

View from a Shed: Four Seasons as an Urban Farmer (Hardback) - Common

(author) Michael Wale

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(author) Michael Wale : View from a Shed: Four Seasons as an Urban Farmer (Hardback) - Common before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised View from a Shed: Four Seasons as an Urban Farmer (Hardback) - Common:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Urban Allotment GardeningBy The Garden InteriorThis is a funny little book that will be of interest to a certain kind of audience. It gives you a deeply personal look into what it is like to garden on a community plot (or allotment as it is called in England) in London. In a city where gardening land is scarce and open space is practically non-existent except for the famous parks and palaces of London, there is a strong and deeply entrenched movement in favor of setting land aside for community gardening. Michael Wale is a long-time advocate of this system and an experienced bureaucratic guerrilla in dealing with pettifogging local politicians to defend and expand this movement. He is greatly helped by all those who support local and organic produce, and those who are concerned about genetically altered food crops. The allotments featured in this book are four sites in the Acton Gardening Association, and they are located in West London. I loved reading about them because Wale refers to many landmarks of West London that are familiar to me from my business travels there. But what I really liked about his book was its intimate look into what it is like to garden this way. The gossip, the camaraderie, the scheming and scolding of rival plot-holders, the bureaucratic and political infighting with local authorities, the struggles against pressure from developers, and so on. For those of us with the quiet enjoyment of our own land, however small, it is interesting to read about gardening in a precarious but joyfully determined culture such as this. Nearly all of this

garden concerns the production of vegetable crops, much of it prosaic staples like potatoes, broccoli and onions. I loved how Wale echoed one of my personal crochets by recommending growing your own garlic. Fresh garlic from your own garden is so much better than store-bought; it has an oily, creamy consistency that makes all your cooking taste better. You simply buy 2-3 bulbs of garlic at the store, break them up into individual cloves and stick them in anywhere you have a tiny bit of space, six inches deep and root-side down. Soon you have a supply of lovely fresh garlic. But the best part of this book is the way Wale introduces the reader to all the quirky gardeners who tend their allotments with him. It is a delightful cast of London characters, and strongly reinforces the idea, if any reinforcement were necessary, that gardeners are colorful charactersopinionated, individualistic, willful, cranky, and joyful. Wale also tells how he moonlights as a cox for rowers on the nearby Thames and at the famous annual regatta at Henley. I used to row in England, a long time ago now and at Oxford, and I still remember our sadistic cox screaming at us, to get us to row harder, Punish the body, gentlemen! And an allotment gardener is bold and cheeky enough, as Wales colleagues demonstrate, to ring up Buckingham Palace and ask for a steady supply lovely fresh horse manure from the royal stables. And they got it! They do whatever they have to do to survive and prosper in the cramped and competitive world of modern London. Physically, this book is handsome, though rather small, measuring only 5.5 by 7.5 inches. It is printed on glossy stock, presumably to accommodate the frequent and very lovely watercolor illustrations by Tim Bramfitt. At 300 words per page and 222 pages, it comes in as a rather brief book, but it is told in a very authentic and distinctive voice, and has a practical few pages at the end, giving useful advice on how to get started with allotment gardening. I cannot say this is one of my favorite gardening books, or even in the top half of the gardening books I have read, but if you ever wanted a fascinating insight into a very different way of gardening and the people who are passionate about it, you could do worse than View from a Shed.

The warm and engaging story of a year tending a London community garden allotment - from the plants and wildlife to the gardeners and bureaucrats. All life is here!