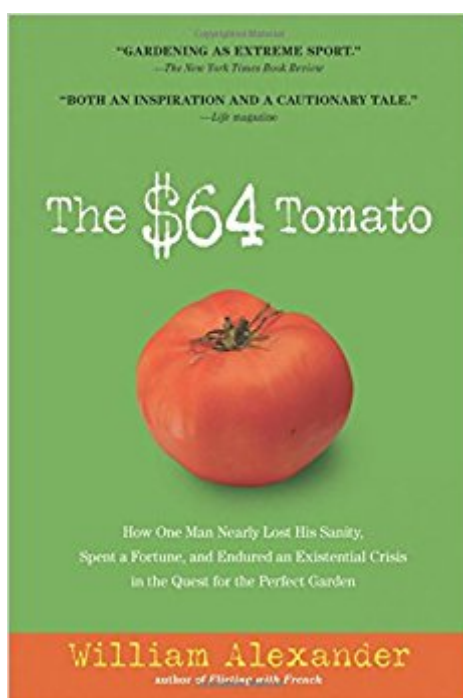


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# The \$64 Tomato: How One Man Nearly Lost His Sanity, Spent A Fortune, And Endured An Existential Crisis In The Quest For The Perfect Garden



## Synopsis

Bill Alexander had no idea that his simple dream of having a vegetable garden and small orchard in his backyard would lead him into life-and-death battles with groundhogs, webworms, weeds, and weather; midnight expeditions in the dead of winter to dig up fresh thyme; and skirmishes with neighbors who feed the vermin (i.e., deer). Not to mention the vacations that had to be planned around the harvest, the near electrocution of the tree man, the limitations of his own middle-aged body, and the pity of his wife and kids. When Alexander runs (just for fun!) a costbenefit analysis, adding up everything from the live animal trap to the Velcro tomato wraps and then amortizing it over the life of his garden, it comes as quite a shock to learn that it cost him a staggering \$64 to grow each one of his beloved Brandywine tomatoes. But as any gardener will tell you, you can't put a price on the unparalleled pleasures of providing fresh food for your family.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Starred Review. When the author of this hilarious horticultural memoir plants a large vegetable garden and a small orchard on his Hudson Valley farmstead, he finds himself at odds with almost all creation. At the top of the food chain are the landscaping contractors, always behind schedule, frequently derelict, occasionally menacing. Then there are the herds of deer that batter the electrified fence to get at Alexander's crop, and the groundhog who simply squeezes between the wires, apparently savoring the 10,000-volt shocks. Most insidious are the armies of beetles, worms, maggots and grubs that provoke Alexander, initially an organic-produce zealot, into drenching his

entire property with pesticides. He braves these trials, along with hours of backbreaking labor and the eye-rolling of his wife and children, for the succulence of homegrown food. He also manages to maintain a sense of humor, riffing on everything from the ugliness of garden ornaments to the politics of giving away vegetables to friends. Alexander's slightly poisoned paradise manages to impart an existential lesson on the interconnectedness of nature and the fine line between nurturing and killing. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Digital edition.

Adult/High School-Alexander had always dreamed of having his own garden, where he could grow healthy, organic fruits and vegetables. When his family moved to the Hudson Valley, he got his wish-there was more than enough land for his vegetable garden, his apple orchard, his wife's flower garden, and a swimming pool. He had done his research and knew which crops to plant and when, what type of fencing he'd need, and how to defend his garden against predators. What he hadn't counted on were the facts that planting sod around the swimming pool killed the corn, and that planting rosebushes killed the sod. There were also landscaping contractors always behind schedule, a groundhog that figured out how to get through a 10,000-electric-volt fence, and feasting deer. After years of fighting pests, Alexander realized that there was no such thing as an organic garden in the Northeast, and that for each tomato he'd taken from his garden he'd spent \$64; ultimately, what was once a hobby became a second full-time job. Throughout the telling, the author manages to maintain a sense of humor, riffing on everything from the ugliness of garden ornaments to the politics of giving away vegetables to friends. This hilarious horticultural memoir manages to impart an existential lesson on the interconnectedness of nature and the fine line between nurturing and killing. Teens looking for a biography, a book on biology, or a humorous read can't go wrong with this title.-Erin Dennington, Chantilly Regional Library, Fairfax County, VA Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Digital edition.

Which may be why I just gave it three stars. The writing is fine and it moves right along, and I laughed out loud a couple of times, but I just didn't care enough about his problems. I think a gardener would be constantly nodding his/her head and saying, "yes, exactly!" Give it to the gardener in your family, or maybe a long-suffering spouse. I think they'll enjoy it.

