

FROM THE CREATORS OF THE OWNERS AND EMERGENCY SITUATION

OLDŘICH  
KAISER



# THE GARDENER'S YEAR

CAST: OLDŘICH KAISER, DAGMAR VOKATÁ, MICHAL IŠTENIK, ŠTĚPÁN KOZUB, ALENA MIHULOVÁ, LUDBOS VESELY, PETR LNĚNIČKA, TOMÁŠ JERÁBEK, JIŘÍ VYVORÁLEK  
PRODUCER: JIŘÍ TUČEK, EXECUTIVE PRODUCER: MICHAELA PETRŽILKOVÁ, SCRIPT SUPERVISOR: MARTINA KINŠKÁ, LUDOMÍR SŮVA, MUSIC: TADEÁŠ VĚRČÁK, PRODUCTION DESIGNER: JAN "PĚNA" NOVOTNÝ, COSTUME DESIGNER: FRANTIŠKA KRÁLÍKOVÁ  
MAKE-UP ARTIST: KATEŘINA MĚŠTÁNKOVÁ, IMAGE POSTPRODUCTION: ÚPP, SOUND EDITOR: PETR KAPELLEK, EDITOR: JAKUB HEJNA, DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY: FERDINAND MAZUREK, WRITTEN AND DIRECTED BY: JIŘÍ HAVELKA

IN THEATRES FROM JULY 18, 2024



DESIGNED BY: JAN FOULAR (FOULARDESIGN) PHOTOGRAPHY BY: ZUZANA PÁSKÁ 2024

# THE GARDENER'S YEAR

<b>Original title:</b>	Zahradníkův rok
<b>Country of origin:</b>	Czechia's
<b>Year produced:</b>	2024
<b>Language version:</b>	Czech 5.1 Dolby Digital
<b>Certification:</b>	12 years
<b>Genre:</b>	bittersweet comedy
<b>Runtime:</b>	104 minutes
<b>Formát:</b>	1:1,85, 2D DCP, MP4
<b>Director, writer:</b>	Jiří Havelka
<b>DoP:</b>	Ferdinand Mazurek
<b>Starring:</b>	Oldřich Kaiser – the gardener Dáša Vokatá – the gardener's wife Štěpán Kozub – security guard Alena Mihulová – mayor Michal Isteník – real estate agent Petr Lněnička – official Tomáš Jeřábek, Jiří Vyorálek - policemen Luboš Veselý – the gardener's neighbor Jiří Šimek, Sára Arnstein – married couple Tereza Dočkalová – journalist Hanuš Bor – doctor Pavel Batěk – detective
<b>Co-producer:</b>	Czech Television – Creative producer: Helena Uldrichová

A gardener (Oldřich Kaiser) and his wife (Dáša Vokatá) live at the foot of a picturesque hill and take care of their small nursery. But their idyllic life is disrupted when a new owner buys the nearby palace and begins transforming the local landscape according to his ideas. When the nursery obstructs his plans, a series of bizarre events is triggered. The new owner installs a razor-wire fence, closes the local access road, and hires a security guard (Štěpán Kozub). He then gradually ups the ante in order to achieve his goals. Determined to defend his home, the gardener refuses to give in. While the police (Jiří Vyorálek, Tomáš Jeřábek) and the mayor (Alena Mihulová) become ever more mired in their own bureaucracy, the gardener decides to take matters into his own hands. The new film by Jiří Havelka, combining bizarre, absurd, and tragicomic elements, is framed by the Karel Čapek work of the same name. In theaters July 18, 2024.



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## The Gardener's Year from the perspective of a production diary

*"I like remembering the entire shoot. On average, we filmed only two days a month, so we always really looked forward to the arrival of those two days when we could head to Humpolec. We enjoyed it for the whole year," says director Jiří Havelka.*

Havelka shot his latest writer-director picture in the Bohemian Highlands, at a location belonging to his father, Jiří Havelka Sr. Employed as a temporary home for about 80 people, his farm served as the scene for all the gardening work captured in the film – an atypical, chronological shoot that lasted one year, from March to March. The film was shot **over 25 days through all seasons (from March to October 2022 and January and March 2023)**. As producer Jiří Tuček says with a smile: "We had a company handling the weather, which, with one exception, was A+."

