

Cast Of Anne Of Green Gables

Bringing Avonlea to Life: A Deep Dive into the Cast of Anne of Green Gables

For over a century, readers have fallen in love with the imaginative, fiery red-headed orphan, Anne Shirley, from the idyllic setting of Prince Edward Island. L.M. Montgomery’s classic novel, *Anne of Green Gables*, has transcended the pages of literature to become a global cultural phenomenon. A significant part of this enduring magic lies in the numerous screen adaptations that have brought Avonlea to life. When discussing these adaptations, one question arises more than any other: Who is in the cast of *Anne of Green Gables*? The answer is a fascinating journey through different eras, acting styles, and interpretations, each cast bringing a unique flavour to the beloved characters. This article explores the most notable ensembles that have portrayed Anne, Marilla, Matthew, and the residents of Avonlea, celebrating the actors who made these stories unforgettable.

The Definitive Adaptation: The 1985 Miniseries Cast

For millions of fans worldwide, the 1985 CBC miniseries, later largely aired as a television movie, represents the definitive screen version of *Anne of Green Gables*. The casting was so perfect that it is often considered the benchmark against which all other casts are measured. The chemistry, the attention to period detail, and the heartfelt performances created a masterpiece that continues to captivate new generations.

Megan Follows as Anne Shirley

At the very heart of the **cast of Anne of Green Gables** from this era is Megan Follows. Her portrayal of Anne is nothing short of iconic. Follows perfectly captured Anne’s volatile mix of dramatic intensity, wild imagination, and profound sensitivity. She embodied the character’s famous "scope for imagination" and her ability to shift from a tearful, passionate rage over her red hair to a state of blissful, poetic wonder at the beauty of the "White Way of Delight." Her performance was raw, unpolished, and achingly real, making Anne’s journey from a defensive, lonely orphan to a confident, beloved young woman utterly believable. Follows’s unique voice, mannerisms, and expressive eyes became synonymous with Anne Shirley, setting a nearly impossible standard for any actress to follow.

Colleen Dewhurst as Marilla Cuthbert

Opposite Megan Follows, the legendary Colleen Dewhurst delivered a career-defining performance as Marilla Cuthbert. Dewhurst’s Marilla was a masterclass in subtle, restrained emotion. Initially, she perfectly portrayed the stern, practical, and deeply guarded spinster who was unsure of what to do with this strange, talkative child. As the story progressed, Dewhurst masterfully allowed the audience to see the cracks in Marilla’s armour. Through a slight softening of her gaze, a hesitant, almost secretive smile, or a gruffly delivered line of affection, she showed Marilla’s deep, transformative love for Anne. Her final scene, where she tearfully admits she "loves her as much as if she were her own flesh and blood," is one of the most powerful and moving moments in television history.

Richard Farnsworth as Matthew Cuthbert

The gentle soul of Green Gables was brought to life by the wonderful Richard Farnsworth. His Matthew was the perfect, silent counterpart to Marilla’s strictness. Farnsworth’s performance was defined by his kind eyes, his hesitant smiles, and his deep, wordless affection for Anne. From his nervous, stammering attempt to tell her he was glad she was a girl to the iconic moment he buys her the coveted puff-sleeved dress, Farnsworth’s Matthew was the embodiment of unconditional love. The bond between Farnsworth’s Matthew and Follows’s Anne was so genuine and touching that it formed the emotional bedrock of the entire production.

The Supporting Cast of Avonlea

The brilliance of this **cast of Anne of Green Gables** extended far beyond the three leads. Every character in Avonlea was perfectly cast:

- **Schuyler Grant** as Diana Barry: Grant was the ideal "bosom friend" for Anne. She captured Diana’s sweetness, loyalty, and slightly more conventional nature, creating a believable, loving friendship that was central to Anne’s happiness.
- **Patricia Hamilton** as Rachel Lynde: Hamilton’s Rachel Lynde was the perfect village busybody. She was nosy, opinionated, and outspoken, but with a humour and underlying warmth that made her a beloved character rather than a mere antagonist.
- **Marilyn Lightstone** as Miss Stacy: Lightstone brought a wonderful energy and progressive spirit to the role of Anne’s favourite teacher. Her Miss Stacy was inspiring, intelligent, and the perfect mentor for Anne’s ambition.
- **Jonathan Crombie** as Gilbert Blythe: Crombie’s Gilbert was handsome, charming, and supremely confident, making him the perfect rival and eventual love interest for Anne. His "Carrots!" taunt and the subsequent slate-breaking incident remain one of the most famous scenes in literary adaptation history. Crombie became a heartthrob for a generation of fans.

Other Notable Screen Casts of Anne of Green Gables

While the 1985 miniseries is the most famous, it is not the only adaptation to feature a remarkable **cast of Anne of Green Gables**. Several other productions have offered their own distinct and valuable interpretations.