I read the 64 dollar tomato at the suggestion of new friends who we invited over to teach how to

make fresh mozzarella. As they sat and chatted while I made a fresh batch, they seemed to marvel at the things that we frankly considered normal in our lives living on a cattle farm with three children. First, just making cheese seemed out of this world, but we were washing vegetable from our garden and cooking with eggs from our chickens. As we told one funny story after another of our adventures in learning to do all the different things we do on the farm, they said "You HAVE to read The 64 dollar tomato." Having now read it, I can see where the bumbling, out in left field, get a wild hair and plant an orchard for some strange reason author reminded our visitors of our lives. I certainly identified with the author as he wrestled with all of his misadventures and as a fellow partially successful gardener I truly identified and laughed out loud at most chapters. I would recommend this book to anyone who gardens as it's an easy and enjoyable read. My one concerning detail as referenced above is the author has his own reviews of products, books, etc. One of the books he offers his opinion on is *Weedless Gardening* by Lee Reich, a book I have reviewed here on .com. The concepts offered in *Weedless Gardening* are dismissed out of hand by the author without any attempt to test them. While I did truly enjoy the stories in the book, I couldn't help but feel sorry for the author as he quite literally broke his back over the years trying to garden the open earth way. Quite often during the read I wanted to pick up the phone and call the author, just give weedless gardening a try and you'll eliminate much of the work that caused the last chapter to be so funny and heart breaking. As the book winds down and the author has to lay down his tools due to health issues, I truly felt sad for him that his obvious passion for the garden was wasted on pointless labor. Labor that could have been invested to much greater good.

Wanting the perfect garden and actually putting in the work to achieve it has been a pipe dream of mine for years. I thought I'd start small with a little herb garden and then when nothing died prematurely, I graduated to a little vegetable bed with minor success. That has lent itself to more grandiose dreams for the rest of the back yard. Chancing across this book will be, I suspect, a life, wallet and sanity-saver. Hilarious anecdotes abound in this memoir as the author goes from almost electrocuting a contractor because he forgot to switch off his 6000volt electric fence that he had put up trying to keep deer and Superchuck the groundhog out of his vegetable beds, building a meadow which didn't quite live up to his mental picture of the Sound of Music, finding an aggrieved and snarling possum in a trap, developing blisters on top of blisters in his attempt to keep up with the weeding, painting pollen on apple blossoms in order to fertilize them and how a headstone almost became a garden ornament. There are moments of self-reflection too around how certain bugs are introduced which could destroy a crop all because a rose bush had been planted or because sod

had been laid. And what does it really mean to be organic? At the end lies the truth that I had come to realize. I would like to be a garden hobbyist, not a full-time farmer. And if that means my yard will remain home to weeds and I will continue to purchase most of my produce instead of growing them myself, I can live with that.

This was not what I expected from reading the title which caught my eye. I anticipated a book devoted to tomatoes exclusively. It is a fun, easy-going, light read that can be enjoyed in an afternoon or at a leisurely pace as each chapter stands on its own. It is humorous and captures the ups & downs of gardening in fun & pleasant format. Buy it, read it & pass it on to a gardening friend. You will be glad you did.

Alexander tells it like it is! Every beginning gardener should read this book, and learn from it. Then make other mistakes, as I did! Every experienced, or moderately experienced, gardener should read it because one can relate to every experience described here. The author worked grueling, and often frustrating hours (while having a demanding, regular job), to create a beautiful, and productive garden. He yearned for his own, fresh fruit and vegetables, as well as having his very own meadow. Eventually, he got all of that - at a price. "The \$ 64 Tomato" is fast-paced, tells it like it is, a wonderful read, and as true to its subject as any book on gardening I've ever read. Charlotte Isler, aka Evelyn Laden

I bought both of Alexander's books at the same time and read this one first. I had heard of it from a friend who retold to me the story of Alexander's expenditures and how they resulted in his cost of \$64 for a tomato. While he does actually calculate out this expenditure, his math is flawed. He grew many other things in the garden including flowers, but yet he assigned them super/farmers market prices thus isolating the tomato as the full bearer of any uncovered costs. The same could be done for any crop in anyone's garden. He could have just as easily called it The \$49 Cucumber. Aside from this one story which comes at the end of the book, the work on the whole is a must read for anyone considering taking on a large scale gardening project (particularly in the North Eastern US). He tackles the problems of insects, rots, molds, pests, deer, contractors, and ideals about organics.

Great book by an excellent author. I've recommended this book to many friends and family members. I also bought his book *Flirting With French* and recommend it to anyone learning a second language or someone wanting to remember their own struggle with learning French.

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