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# Gardens For A Beautiful America, 1895-1935. Photographs By Frances Benjamin Johnston



## Synopsis

Gardens for a Beautiful America, 1895- 1935, written by Sam Watters and published in collaboration with the Library of Congress, presents for the first time 250 colored photographs of urban and suburban gardens taken by Frances Benjamin Johnston- photographer of presidents, celebrity authors, tastemakers, and estates of the Gilded Age. At the opening of the 20th century, as artist and progressive, Johnston was front and center in the movement to beautify America. Gilded Age industrialism had brought a new prosperity to life coast to coast, but at the price of once pristine forests, rivers, and blue skies, wrecked by continental railroad building and factory pollution in growing cities. As guardians of home and community, wealthy women rallied clubs and societies to green America through design and horticulture. To show all gardeners, rich and poor, what a garden should be, they turned to Frances Benjamin Johnston. Johnston's colored lantern slides have not been seen since the 1940s. They picture New York town house yards, Long Island villas, California hillside terraces and plantations of the South identified by Watters over years of research and travel. Johnston produced each slide for illustrated lectures she presented to gardening women. Today, these hand-painted miniatures on glass still resonate with her crusading message: garden the nation back to America the Beautiful, one elm, one rose, one fountain and one boxwood terrace at a time. Preserve our wildflowers and forests for future generations.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Skillfully narrated... The research and identification of these slides by Watters, uncataloged when he

first saw them five years ago, are exhaustively presented and annotated and will be a rich fund for later historians. --John Dixon Hunt, Landscape Architecture Magazine, April 2012  
Pioneering American photojournalist Frances Benjamin Johnston never planted a garden of her own until she was in her 80s, but she masterfully recorded hundreds of others on hand-painted glass lantern slides used for her horticultural lectures... Author Sam Watters has meticulously identified the landscapes, which range from humble backyards to noble estates. --Architectural Digest, May 2012  
Far more than pretty pictures (Frederick Law Olmsted Jr. deemed Ms. Johnston's photographs the finest existing on the subject of American gardens), the carefully composed painterly images of these elegant, often opulent gardens were meant to educate the masses. --Anne Raver, the New York Times

Sam Watters writes and lectures about American house and garden culture. He is the author of books and essays on wide-ranging subjects including cactus theft for suburban gardens, the public gallery in the private house, and photographing Hollywood at home.

This book is a collection of wonderful hand colored glass plates of gardens spanning many years. There are gardens from numerous parts of the United States, which gives a good idea of the diverse garden styles throughout the country. It is a great help for the amateur gardener as well as the professional landscaper and for those who just love to look at beautiful gardens.

What an unusual and magnificent collection of photographs, all the more remarkable because they were hand-tinted for color by the photographer. I enjoy just thumbing through the collection over and over again ... it's inspiring and relaxing. It would be useful if future editions included a list of the gardens that still exist and/or that are open to the public.

wonderful images of another time. Very good addition to your gardening library; I would highly recommend buying this book now

Well Known as an eminent architectural and portrait photographer, Frances Benjamin Johnston is perhaps less well remembered for her pioneering role as a champion of American garden design and the training of women as landscape architects. With GARDENS FOR A BEAUTIFUL AMERICA, 1895-1935, author and Los Angeles Times columnist Sam Watters' provides a resplendent and evocative testimony to Ms. Johnston's outstanding achievements in this field. Culled from the Library

of Congress's collection of over a thousand, meticulously hand-colored photographs Ms. Johnston created over a forty-year period for use in her illustrated lectures to garden clubs, landscaping schools and civic groups, GARDENS FOR A BEAUTIFUL AMERICA is a handsomely-produced, voluminously illustrated record of Johnston's life and work, divided geographically into sections on the estates of Newport, Long Island and the East Coast, the lush, semi-tropical gardens of the Pacific coast, Spanish moss-laden landscapes of the Old South, intimate enclaves of the cities and the famed gardens of Europe. Accompanying these luxuriant images are informative essays by Mr. Watters providing biographical information on Frances Benjamin Johnston and an analytical consideration of her role in what might be called the Country Beautiful movement. Requiring intensive use of labor and large areas of vacant land, nothing has proven to be more ephemeral from the age of the Great Estates than its once-breathtakingly beautiful gardens. Mr. Watters's GARDENS FOR A BEAUTIFUL AMERICA is thus a most-welcome conjuring up of some of the most spectacular glories of that bygone era as recorded by one of its finest photographers.

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