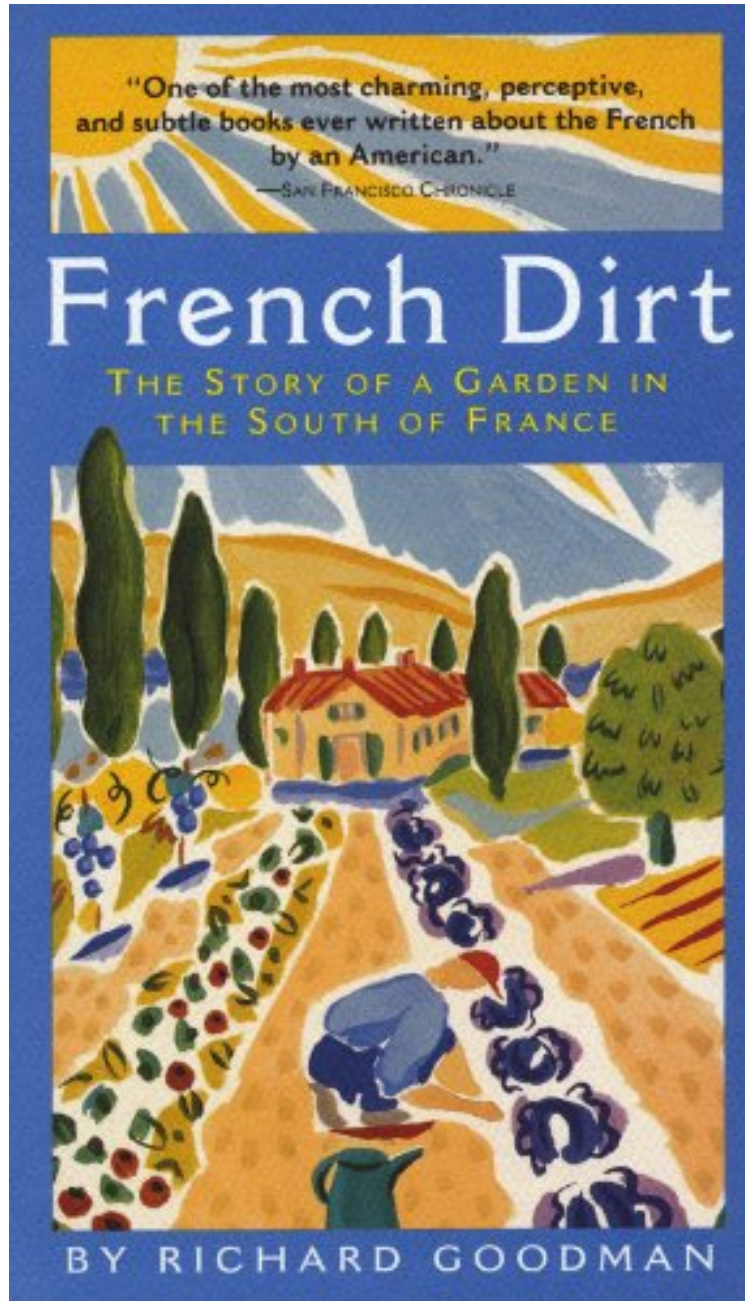


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## French Dirt: The Story of a Garden in the South of France

*Richard Goodman*

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**Richard Goodman : French Dirt: The Story of a Garden in the South of France** before purchasing it in order to

gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *French Dirt: The Story of a Garden in the South of France*:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. An escape from modern living, even if only to your own yard  
By Melanie Nolen  
Beautiful, dreamy novel that successfully manages to convince you of the romance of simple, albeit physical, labor in a small village in the south of France. Irony in timing: I was working on reviving my own garden, and every break from the book, though few and short-lived, brought me to reflect on the peace, love, and tranquility I feel when I'm tending to nature. No comparison to Peter Mayle's Provence tales, *French Dirt* nevertheless succeeds in its mission to take the reader on an exotic journey away from the bustling of the typical US city.  
1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. Reaching for a Handful of French Dirt, One More Time  
By Ronald M. Johnson  
This is my third time reading *FRENCH DIRT*. Why so addicted to this beautiful story of Richard Goodman and the garden he planted in a southern French village? Hard to say. Perhaps it is the special meaning one finds in putting down roots, even for just a year, in the dark earth of a new-found place. Or the reaching out in midst of isolation to overcome a sense of loneliness and alienation, something all of us have experienced at times. Could it be the connection between the act of writing and the act of planting? Whatever it is, the urge to re-read this small but incredibly compelling story remains strong within me. One source of that urge has to be my own times of living in another country for short periods--in my case, once for a year, two times for half that time--and imagining for a while that I had come to stay. The American as immigrant, a reversal of the usual flow, the searching for a new identity in an old place. In my case, and in my family's, we too found a symbolic dimension of the experience: skiing in Norway, biking in Denmark, and walking in Portugal. In each case, though not nearly as intensely as Goodman with his garden, we found an entry into the culture. And, in the end, perhaps that is the real reason I am drawn back, time and again, to his book. He never fails to help me better understand that we always need to find ways to cross those boundaries that keep us apart as cultures and individuals. For that, I thank him, one more time.  
0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Good and fun reading!  
By Contenta  
I chose this book for its title, liked it because embarks into two of my interests, gardening and the south of France, it was a very enjoyable and fun reading. I was amused with the description of his characters through the book, and felt as my own his urgency to garden...I was reading it in winter and was longing for spring to start digging again.

