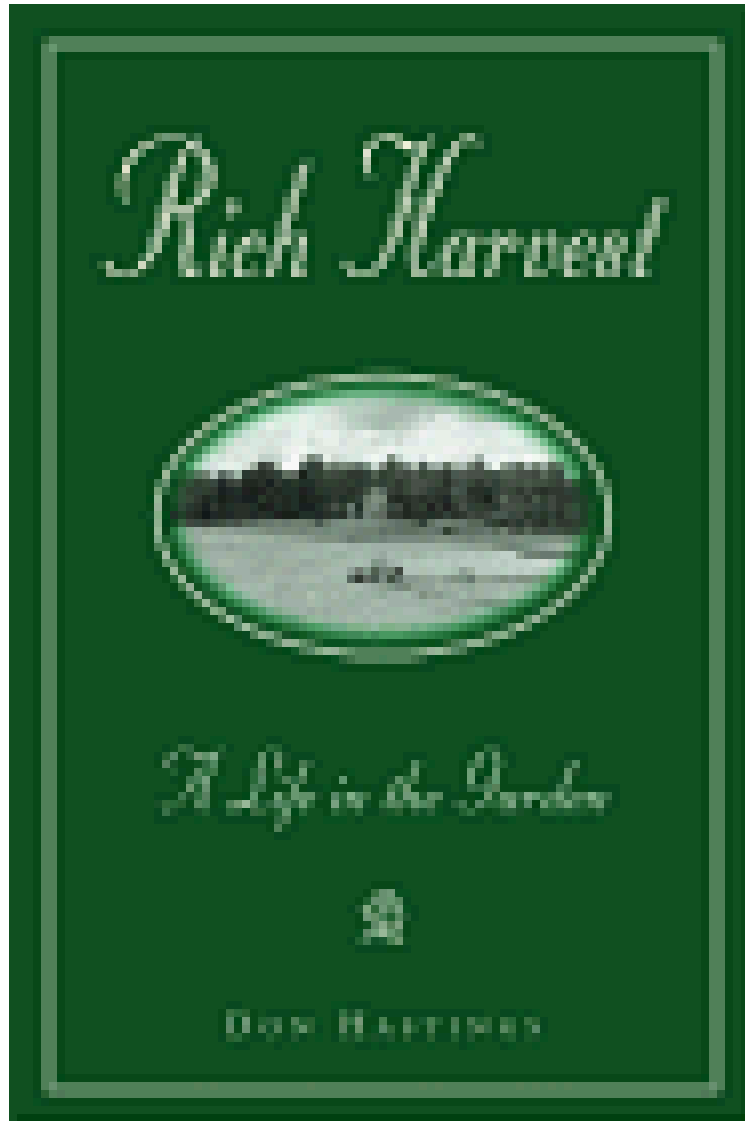


[Free] Rich Harvest: A Life in the Garden

Rich Harvest: A Life in the Garden

Don Hastings

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1563525089208 pages | File size: 72.Mb

Don Hastings : Rich Harvest: A Life in the Garden before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Rich Harvest: A Life in the Garden:

Memories, anecdotes, and family history from one of the South's leading plant men.

Excerpt. Reprinted by permission. All rights reserved.From Chapter 1: "As a tree is bent, so will it grow," my mother

frequently admonished me when I was little. She referred to plants when making almost any kind of important point, often altering time-honored sayings to better fit a situation -- like lecturing me. My grandfather, father, and mother were all horticulturists and lived in a world of plants. From day one, which I don't happen to remember, I have too. The place where I grew up, near rural Lovejoy, Georgia, was a 1,500-acre seed farm and nursery operated by my father, Donald M. Hastings. My father was the youngest son of Harry G. Hastings, an eminent Southern horticulturist and seedsman who had founded the company in 1889. My mother, Louise Hastings, was a respected horticulturist in her own right, and frankly the best gardener of us all. It was she who planned the spacious terraced gardens which lay to the north of the house and which evolved over the years into an ever-more-beautiful place for family and friends to enjoy. It was a measure of this special environment that even when things wouldn't grow, they did anyway. The field in front of the house had once been used to grow narcissus bulbs but the venture had not been profitable. In fact, one section of the field was never again used for crop production because it was a low and soggy place where tractors got stuck in less than perfect conditions. Here the neglected narcissus bulbs multiplied like mad, producing a field full of such beautiful blooms each spring that people would stop along the highway just to gaze at the splendor. As a youngster, my only connection to my mother's gardens was my propensity for falling into one of the decorative fish pools and having to be extracted by our gardener Willie Pine. Otherwise I stayed clear, much preferring to climb the big sweet gum tree in the backyard or even to play hide and seek with my sister in the hedges. However, when I was twelve, the garden took on an ominous reality. "I want you to start helping Willie in the garden," Momma said in her "don't argue with me" tone. Summer in Georgia is hot, especially hot in that garden where tall hedges kept out any hint of a breeze. Black gnats swarmed everywhere, and I hated every minute of it. I made the mistake of telling Mother that the garden was a hot, miserable, and useless place. "Besides," I said, "I hate messing in the dirt." She swatted me hard on the shoulder, then lectured forever, it seemed, on the beauty of the soil, its fresh smell, its life-giving properties. "Don't ever let me hear you call soil dirt. Soil is wonderful, dirt is not." She convinced me, and I'm still convinced. Every time I hear that gardening ad about playing in the dirt, I remember that swat and Momma's admonition. In her heavenly garden, I know she hates hearing that jingle even more than I do. The next summer I escaped by working in the company's nursery, and I believe that's where my tree began to bend. The farm was divided into two divisions: field crops and nursery stock. The field part specialized in producing seeds of Hastings Prolific Corn, Hastings Hundred Bushel Oats, Clemson Spineless Okra, Stone Mountain Watermelon, and cotton. The nursery produced 150,000 roses per year, several thousand Chinese Chestnut trees, hundreds of Magnolia grandiflora seedlings, and large numbers of other trees and shrubs. We started work at sunup and stopped at sundown, with an hour and a half for lunch, which is a long, long day for a scrawny thirteen-year-old boy. We hoed a lot. Mr. Watts, who headed the nursery, would say, "You boys sharpen your hoes and go cut the weeds in the Cannas." Since Mr. Watts refused to have the modern "gooseneck" hoe in the nursery, ours were always the old "ringneck" kind, made to chop cotton and heavy as lead. We had files to keep our hoe blades sharp, but it was still hard work, especially when Mr. Watts sent us to hoe nut grass out of the Canna field. We rested by leaning on the hoe handle, which always brought a stern reprimand: "You boys are going to bend those hoe handles if you don't quit leaning on them." When Mr. Watts didn't laugh after scolding us, we knew he was serious, so we would chop like crazy until he was out of sight. . . .