During filming, over 300 kg of soil was used, and four hothouses and two greenhouses were built. The local Plíhal nursery and Starkl nursery, one of the film's partners, supplied 20 trees and countless seedlings. The filmmakers themselves grew several hundred kilos of fruits and vegetables, and just like in the movie, they harvested and ate the crops – for lunch there were fresh salads, herbal spreads, and cake. Numerous animals also appeared in the film: 12 rabbits, 18 hens, 20 carp, a dog, a goose, and a swarm of bees.

Some of the most difficult scenes included lowering Oldřich Kaiser into a well and setting the beehives on fire, where firemen and special effects staff had to be present. But there was also the scene of the gardener swimming in a pond full of dead carp, and another involving the overturning of a utility vehicle, which the actor drove himself without incident – on the contrary, he drove like a pro.



### Jiří Havelka's directorial achievement filmed on his father's farm

*"I myself prefer spring and autumn for the simple reason that they are something in between," laughs the director, screenwriter, and actor when asked to name his favorite season. And how did the idea for the film come about? "The idea gradually emerged as I learned about cases involving interference with private property rights in the Czech Republic. Because *The Gardener's Year* was made over 12 months, it allowed us to step back a bit from reality and use a kind of fairytale principle."*

It's hard not to notice that Havelka's previous, successful film *The Owners* was also about private property. What fascinates him about this topic? *"There was no plan to focus on the topic of personal property. Those two films are very different, but you are probably right that there are some commonalities. I think of private property as one of the tenets of democracy, alongside the separation of powers, parliamentary rule, the rule of law, respect for human rights, etc. But I take more inspiration from everything around me rather than look for something specific."*



What's the connection with Karel Čapek's book of the same name and is there something Kafkaesque about the film? *"The movie isn't directly inspired by Čapek. His book *The Gardener's Year* came later, as an interesting way to frame the story. But I really like Čapek. He's often criticized for a certain naïveté or for excessively transparent metaphors or for being overly moralizing and pedagogical. But I have never agreed with this. I think it's impossible to find a better writer who is also such a confirmed humanist. And Kafka is an entire universe through which you can travel further and further, at every*



*age finding completely new connections in it. For me, Kafka and Čapek are closely connected, even though it may not seem so at first glance.”*

And how did real-life married couple Oldřich Kaiser and Dáša Vokatá come to play husband and wife? *“I asked Jirka Lábus for Olda’s number because I wanted to give him the script to read. But all scripts stop with Dáša first. Dáša reads them and only some of them filter through to Olda. And this script passed through Dáša’s net, so Dáša was an organic part of the project from beginning to end.”*

Why was the film shot on the director’s father’s property? *“The work there, the work in the garden, plays the most fundamental role. We looked for a location for a long time because finding a nursery that would let us film all year round – and ideally one that was next to a palace – was quite difficult. That is, until we settled on my dad’s mill in Dubí u Herálce. True, there wasn’t a palace in the neighborhood, but otherwise I felt right at home. Above all, I knew that my dad would want to be there, and that he would ensure that all the work, everything that went on, would look credible because he built and grew everything himself in his garden. So he was the owner of the location and, at the same time, a professional consultant.”*

