

JEFFERSON'S  
*Living Legacy* The Revolutionary  
Garden of Monticello

COURTESY OF MONTICELLO/LEONARD PHILLIPS, PHOTOGRAPHER



Thomas Jefferson

COURTESY OF MONTICELLO

***W*e all know that Thomas Jefferson wrote the Declaration of Independence and that he was our third president, but how many know that he was a revolutionary gardener and America's first foodie?**

On his mountaintop at Monticello in Charlottesville, Virginia, Jefferson cultivated plants from all over the world, including more than 330 vegetable varieties, 170 fruit varieties and an ever-changing landscape of flowers. Jefferson mixed native umbrella magnolias with oriental chinaberry, native cardinal flower and Virginia bluebell with tulips and anemones, but his real accomplishment was his garden.

Jefferson carved the 1,000-foot garden out of the southern side of the

mountain on his 2,400-acre estate. It was a giant hanging garden that looked out over the Piedmont countryside, ingenious in its design so that it extended the growing months and optimized vegetable production.

"His garden became an Ellis Island, if you will, as new plants were brought literally from around the world," says Peter Hatch, director of gardens and grounds at Monticello. "It was an experimental laboratory where he would grow 25 varieties of pea, 30 varieties of cabbage."

Each spring, Monticello participates in Virginia's Historic Garden Week, and this year visitors will have even more to look forward to. In addition to free lectures and tours of the garden, this April Monticello will unveil a new, two-hour experiential tour of the gardens



that includes hands-on activities like planting, harvesting and sampling such spring crops as asparagus and baby root vegetables.

Monticello is also launching a new book by Peter Hatch, *A Rich Spot of Earth: Thomas Jefferson's Revolutionary Garden at Monticello*. "The book is primarily about the vegetable garden and the people who worked it, how the garden was taken care of," says Hatch. "But of course, the stars are the vegetables."

Hatch, who has been director of gardens and grounds at Monticello since

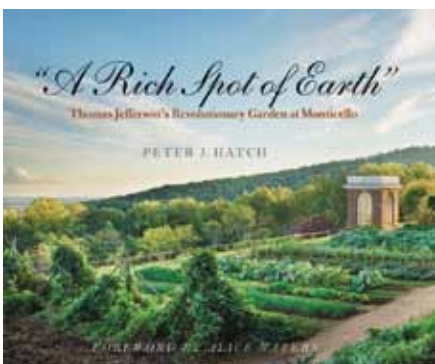
1977, is responsible for the historical restoration of Jefferson's gardens. He is also the founder of The Thomas Jefferson Center for Historic Plants whose mission is to preserve and distribute plants known in early American gardens so that Jefferson's gardening legacy lives on.

### Healthy Foodie

In an age of organic gardening, healthy eating and the slow food movement, many of Jefferson's ideas about gardening and eating may not seem revolutionary. But in his time, they certainly were.

Jefferson believed that healthy soil produced healthy plants that could withstand pests and illness. He also believed in eating lots of vegetables and using meat sparingly. He once wrote, "I have lived temperately, eating little animal food and that ... as a condiment for the vegetables which constitute my principal diet."

To support this healthy lifestyle, Jefferson had to significantly improve upon current gardening practices. During the 17th and 18th century, most gardens yielded very little in the warmest month, but Jefferson planted his garden



Above: Peter Hatch, director of gardens and grounds at Monticello, and his new book, *A Rich Spot of Earth: Thomas Jefferson's Revolutionary Garden at Monticello*



PHOTOS COURTESY OF MONTICELLO

# Dig This!

If you're interested in planting the seeds for a historic gardening season, consider visiting Monticello on these dates. You can gather some great tips from master gardeners, and take home vegetable, fruit and flower varieties that harken back to Jefferson's day.

**Center for Historic Plants  
Open House: March 31**

**Thomas Jefferson's Monticello  
Historic Garden Week:  
April 21-28**

For more information, visit  
[www.monticello.org](http://www.monticello.org)

strategically so that crops would harvest all throughout the summer.

Jefferson introduced many species of vegetable that were unfamiliar in his time, such as tomato, okra, eggplant, lima beans, peanuts and peppers. These vegetables thrived in the heat of summer, and made it possible to eat vegetables throughout the summer—something that we take for granted now, but that was groundbreaking in Jefferson's time.

## Bringing History to Life

In Charlottesville, residents often talk of Jefferson as if he is still alive and perhaps just in another room. After visiting Monticello, you may understand why.

Monticello is not just another dry museum tour—the emphasis is on personal stories and anecdotes that make Jefferson seem inspiring yet accessible and vastly likeable. Jefferson saw gardening not just as a means of growing food, but as a way of relating to others. There are accounts of Jefferson sowing seeds with his daughters and granddaughters, and of him waging healthy competitions

over cucumbers and peas with friends and neighbors.

"We can see his boyish enthusiasm even at 83," says Hatch. "He became obsessed with 6-foot-long cucumbers that he read about in a magazine. He sent away for seeds and distributed them to all his friends and held a competition to see who could grow the largest cucumbers."

But cucumbers were not the only plant that Jefferson waged friendly competition with—there was also an annual pea competition to see which of Jefferson's neighbors could bring peas to table first. The winner held a dinner party for all the participants with peas as the meal's star.

Jefferson's neighbor at Farmington Estate, George Divers, was a frequent winner of the annual pea competition, and one of Jefferson's best gardening buddies. Jefferson himself only won the pea competition once in 1815.

## They Have a House There, Too

If you need a break from the sun, the fresh mountain air and the riot of colorful flowers, Monticello offers tours

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of the 21-room home that Jefferson designed and built.

The House Tour takes you through the first floor of Monticello that includes Thomas Jefferson's library, bedroom, parlor and dining room. Many of Jefferson's inventions are on display, including his


great clock run by gravity and his revolving book stand—a lazy Susan-type device that enabled him to read five books at a time, leave them open and not lose his place.

The Behind the Scenes Tour offers a special look at the upstairs rooms, and has

only been available since June 11, 2010. This tour takes you up the steep, narrow staircase to the second and third floors of Monticello, and focuses more on the stories of the people who lived and stayed in the rooms. Daughter Martha, her husband and 11 children were permanent residents, but they were just the beginning of the multitude of family and friends that passed through the house.

"It was a merry-go-round of hospitality," says Elaine Newcomb, tour guide. "One relative came with four children and left with five."

It was not unusual to have 40 or 50 people staying at Monticello at one time, and all of those people had to eat. And where did all that food come from? The garden, of course.

Today, the garden serves as a historical record and an educational tool. Its bounty is used at the café, given to lucky employees and used to produce seeds and plants that you can buy at the gift shop. So not only does Monticello bring history to life, but you can take a little bit home with you to nurture and enjoy long after your visit is over. 

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