

# Early-17<sup>th</sup>-century gardens in New Amsterdam and Crispijn De Passe's Garden print

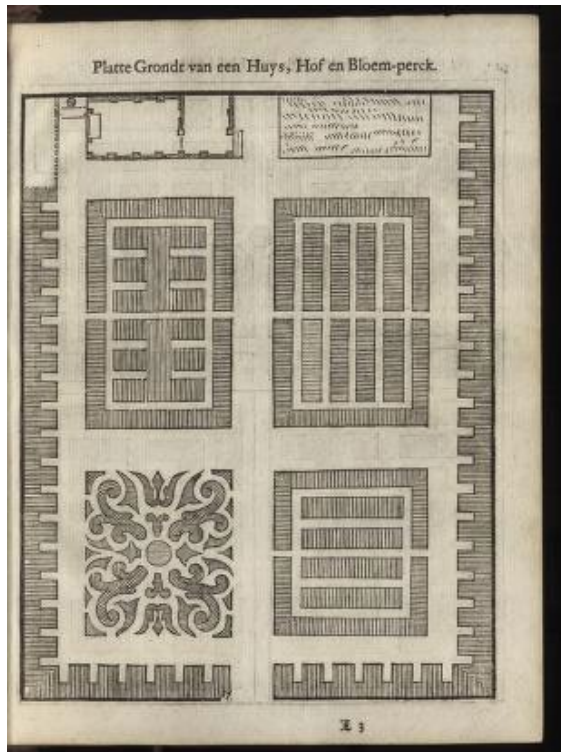
by Vanessa Bezemer Sellers



Fig 4.21 Crispijn de Passe, Hortus Floridus, Utrecht 1615, copyright New York Botanical Garden <https://www.nybg.org/>

Crispijn De Passe's impressive garden print offer a highly appealing view of a Dutch garden layout in classical geometrical style. From an enclosed portico, one oversees a courtyard garden designed with an array of geometrically shaped boxwood parterres or planting beds, filled with spring flowers, from tulips to crown imperial and fritillaria. This image is iconic for what would come to be known as the "Golden Age" of Dutch formal garden art and architecture. Apart from geometrical garden design, it also reflects the early 17<sup>th</sup>-century development of floriculture and horticultural knowledge; knowledge that was taken along on the passage to New Netherland. While De Passe's print shows an ideal, imaginary garden, a place that only could be afforded by the very wealthy, garden layouts like this did exist in early 17<sup>th</sup>-century Netherlands, and later in the century also in New Netherland.

Initially, in early 17<sup>th</sup>-century New Amsterdam gardens did not have an ornamental purpose but were used to grow plants for sustenance. The extreme expense and rarity of tulips and other bulbous plants would have precluded their presence in New Amsterdam until the second half of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, when, in fact, Adriaen van der Donck notes the presence of roses and tulips in his *Description of New Netherland*. For a general idea of what an early 17<sup>th</sup>-century garden in New Amsterdam looked like –neatly divided in rectilinear beds for growing produce, one square for ornamental purpose– the print published by the Dutch gardener Jan van der Groen in *Den Nederlandtsen Hovenier* is useful:



[https://archive.org/details/gri\\_33125010375786/page/n181/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/gri_33125010375786/page/n181/mode/2up)

Often these kind of 'quartered' garden plots clearly visible on the Castello plan at the back of each small New Amsterdam house included potherbs and medicinal plants in addition to food production and formed central part of each New Netherland family's daily lives. Certainly, the Director of the West India Company's Garden followed this formal geometry based on the drawing of the Castello plan- but did so on a much grander scale.

#### Literature/Sources:

Vanessa Bezemer Sellers, "Anticipating Spring with Crispijn de Passe's Garden of Flowers,"

<https://newamsterdamhistorycenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Spring-2021-Newsletter-Vol.-4-No.-1-3.pdf>

Adriaen van der Donck, *Beschryvinge Van Nieuw-Nederlant (Ghelijck het tegenwoordigh in Staet is)* (Amsterdam/Madrid: Evert Niewenhof, 1655) <https://www.loc.gov/item/2021666733/>

Best English translation: [Charles T. Gehring](#) and [William A. Starna](#), eds. Adriaen van der Donck, *Description of New Netherland (The Iroquoians and Their World)* (Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2010) <https://www.nebraskapress.unl.edu/nebraska-paperback/9780803232839/a-description-of-new-netherland/>

Jan van der Groen, *Den Nederlandtsen Hovenier - Zijnde het I. deel van het Vermakelijck land-leven, beschrijvende alderhande princelijke en heerlijcke lusthoven en hofsteden; en hoe men de selve, met veelderley uytnemende boomen, bloemen en kruyden, kan beplanten, bezaeyen, en verciereren ...* (Amsterdam: Marcus Doornick, 1669)  
[https://archive.org/details/gri\\_33125010375786/page/n181/mode/2up](https://archive.org/details/gri_33125010375786/page/n181/mode/2up)

Joel W. Grossman <https://encyclopedia.nahc-mapping.org/sites/default/files/2024-01/DEHALV~1.PDF>, p. 9: "None of the seventeenth-century plants excavated from lower Manhattan suggest an ornamental flower garden."

Also see a detailed article on the archeology of plant life in New Amsterdam by Joel Grossman, PhD. [here](#). Courtesy of the [Holland Society of New York](#).