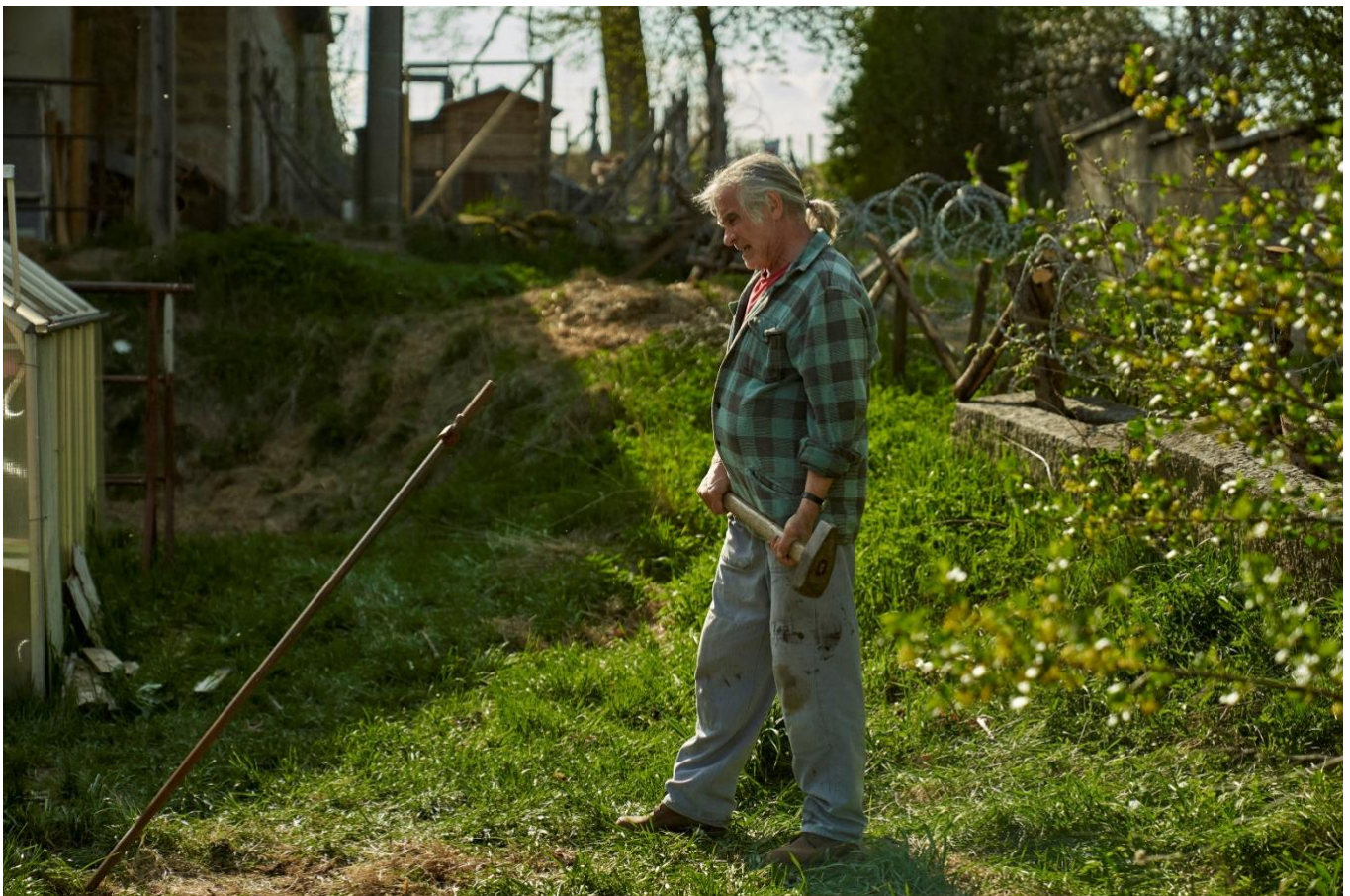
We couldn’t help but ask: What kind of gardener is Jiří Havelka? *“I was a smalltime citrus grower as a child. I grew several small, green, never-to-be-ripe citrus fruits,”* he laughs.



## The four seasons of gardener Oldřich Kaiser

As acting journeymen Oldřich Kaiser told us, he was completely prepared for this role. He only needed to brush up on grafting and beekeeping. When asked whether he'd make a good gardener and if he'd like to make a living from it, he replied: *"I'd definitely make a good gardener! During the Bolshevik era, I built out two cottages and several apartments. Since it was harder then to get materials than it is now, you had to do everything yourself, and that's how I learned a lot of things. If you're a gardener, you can't do much theater – it doesn't work. Let alone a beekeeper... So I'm more of a gardener on the side,"* he laughs. *"You've probably already realized that I have a lot in common with my character – a love of manual work and gardening, as well as the same wife,"* he jokes. *"In short, I don't think we differ at all, except that I've never made a living from gardening. But that's probably the only thing. And that wife, Dáša Vokatá, is someone who never touches dirt – I enjoyed that she had to plant and dig in the soil. That was pretty interesting."*

In this bittersweet comedy that unfolds through work, nature plays one of the main roles. *"In the film, we managed to capture nature as it progresses through spring, summer, autumn, and winter, as well as everything that gardening entails during those seasons – so that was nice. The gardener and his wife take good care of their orchards, herbs, vegetables, etc., and they make a living from it. But then some modern-day nouveau riche turns up in the area. And he longs for a piece of land because he wants to build something on it. This complicates things, seriously complicates things for the gardener and his wife. But I won't say any more. Except I will say that when I read the script I was touched, but that's how it is..."*





### Debut actress Dagmar Vokatá, the gardener's wife

*"I cried when I read it,"* says debut actress Dáša Vokatá, continuing her husband's thought. *"You know, I enjoy playing guitar and singing. I'm cut from a different cloth, but when I'm here and I'm digging around in the flowers, feeding rabbits and chickens, I can stand it for a while but I wouldn't spend my whole life doing it."* As her husband Oldřich Kaiser adds, she wanted to try something different, even though he had to persuade her a bit. The idea to cast real-life spouses in the roles occurred to director Jiří Havelka, who had seen the video of their song "Můj milý."