The 2017 Netflix Series: *Anne with an 'E'*

This modern, darker, and more psychologically complex adaptation took significant liberties with the source material, but its casting was universally praised.

- **Amybeth McNulty** as Anne Shirley-Cuthbert: McNulty’s performance was a revelation. She captured a more traumatized, angrier, and more neurodivergent-tinged Anne. Her wide, expressive eyes and frantic energy conveyed a child deeply scarred by her past, making her moments of joy and connection even more powerful. This was a different Anne from Follows’s, but an equally compelling one.
- **Geraldine James** as Marilla Cuthbert: James brought a brittle steeliness to Marilla, a woman hiding immense pain and a fierce, unexpected love. Her performance was deeply moving, showing a Marilla learning to express her own emotions alongside Anne.
- **R.H. Thomson** as Matthew Cuthbert: Thomson’s Matthew was more overtly anxious and socially awkward than Farnsworth’s, but his gentle, protective love for Anne was just as profound. His performance highlighted Matthew’s own quiet struggles with the world.
- **Lucas Jade Zumann** as Gilbert Blythe: Zumann played a more sensitive and modern-minded Gilbert, a young man troubled by his father’s legacy and drawn to Anne’s intellect and spirit from the very beginning.

The 1934 Black and White Film

This early sound adaptation starred the beautiful **Dawn O'Day** as Anne. In a fascinating piece of cinematic history, O'Day so fully embraced the role that she legally changed her name to **Anne Shirley**. This film offers a glimpse into how the story was first interpreted for the screen, though it is often criticized for having a much older and more polished Anne than the book describes. The cast also included Helen Jerome Eddy as a kindly Marilla and O.P. Heggie as a sweet Matthew.

Other Notable Adaptations

Several other productions have contributed unique interpretations to the **cast of Anne of Green Gables**:

- **1985 Japanese Animated Series: *Akazukin no Tokidoki*** (Little Red Riding Hood Anne) is part of the famous "World Masterpiece Theater" series. This anime is beloved in Japan and around the world for its faithful and charming depiction of the story.
- **1972 BBC Miniseries:** This British production starred **Kim Braden** as Anne. It is a very literal, low-budget adaptation that is sometimes less well-known but has its own dedicated following for its faithfulness to the book’s dialogue.
- **The 2016 Lacey Chabert Film:** A more recent television movie for PBS, *L.M. Montgomery’s Anne of Green Gables*, starred **Ella Ballentine** as Anne, **Sara Botsford** as Marilla, and **Martin Sheen** as Matthew. This version is a more straightforward, condensed telling of the first book.

Why the Cast of Anne of Green Gables Matters So Much

The enduring appeal of L.M. Montgomery’s story is its profound emotional truth. It is a story about belonging, love, imagination, and the transformative power of a kind heart. The success of any adaptation hinges entirely on its ability to capture these intangible qualities. The **cast of Anne of Green Gables** must not only look the part but also embody the very soul of these characters. The audience must believe in Anne’s wild imagination, in Marilla’s hidden well of love, and in Matthew’s silent, perfect kindness. When a casting works—as it did so brilliantly in 1985 and again in a different way in 2017—it creates a powerful emotional connection that can last a lifetime.

These actors become the characters for their generation. They shape how fans visualize the story and feel the story. The chemistry between the members of the cast, particularly between Anne and Marilla, is the engine that drives the entire narrative. It is a delicate balance of conflict, humour, and profound love that requires exceptional talent to make believable.

Furthermore, the casting of Anne herself is a particularly challenging task. She is one of literature’s most complex and beloved heroines—passionate, witty, dramatic, intelligent, and deeply vulnerable. The actress must be able to command the screen, delivering lengthy, poetic monologues without seeming pretentious, and shifting from ecstatic joy to heartbroken despair in a single scene. The success of a production almost always rests on the shoulders of the actress playing Anne.

Conclusion

From the idyllic Green Gables farmhouse to the bustling streets of Avonlea, the world of Anne Shirley has been brought to life by a remarkable collection of talented actors. The **cast of Anne of Green Gables** is not merely a list of names and credits; it is an integral part of the story's legacy. Each adaptation, from the iconic 1985 miniseries with Megan Follows, Colleen Dewhurst, and Richard Farnsworth to the more recent, grittier *Anne with an 'E'* featuring Amybeth McNulty and Geraldine James, has offered a new lens through which to see these timeless characters. While every fan may have their own favourite version, the dedication and skill of the actors who have stepped into the shoes of Anne Shirley, Marilla Cuthbert, and all the residents of Avonlea have ensured that this story of a lonely orphan who found a home and a family will continue to inspire, comfort, and delight audiences for generations to come.