



## Introduction

When I purchased the house and garden of Elizabeth Lawrence on February 11, 1986, I did not have the slightest inkling of what lay ahead for me. I knew of Elizabeth Lawrence, of course, but the garden had been neglected for two years by another owner, and on that cold and dismal winter day it was covered with invasive vines and weeds. Recently, there had been a record freeze of minus five degrees. Scores of plants had succumbed to the frost and now littered the garden. I had been told that very few of her treasures remained, and it certainly seemed unlikely that many could have survived.

However, having an intractable passion for gardening, and inspired by the appearance of the golden flowers of the *Adonis amurensis* shimmering in the shadow of the pines at the back of the garden, I set about the daunting task of gardening in this “new” garden. Soon many other horticultural surprises struggled out from underneath the thick mat of ivy and periwinkle. Winter aconite and snowdrops smiled at me along with Elizabeth Lawrence’s beloved Algerian iris, *Crocus tomasinianus*, and daffodils. As the work of pruning and the removal of vines and weeds progressed, even more treasures appeared. Among these was a gorgeous violet-blue Japanese iris, *Iris ensata*, that bloomed with Miss Lawrence’s many yellow daylilies. It is a wonder that this moisture-loving iris continues to flourish in this dry garden.

Visitors from both near and far also began to appear, and I soon realized that my garden was not to be just for my pleasure. This responsibility began to weigh heavily. However, loving gardening as I do, I have not let this responsibility diminish the joy I feel when in the garden.

The opening of Elizabeth Lawrence's garden gate has led me to a world of gardening friends and acquainted me with many new and exciting plants.

I have met many of these plants both in her garden and in her books. During her lifetime, four of her books were published. They were *A Southern Garden*, *Lob's Wood*, *The Little Bulbs*, and *Gardens in Winter*, of which the latter three were written in Charlotte. *The Little Bulbs* and *Gardens in Winter* were filled with direct references to existing plants in the garden. They became my constant companions. Four more Lawrence books were published after her death in 1985, and with their publication many more garden mysteries were solved for me. *Through the Garden Gate*, edited by Bill Neal and published in 1990, was a collection of some of her garden columns written for the *Charlotte Observer*. This book was a rich source of information, and caused me to realize that many more tidbits of horticultural information must certainly be in the remaining columns. Thus it was with great excitement and anticipation that I began the project of the editing of this book with Ann Armstrong. I learned even more about my garden during the course of our research.

A healthy stand of bamboo grows outside my living room window. In the article "Bamboo," Miss Lawrence identifies it as *Phyllostachy × aurea*, the golden bamboo, and she goes on to write, "Dearly as I love this bamboo, it is more trouble than anything else in the garden." I definitely concur! After years of struggling with it, I have finally succeeded in containing it with a barrier sunk two feet into the earth. Troublesome as it has been, I would not give it up, as it is a joy in the garden. In *Gardens in Winter*, Miss Lawrence writes, "All winter the green leaves rustle outside my window, and the low winter sun sends slender shadows into the room." The cardinals still sleep in the bamboo in the winter, and in spring, it is their favorite place to nest.

Reading the article about planting the parking strip in front of the house in Charlotte was fascinating. It made me very sad to learn of Miss Lawrence's love of the pear, *Pyrus calleryana*, planted next to the driveway, because a few years ago it had to be taken down. It had become a dangerous tree, regularly shedding large limbs across my driveway entrance. I still miss its lovely and profuse display of white flowers in early March. Of the trees she described in the article, ironically only the *Malus × miromalus*, the midget crabapple, remains in the parking strip. She writes, "The small round yellow fruits are borne very freely and are

rather a nuisance. I think I may replace this when I find something I like better.” Evidently she never found a suitable replacement. The handsome quince, *Cydonia oblonga*, with its beautiful exfoliating bark, also grows in the parking strip but strangely is not mentioned in this article.

In another article, Miss Lawrence writes of her *Camellia saluenensis*. With its early bloom, beginning in October, and lasting for many months, it has always been a favorite of mine. It has reached tree-like proportions, and continues to bloom through the worst of winter weather. She writes that the blossoms are “single, and delicately modeled with a slender column of pale yellow stamens. The petals are ivory with a flush of wine.” According to Miss Lawrence, it was planted in 1965, more than four decades ago.

I was thrilled to find many wonderful bulbs planted by Elizabeth Lawrence growing in the garden. In the article “Green Winter,” I discovered that in February 1962, she found “two violet flowers of *Crocus imperati* in the melting snow.” These same lovely bulbs continue to delight me with their radiant blossoms each winter. The identity of the summer snowflakes in the garden has been a puzzle for me because their bloom period seemed to go on for many months. In the chapter “Bulbs,” that species is discussed in detail, and I am now delighted to know that it is *Leucojum* var. *pulchellum*, which begins its early bloom in January. She wrote that this variety blooms with crocus and daffodils as well as the tulips, and that she once found a flower on New Year’s Day. How remarkable it is that these bulbs have survived since at least 1960 when this article was written! After living in the house for twelve years, I was surprised with the discovery of the lady tulip, *Tulipa clusiana*, blooming in one of the sunny borders. And recently, in autumn, charming pale white crocus, their identity as yet unknown, have appeared.