*"I had no experience with either camera or garden. But Jirka Havelka, the director, always tells me what to do. He knows what he wants and outlines it for me, demonstrates it, advises me, and then the camera starts rolling and I do it. This is my very first film shoot and it's also probably my last, but I've been learning. Just yesterday, for example, during a pretty emotional scene I asked Olda how I should look, and he explained it to me. I asked him to show me the facial expression. He can do thousands of expressions, so he showed me the right one and I copied it, and that was that."*

And what attracted her most to the story? *"I very much like that it's a real story and that the filming is authentic."*



### **Alena Mihulová, a mayor drowning in bureaucracy**

What did she reveal to us about her role? *“I play the mayor of a small, unspecified town, who initially doesn’t take the gardener’s problem very seriously. She gradually realizes that the gardener is right, but there is no legal process to help him. I – along with Petr Lněnička, who plays the lawyer – feel increasingly helpless, and it shows how terribly difficult it is to help someone when a real crook appears. In the end, she tries instead to help him unofficially because it’s obvious that the official fight against evil is a lost cause.”*

And how was the collaboration with Jiří Havelka and Oldřich Kaiser? *“When I saw The Owners, I really liked Jirka Havelka’s directorial approach, so I went into it with confidence. In addition, I was truly interested in the topic – the powerlessness, the injustice, and the human pettiness involved in the fight – both with crooks and with official procedures. And to be honest, I’d like a deeper collaboration with Jirka Havelka. I was also very interested in how Olda Kaiser would approach his role because it’s very difficult to act without speaking, with just body language and facial expressions. And in one scene, sitting across from him with Petr Lněnička, saying our lines – he just looked at us... But how he looked!”*



The film is inspired by Čapek’s novel *The Gardener’s Year*, but you could also say it’s somewhat Kafkaesque. Does the actress feel close to these writers? *“It’s true that our film is Kafkaesque in its despair. In any event, I’ve read books by both Čapek and Kafka, but I probably prefer Čapek. He seems kinder to me. Kafka is darker. But on the other hand, my favorite books by Čapek are *The White Disease* and *The Mother*, which are not the most lighthearted reading,”* she jokes.

What is Alena Mihulová's favorite season? *"I like spring and summer the most because I like water: swimming in our ponds or in the sea, and, of course, the sun and the light. Simply put, I love being warm,"* she smiles.

How does she herself feel about gardening? *"I have a yard but to tell you the truth, I prefer sitting there with a good cup of coffee. I have cedars, climbing roses, and lavender in my yard, and they need just the right amount of care to suit me, which means occasional trimming and that's all. But I really appreciate people who have beautiful yards and gardens that they take care of, like my neighbor does, or like the protagonist of our film and his wife."*

### **Petr Lněnička, a lawyer lost among paragraphs**

Who does he portray in the film? *"I portray a lawyer of a small-town municipal authority. A colleague of the mayor. The protagonist's problem is obviously too much for him."*



How was his collaboration with director Jiří Havelka and the other actors? *"Quick and wonderful. I was only filming on one day. But I've known Jirka since school and I like his movies and theater pieces. So I was very pleased when he called me and offered me the role. I didn't hesitate for a moment. I didn't know Alena personally and it was pleasant working with her. I think we were both crossing our fingers while delivering those professional lines we had,"* he laughs. *"And I was looking forward to meeting Mr. Kaiser. Years ago, we acted together as father and son in a production of The Goat, or Who Is Sylvia? I kind of feel it every time we meet, that he's my father."*

*I'll admit right away that I don't have a yard, but my parents do and they really enjoy it. I didn't really take to it, maybe because I had to help out. Nevertheless, I have some experience, and all those delicious things that you grow by hand – that's irreplaceable..."* This in answer to the question of whether or not he's a gardener himself.

