



# Chicago Gardens: The Early History (Center for American Places - Center Books on American Places)

*Cathy Jean Maloney*

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Once maligned as a swampy outpost, the fledgling city of Chicago brazenly adopted the motto *Urbs in Horto* or City in a Garden, in 1837. *Chicago Gardens* shows how this upstart town earned its sobriquet over the next century, from the first vegetable plots at Fort Dearborn to innovative garden designs at the 1933 World's Fair.

Cathy Jean Maloney has spent decades researching the city's horticultural heritage, and here she reveals the unusual history of Chicago's first gardens. Challenged by the region's clay soil, harsh winters, and fierce winds, Chicago's pioneering horticulturalists, Maloney demonstrates, found imaginative uses for hardy prairie plants. This same creative spirit thrived in the city's local fruit and vegetable markets, encouraging the growth of what would become the nation's produce hub. The vast plains that surrounded Chicago, meanwhile, inspired early landscape architects, such as Frederick Law Olmsted, Jens Jensen, and O.C. Simonds, to new heights of grandeur.

Maloney does not forget the backyard gardeners: immigrants who cultivated treasured seeds and pioneers who planted native wildflowers. Maloney's vibrant depictions of Chicagoans like "Bouquet Mary," a flower peddler who built a greenhouse empire, add charming anecdotal evidence to her argument—that Chicago's garden history rivals that of New York or London and ensures its status as a world-class capital of horticultural innovation.

With exquisite archival photographs, prints, and postcards, as well as field guide descriptions of living legacy gardens for today's visitors, *Chicago Gardens* will delight green-thumbs from all parts of the world.

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