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**A house is not a Home without a Gnome**

**By Hugh Harris-Evans**

**A house is not a Home without a Gnome by Hugh Harris-Evans**

When confronted by a garden gnome the common reaction is to hold up your hands in horror and utter an expression of disgust while wondering how anyone can bear to allow such a creature to remain in their backyard. On the other hand we are told on good authority that the gnome population of Southern Germany is close on four million and, when you start looking, there are quite a number visible in the US.

Perhaps we should not be surprised by the Germans since gnomes were first created in their country in the early 1800's. The earliest recorded sighting in England was in 1840 at Lamport Hall, the seat of Sir Charles Isham. It was not until 1872 that gnomes for the garden began to be manufactured in large numbers. According to German folklore gnomes were regarded as good luck charms. They were supposed to help around the house and garden and in rural areas often lived in the rafters of barns where they would keep a watchful eye on the owner's animals as well as the crops and garden produce.

Over the years the German gnome makers honed their skills and became master craftsmen. At its peak the Griebel gnome factory in East Germany produced some 300 different gnome characters. Following the collapse of communism in 1989 entrepreneurs in the Czech Republic decided to enter the market and to produce cheap imitations of the traditional characters. Initially they were prevented from entering Germany by a law which allowed customs to confiscate those gnomes infringing companies' copyright. However, now it is a free for all on the German border and Reinhard Griebel, the great grandson of the founder of the firm, has just one workshop and the gnome museum.

Whilst the original gnomes were depicted as gardeners engaged in the traditional rural tasks, the range was increased to include anyone from fishermen to musicians, sportsmen and farmers. It was not long before living individuals were being modelled in clay or stoneware. Among those currently available are gladiator Russell Crowe, TV gardeners Alan Titchmarsh and Charlie Dimmock and even a Tony Blair wall plaque.

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For gnome lovers no trip to Europe would be complete without a visit to the Gnome Reserve set in the wilds of northern Devon in England. There you will find over one thousand gnomes and pixies in the four acre reserve. Gnome hats are loaned free of charge together with fishing rods, so you don't embarrass the gnomes!

There are some who view the cheerful little character sitting in your yard in a different light. FreeTheGnomes.com provides Garden Gnome Liberation information and calls to action. They proclaim that "Thousands of Gnomes are enslaved in Gardens across America. For too long we have let our neighbors usurp the rights of these gentle woodland creatures. Join our boycott. Organize a picket demonstration. Write to Congress. Free a Gnome. We'll show you how."

Some groups have taken the law into their own hands. In April 2000 in Paris the dormant Garden Gnome Liberation Front sprang back to life, stealing about 20 gnomes during a nighttime raid on a

Paris exhibition. "We demand ... that garden gnomes are no longer ridiculed and that they be released into their natural habitat," the Front's Paris wing said in a statement following its weekend strike.

Disappearing gnomes have caused headaches for police forces worldwide. In May 2004 The Scotsman reported that a spate of bizarre thefts had left Lothians police with several unusual prisoners – 14 garden gnomes. An elderly woman complained to police that someone was stealing gnomes from her yard in Fairfax County, Washington D.C. Officers set up a spy-cam and caught their suspect in the act four times. Police revealed that their bad guy was really a not-so-bad Labrador retriever named Magnum. The dog had been retrieving the figurines and bringing them home. In Australia, garden gnomes started disappearing from one particular neighbourhood on a large scale. They were found in a clearing in the bush months later, where they were all gathered around the largest gnome, having a meeting.

If you have not yet succumbed to the temptation to acquire one of these cheerful little creatures, let me leave you with one final thought. A study carried out in England in 2003 into matters to be considered when selling your home found that having a gnome in your front garden reduced the value of your house by \$840.

Hugh Harris-Evans

For gardening tips and resources visit my site:  
<http://www.garden-supplies-advisor.com>

Hugh Harris-Evans is a retired 62 year old who divides his time between building his gardening web site <http://www.garden-supplies-advisor.com> and getting his hands dirty in his real world garden.

### **The Garden Gnomes**

**By Dave Conrad**

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The Garden Gnome is not just another yard figurine. It has its own distinguished history, culture and controversy attached to it. Before you buy a Garden Gnome for your home be sure to know all of the factors that go along with it.

For starters the history of the Garden Gnome dates back to Germany in the 1800's. The original statues were made out of clay and were hand crafted. They then made their way to England in the mid 1800s. Around the late 1800's to the 1900's they made their way into America. During WWII production of these figurines came to an abrupt halt. The German factories were commandeered and converted to support the war efforts. In 1960's the gnomes picked up popularity again however, they were mass-produced using plastic. Because so many of them were produced they gained the stigma for being a tacky lawn ornament. The clay hand carved Garden Gnomes have been family heirlooms for many families. The Clay figurines are making a come back of sorts, more companies are reviving the old tradition.

Any Garden Gnome enthusiast will tell you that Garden Gnomes are wonderful creatures that are very good luck to have in your garden. They are primarily vegetarians, joyful little people who enjoy having fun and helping out with things. It is believed that having one in your garden will be helpful in the day-to-day activities that are necessary to proper garden management. It is believed that they have an excellent ability to be able to reflect on history and an even better perspective on the future.

Not all people have such a jovial perception of the Garden Gnome. There are some that disagree with the use of the Garden Gnome. They believe that to have a Garden Gnome in the home is slavery and that the Garden Gnome should be freed. There are groups that will take a Garden Gnome from a yard if they see it. Relocating it to the forest where they believe they find their freedom. A few of the groups choose to operate under the radar, sneaking into people's yards and stealing these figurines. There is a political group that actively lobbies for the ban of Garden Gnome slavery.

Whether you are a follower of the Garden Gnome culture or just someone who thinks they are cut enough to go in your yard these figurines have a lot of history behind them and can be a wonderful addition to your yard. Just be sure to keep them away from the gnome liberators if you would like to keep them for a long period of time.

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