And what about his favorite season? *"It changes with age. Now I probably like spring the most. I really look forward to it and try to enjoy it. The beginning of it after winter: the scents, the colors, the warmth – and later the cherries. The first trips to the countryside. The first motorcycle rides, and so on."*

### **Michal Isteník, the relentless real estate broker**



We asked him about the character he portrays in the film. *"My character is something between a real estate agent and the consigliere of a mafia boss. He is a spineless and dangerous person. In the film, he functions as the representative of an unseen evil that enters the house."*

And how was his collaboration with director Jiří Havelka? *"Anyone who has ever collaborated with Jiří Havelka would smile at this question. Jiří Havelka is unique. He is an extremely good director but it doesn't end there. He is very good company. He's smart and funny, he doesn't panic on set, and under all circumstances he is the true guarantee of good results. And on top of that, he's really good-looking. Thinking about it now, it's really quite annoying how perfect he is. But only because I don't like feeling envy,"* he laughs.



And the collaboration with the others on set? *"I was only with Mrs. Vokatá in one scene and it was the first day I was filming. I was nervous but her presence immediately bucked me up."* And with Mr. Kaiser? *"You know, as a boy I play acted for my parents and grandparents. I often reenacted scenes from Belmondo's movies and from sketches by Oldřich Kaiser and Jiří Lábus. I acted the sketch 'the rubber bands didn't come' maybe five hundred times – including that goofy bit and the pratfall. And then suddenly, thirty years later, you're standing next to him in front of the camera. If you haven't experienced something like this, you can't imagine how nervous I was. I tried not to bother him and I think it worked. I hope,"* he smiles.

And how does he recall the shoot, which took place over two years ago? *"I enjoy remembering meeting Jiří Havelka's father. We locked ourselves in his kitchen and Jirka's father let me taste various distillates he himself had made, and we discussed them scientifically. I had already finished filming for the day, and because of this encounter I left a little late to go home to Brno."*

Did he learn anything else from the elder Mr. Havelka – that is, does he himself garden? *"Yes, I'm a gardener. We gave up our plot in the community garden this year because our jobs would prevent us from working it and we'd be sorry to leave it fallow. But at the same time, we fulfilled our dream of buying a cottage in a village. With a big yard. We won't get much done this year because I'm rehearsing and filming, but next spring we'll dive right in and we'll have dirt under our fingernails once again!"* he laughs.

And while we're at it, what's his favorite season? *"When daffodils and tulips bloom... That's how it starts... Winter has lost."*

Finally, what about Karel Čapek versus Franz Kafka? *"I lived through that beautiful and difficult time of growing up with Franz Kafka, when a person is overly sensitive and longs to be an adult already. I rarely read him these days because then I'm sad. But it's not the sadness of a 14-year-old boy, when feelings and emotions spin around like a carousel. It's a kind of dark sadness that's hard to shake. On the other hand, I labored through the work of Karel Čapek only after age thirty, and it will stay with me forever. I think Karel Čapek was a genius of Verne's stature, with a huge dose of humor. And his humor is very intelligent but also very tough. I really like that."*

## Štěpán Kozub, the unscrupulous security guard



*“I play the role of a guard of sorts. He’s kind of a rat. He’s cowardly because he doesn’t think much of his own opinion. He just obeys orders – definitely not the sharpest knife in the drawer. He’s actually a bit comical. That is, I hope so. But he can also be scary.”*

And how was the collaboration with the director and other actors? *“Very good. Jirka was very friendly, inventive, and at the same time, he cared about how the actors felt on set. Maybe because he’s also an actor. We had a discussion about the character, and that was good. He wasn’t pushy. He was open-minded. And also I worked with a man who I watched on TV as a boy, and I thought to myself: ‘How does that guy do it?’ Olda has been an inspiration for me as an actor/comedian since I started flirting with comedy. So you could say that I met someone on set who I really wanted to meet.”*

Does he have any strong memories from the shoot? *“Mmm, yes, one. I went up to Olda Kaiser on the first day of filming and introduced myself. ‘Hello, I’m Štěpán Kozub. I just wanted to say that, thanks to your work, I decided to start studying acting 14 years ago.’ Olda looked at me and replied: ‘Hmm... Am I supposed to apologize now or what?!’ An amazing reaction that I will never forget!”*

And how does he himself feel about gardening? *“I have a yard, but I don’t garden. I have a car, but I don’t drive. I even have twelve watches and I only wear three of them.”*

*“I probably enjoy autumn the most. I like how it isn’t either cold or hot. Spring is also beautiful when it turns out well. Regardless, it’s kind of uncomfortable for me since I have allergies. You know what? I’ll stick with autumn. I enjoy it. It’s colorful and mild,”* he answers regarding his favorite part of the year.









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