A story about dirt--and about sun, water, work, elation, and defeat. And about the sublime pleasure of having a little piece of French land all to oneself to till. Richard Goodman saw the ad in the paper: "SOUTHERN FRANCE: Stone house in Village near Nimes/Avignon/Uzes. 4 BR, 2 baths, fireplace, books, desk, bikes. Perfect for writing, painting, exploring experiencing la France profonde. \$450 mo. plus utilities." And, with his girlfriend, he left New York City to spend a year in Southern France. The village was small--no shops, no gas station, no post office, only a caf and a school. St. Sebastien de Caisson was home to farmers and vintners. Every evening Goodman watched the villagers congregate and longed to be a part of their camaraderie. But they weren't interested in him: he was just another American, come to visit and soon to leave. So Goodman laced up his work boots and ventured out into the vineyards to work among them. He met them first as a hired worker, and then as a farmer of his own small plot of land. *French Dirt* is a love story between a man and his garden. It's about plowing, planting, watering, and tending. It's about cabbage, tomatoes, parsley, and eggplant. Most of all, it's about the growing friendship between an American outsider and a close-knit community of French farmers. "There's a genuine sweetness about the way the cucumbers and tomatoes bridge the divide of nationality."--The New York Times Book Review "One of the most charming, perceptive and subtle books ever written about the French by an American."--San Francisco Chronicle

.com A few years back, escaping the sound and fury of New York, Richard Goodman moved to a small southern French farming town he calls by the alias St. Sebastian de Caisson, everything about which "suggests the uneventful, and the eternal." There Goodman found a tiny plot of streamside land and set about raising a copious vegetable garden, about as uneventful an event as a seasoned New Yorker is likely to experience. He writes lovingly of tilling the soil and watching his lettuce, tomatoes, and leeks spring from the ground, but at heart his book is about the generous people he met during his stay and what they have to say about life on the land. Armchair travelers, gardeners, and small-scale farmers alike will enjoy his charming memoir. From Publishers Weekly  
Ostensibly about a garden kept by Goodman during a year spent in a tiny French village near Avignon, *French Dirt* is really an account of his response to living as an outsider in a tightly knit community. To make contact with the villagers and better understand their lot, Goodman first worked in a vineyard in exchange for firewood. The coming of spring and an epiphany in a local apricot orchard led him to borrow land, tools and expert but conflicting advice from resident gardeners for a vegetable garden of his own. The author's metaphor for gardening is that of love; he shares his initial out-of-control buying spree in the garden supply store, his devoted struggle to keep his plants watered without a hose or faucet and his raptures when the garden starts to produce. Unfortunately, this story of his short-lived affair with the garden (he left France at the end of August) is marred by self-indulgent writing and condescension toward the very villagers from whom he

craved acceptance. Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc. From Library Journal In this entrancing gardener's version of Peter Mayle's *A Year in Provence* ( LJ 4/1/90), Goodman, a Manhattan transplant, recounts the year he spent tending a small vegetable garden in the tiny Provencal village of St. Sebestien de Caisson (an alias). In addition to describing a neophyte's discovery of the joys of creating a vegetable garden, he portrays the village with its highly polarized partisans of night-vs.-morning watering and its generous, hardworking villagers. At times, Goodman's simple poetic prose style is slightly self-conscious, but not to the point where it interferes with the book's narrative power. Sometimes the repetition of French words ("I had no faucet, no 'robinet' ") irritates. Robinet means faucet. The drawings at the chapter heads are perfect: simple, childlike, humorous. This is an enjoyable read, quietly compelling, for anyone who loves the south of France or the making of a garden. For gardening and travel collections.- Sharon Levin, Univ. of Vermont Lib., Burlington Copyright 1991 Reed Business Information, Inc.