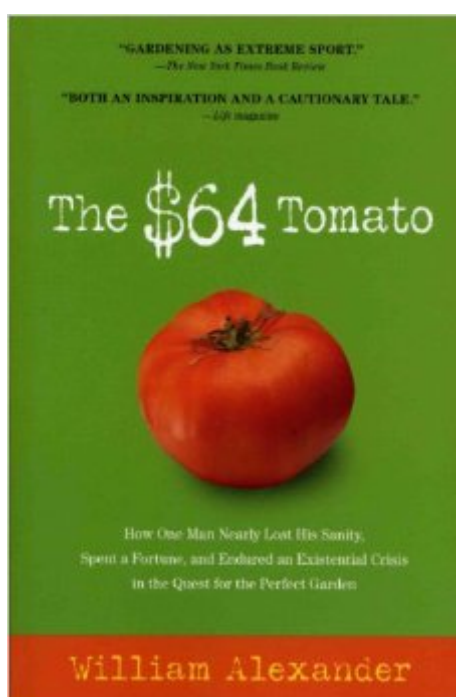


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The \$64 Tomato: How One Man Nearly Lost His Sanity, Spent A Fortune, And Endured An Existential Crisis In The Quest For The Perfect Garden



Synopsis

Bill Alexander had no idea that his simple dream of having a vegetable garden and small orchard in his backyard would lead him into life-and-death battles with groundhogs, webworms, weeds, and weather; midnight expeditions in the dead of winter to dig up fresh thyme; and skirmishes with neighbors who feed the vermin (i.e., deer). Not to mention the vacations that had to be planned around the harvest, the near electrocution of the tree man, the limitations of his own middle-aged body, and the pity of his wife and kids. When Alexander runs (just for fun!) a costbenefit analysis, adding up everything from the live animal trap to the Velcro tomato wraps and then amortizing it over the life of his garden, it comes as quite a shock to learn that it cost him a staggering \$64 to grow each one of his beloved Brandywine tomatoes. But as any gardener will tell you, you can't put a price on the unparalleled pleasures of providing fresh food for your family.

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Customer Reviews

It is a story as old as America itself. When we dream, we dream big. Big houses, big cars and, in the case of The \$64 Tomato, big gardens. In this book, author William Alexander details his love/hate relationship with his garden. I knew I was going to love this book within the first chapter, when I found myself laughing out loud time and time again. Alexander perfectly captures the idealism and absurdity that usually accompany any home improvement project. I must say that, after my childhood of helping my Grandmother and my Father in the garden and even, reluctantly, maintaining my own small garden plot as a child, I found it a bit ludicrous that anyone would actually

set out to "design" a vegetable garden. In my experience, you usually just mark out an area, have the neighbor plow it up and disc it down, lay out some string lines and plant. Aesthetics were rarely, if ever, an issue. Now you bring in experts, test the soil, try exotic new varieties of plants and, so it seems, endure many failures. While the book is funny, it is also a trifle sad. There is an underlying current of hubris which seems to thrive in the heart of every American. We like to think we can conquer and control anything, even nature itself, when, in reality, we can only hold back nature for short periods of time and even then, only in relatively small areas. It is also a story of having eyes too large for our stomachs. Rows and rows of zucchini that must be given away, if not forced on the neighbors. Yes, we love having fresh food from our very own gardens, but it seems we have no self-control. If "some" is good then "more" must certainly be better. The \$64 Tomato is entertaining and enlightening because it is so true.

Working all day at a nearby research institute, sometimes Bill Alexander would have to gird his loins when he came home at sundown and still had all his gardening to do. He and his physician wife owned a patch of land neighboring boys used as a baseball field, but Alexander always had weekend dreams of turning it into a combination orchard and flower garden. Under the direction of a comically sketched landscape designer, he made his dreams come true, despite the skepticism of his sitcom-like kids, a teen girl and a slacker boy named Zach, characterized as living in a dank room filled with unwashed laundry. The kids don't really care--on the outside; but inside their hearts swell with pride as their dear old dad tames a recalcitrant patch of land into a Robert Creeley like garden of which Elizabeth Lawrence might have been proud. His wife likes it too. Digging in the garden is like horticultural Viagra, and when he really gets going he rushes into the house and grabs her. "By the time I was done, I felt strangely, strongly aroused. That night, the smell of pollen still fresh in my nostrils, I made passionate, urgent love to my mystified (but appreciative) wife." When I was a teen, we called this "TMI"--too much information--but it's a nice reminder of the benefits of married life. There's a sinister side to gardening as well, as befits a hobby so elemental, and Alexander meets a strange contractor with a bizarre resemblance to Christopher Walken. Elsewhere he characterizes his battle with squirrels as "like living Hitchcock's THE BIRDS, only with squirrels."

The first chapters in this book are entertaining, well written, and everyone who gardens could probably relate to (working with contractors who show up weeks late, etc). I was thoroughly enjoying the book until I came upon the chapter where the author tries to rid his garden of "pests". (The pests are deer, groundhogs, squirrels, possums, basically anything that moves). The heartless

and inhumane techniques he uses were abhorrent and made me HATE the author all at once, when previously I'd been chuckling along and enjoying his story. he traps a possum and rather than letting it go miles away, he leaves it in the trap, in the blistering sun, for a day hoping it will die of heat suffocation. When the possum survives the first 24 hours, he decides a brilliant idea would be to let the poor thing suffer another 24 hours. after TWO DAYS of torture hasn't killed the animal, he decides a "more humane and quicker death" would be to drown the thing, so he throws the whole trap, animal and all, into the water. That doesn't work either, so then FINALLY he drives a few miles away and releases it! WHAT THE HELL??????? What kind of heartless man does that??? Then to make matters WORSE, he doesn't learn his lesson about the trap, and kills another animal in it, a smart groundhog who up until then had outsmarted him. THEN he wires up his fence to 10 thousand volts and laces peanut butter all over it to make sure the deer touch the fence with their tongues and lips to get a "real jolt". This guy is a sadist, seriously. Really, I can't believe a person like this exists. I'm glad I swapped the book at paperbackswap. com so I didn't pay the author one penny of my own money. Oh, it goes on.

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