



If your thoughts are turning to the garden ...

If you find yourself dreaming of your garden at this point in early February, you might find a good measure of joy in “Be Happy Forever? Make a Garden!”

Author Will Caplinger is a land use consultant, certified arborist, horticulturalist and blithe spirit who splits his time between Astoria and Taiwan. Caplinger admits in his preface that he began writing this book back in the last millennium, but this first draft was “nakedly informational” – a data-driven handbook that would have put his readers to sleep before they could ever get out into their gardens to apply his wisdom. So it was back to the drawing board.

The self-published book you can find now on Amazon still has some of those technical chapters – weight equivalents, mapping and measuring. And yes, for those of us who still prefer not to think of the world as a series of mathematical equations, those chapters are pretty dry – although they’re doubtlessly helpful to others. But Caplinger situates the most technical chapters more than 100 pages in, and before then, the pages are devoted to free-wheeling, poetry-spouting exuberance that covers a lot of territory.

Even before he shares pointers about how to nurture the plants in your garden, the author talks about the importance of caring for the gardener’s own corporeal being with extended discussions on how to breathe, how to hydrate, and how to stay cool.

“Mother Nature,” he warns, “can be one hot mama.”

And with that he launches into a fascinating (who knew?) discussion of the heat index. The author talks about protective equipment for gardeners, tools and lifting techniques. He mentions plants that can

harm and plants that can heal. And he shares his own quasi-mystical, formative experiences with plants – incidents over time with a row of strawberries, a camellia bush and a cucumber seedling – that fired his passion for botanical pursuits.

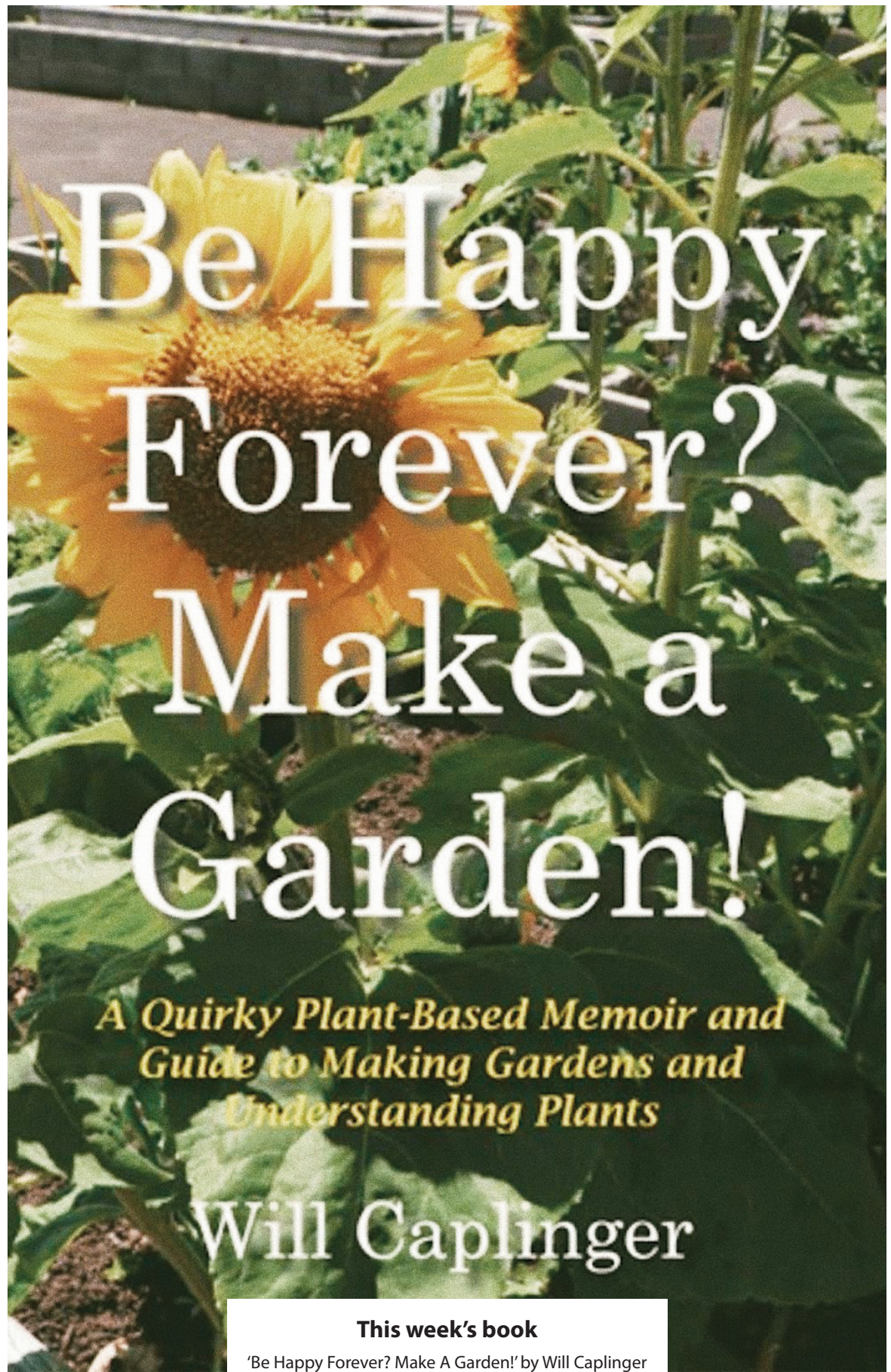
The author also careens off into a myriad of opinionated detours into subjects including, but not limited to, the metric system, seduction en plein air, and the limitations of our senses. If this sounds a little chaotic, maybe it is. But our garrulous guide says it’s intentional: “...the key is taking the time to be open to the possibilities that abound in any moment of life but that go unnoticed because we are too busy, too hurried, or too distracted. Stop for just a little while to consider the world around you,” he implores. “If you pay attention to ordinary things, you open yourself up to extraordinary experiences.”

Caplinger does get down-to-earth, literally, with discussions of soil composition. There’s also a glossary of horticultural abbreviations and a chapter on common and scientific plant names. Ultimately, you could use “Be Happy Forever? Make a Garden!” as you would most reference books – dip in to pick and choose the bare-bones information you need.

But there is a lot of mischief and magic in Caplinger’s narrative, for those who wish to spend the time.

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at BarbaraLMcM@gmail.com

The Bookmonger is Barbara Lloyd McMichael, who writes this weekly column focusing on the books, authors and publishers of the Pacific Northwest. Contact her at barbaralmcm@gmail.com.



This week's book

'Be Happy Forever? Make A Garden!' by Will Caplinger

Self-published - 273pp - \$14.99