One of the most glorious sights in the garden occurs in late winter or early spring when three magnolias, *Magnolia denudata*, *Magnolia × veitchii* and *Magnolia × soulangiana* ‘Lennei’, bloom in unison. The magnolias are planted in a row at the back of the garden behind the pool. They are very clever about eluding the grip of frost, most often waiting until it is safe to display sweet-scented, deep pink and white flowers. The air is filled with their perfume, and then they drop their petals, creating a beautiful, pink path of fragrant blossoms under the pines.

In the article “Walks and Paths” Miss Lawrence writes, “In my garden a width of six feet seemed right for the main path which is over a hundred feet long. It is slightly tapered, with the beginning widened to

six feet six inches, and the end narrowed to five feet six inches. This is supposed to make the vista seem longer than it really is.” While the garden is small (70 feet by 225 feet), its center path seems quite long and grand, and it is her excellent design that makes it seem so.

In the small study of the house in Charlotte, I work at a long desk in front of a large picture window with a full view of the garden. While working late at night, editing Elizabeth Lawrence’s garden articles in the room where so many of them were written, I frequently felt her presence peering over my shoulder.

*Lindie Wilson*

This book collects a number of essays written by Elizabeth Lawrence for the *Charlotte Observer*. Leaving her well-known and loved garden in Raleigh, Elizabeth Lawrence and her mother moved to Charlotte in 1948, where Elizabeth designed the house and garden where they were to live. On August 11, 1957, when Elizabeth was fifty-three, her Sunday gardening column, *Through the Garden Gate*, appeared in the *Charlotte Observer* for the first time. She wrote 720 columns, the last of which was published June 20, 1971.

Bill Neal, a friend and fellow gardener, edited 142 of her columns, publishing them in 1990 as the book *Through the Garden Gate*. Lindie Wilson and I realized that some fascinating columns remained unavailable to most readers. We spent long afternoons peering over microfilms in the Charlotte Public Library. They were pleasure-filled hours reading Elizabeth Lawrence’s work. Even after we eliminated the columns that pertained to flower shows, plant laundry lists and the like, many captivating and insightful articles remained. We gathered 132 articles for this book, choosing to organize them by subject matter rather than chronologically. We have used brackets to change plant names to conform to present nomenclature.

Long before I met her and her garden, and while I was building my own garden, I had fallen under the spell of Elizabeth Lawrence’s writing when I read the 1942 edition of *A Southern Garden*. Reading these articles renewed that spell. Elizabeth Lawrence shared her ideas, knowledge, opinions, and her garden with her friends, visitors, and the world at large through her books and articles, correspondence, and garden columns. Her well-furnished mind ranged over a vast number of interests, as you will find in these essays.

Her garden was her laboratory, where she tested the hardiness, beauty, and suitability of a plant. “Dates given in catalogues and magazines seldom apply to our part of the country,” she wrote. We were constantly amazed that many of the plants Elizabeth grew and wrote about have only recently become available in our nurseries.

Many of her friends helped her make her garden through their correspondence and advice. In these essays you will meet many of them, for they frequently populated her newspaper column. Among them were Eddie and Elizabeth Clarkson, close neighbors and owners of Wing Haven; Hannah Withers, a knowledgeable gardener and traveling companion; Linda Lamm, a great friend and driving force in the North Carolina Wild Flower Society (recently renamed the North Carolina Native Plant Society) and the Herb Society; Lamm’s sister Laura Braswell; Dr. Walter and Helen Mayer, good friends and fellow gardeners; and Dr. Herbert Hechenbleikner, a distinguished horticulturalist. Soon after she began her columns, she published *The Little Bulbs*, in which she introduced her readers to Mr. Carl Krippendorf and his Ohio garden. *Gardens in Winter* was published in 1961 and illustrated by another close friend, Caroline Dormon. After Mr. Krippendorf’s death she wrote *Lob’s Wood*, a tribute to her dear friend and his garden.

Her passion and strong opinions for plants and gardens are evident in much of her writing. She wrote unblinkingly about some: “Getting rid of poor plants is as important as seeking out the best. Nearly every garden in the South has a large ungainly Christmas honeysuckle, *Lonicera fragrantissima*, that is dull at its best, shabby at its worst, and never the least bit beautiful, even when in full bloom. . . . This, I hasten to say, is not the fault of the nurserymen. It is the fault of gardeners, who should learn to know good plants and to demand them.”

Her writings revealed a deep knowledge of centuries of literature, mythology, the church, gardens, and gardeners. Elizabeth’s library was exceptional. She was a prodigious reader and an inveterate correspondent with an immense number of gardeners, nurserymen, farm wives (who often had plants and seeds for sale), and writers. She kept vast cardboard files of three-by-five-inch file cards, on which all manner of information was stored. Readers of these essays cannot help but be impressed with her vast knowledge on so many subjects, and realize that these essays were written long before the existence of personal computers, the internet, and search engines.

Her strong personal voice, warmth, and enthusiasm for her various subjects emanated from her weekly columns as an increasingly devoted and enthusiastic audience reached for the Sunday paper to share some time with Elizabeth Lawrence. We sincerely hope you enjoy these articles and find them as delightful, fascinating, and informative as we have.

*Ann L. Armstrong*