constant delight, nature and art brought into harmony."

In addition to being in charge of the overall development landscaping, the Olmsted firm prepared landscape plans for a number of private gardens and supervised other private plans. Olmsted maintained "It is the comprehensive master plan that is key to ensuring harmonious, beautiful and convenient residential communities." As

Klaus says, we have learned that "sprawl does not age gracefully."

"The opportunity to design every aspect for a community, and to have it built exactly as planned, was rare." And that, unfortunately, seems to still be the case. Klaus ends by writing, "Forest Hills Gardens is at once modern and classic, seemingly timeless." I found the book not only easy to read, but full of interesting information and observations, and wonderful photographs.

Louise Carter, GC of New Haven (CT), Zone II
Library Committee

A Gardener's Guide to Frost by Philip Hamden
Willow Creek Press. 2003

128 pages, 90 color photographs

Frost, personified by a first name, Jack, affects gardeners in over three-quarters of the earth's surface. Author Philip Hamden, who gardens in upper New York State along the Canadian border, has learned to think of Jack Frost as simply one more character in the fascinating drama of gardening.

In this slim volume he defines frost, describes the two different types — one caused by the cooling of the earth, the other by the arrival of a frigid air mass — and explains exactly how it damages plants (basically by dehydration). He suggests garden site considerations for extending the growing season before launching into a rather involved scientific approach to forecasting frost. Later chapters provide good practical advice for hardening off seedlings and fending off late spring frost (that's type-one frost, remember?) and for extending the growing season beyond the first few frigid air blasts.

Hamden limits his scope to vegetable growing and provides a useful chart showing frost tolerance for various garden vegetables. There is also a list of internet websites for weather information.

The outstanding photographs capture gardens and plants covered with icy crystals in rare moments of hoary beauty.

Ellen P. Morris, Short Hills GC (NJ), Zone IV
Chairman, Library Committee