BOOK REVIEWS

DANIEL F. AUSTIN, BOOK REVIEW EDITOR


This book is a collaborative effort on multiple levels: between a scientist and an avid gardener as authors, and between a government ministry and a commercial firm as publishers. As such it is a book with identity issues, reflected throughout in the blending of styles, organization of information, and even the design of the text. The subject matter is fascinating and the authors are to be commended for writing a book for those who live and garden in extremely cold climates in North America. Sadly, not everything in this graft chimera works.

The introductory 15 pages or so describe methods for garden design and horticultural techniques suited to a climate where trapping and conserving heat, as well as making optimal use of the short growing season, is crucial to success. Cloche, cold frames, hot beds, and water jackets are all clearly explained and nicely illustrated. So far, so good.

The main body of the book, comprising 145 pages, catalogs herbs that can be grown successfully under hard-winter conditions; these are keyed to a plant hardiness zone map that emphasizes the continental North America. The main entries are ordered by common name, with scientific name, plant family, and alternative common names provided. The total number of species covered is elusive; a number of taxa are mentioned in passing under some main entries, for example 3 cultivars and 3 additional species of Salvia are mentioned in the account of garden sage. Because there is no index it is impossible to access information about these herb taxa unless you remember what main entry they are described under. The lack of an index to all names used in the text is a serious shortcoming for a book organized in this way.

However, once one gets oriented in the text, there is a great deal here to delight. The species accounts are organized in a logical sequence, filled with interesting information organized as bulleted points rather than prose. Selected bits of (usually historical) information have been set off in tinted boxes inserted in the text. The illustrations are set in the text, with lines of text often varying in length so they abut the artworks. These design features I found visually distracting, even irksome.

The use of botanical art reproduced from 18th and 19th century works is unusual. The sources, however, are not identified, which precludes access to the information originally published with these historical artworks. A few species have been illustrated with original artwork that imitates the older style; these have been credited to the artists that created them.

All in all Culinary Herbs for Short-Season Gardeners is a mixed bag. The authors have created an authoritative text, which fills a niche not addressed in the herb gardening literature. However, the amateurish design and layout do not serve the text well. For those avid herb growers and fanciers living in hard winter areas, the book is worth having. But it will require taking the time to become thoroughly familiar with it in order to use it effectively. This is not a book one can pick up to quickly answer a particular question, but rather one to sit and browse through by the fire on a long dark winter’s night.

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This is a welcome addition toward understanding widespread, though often spatially restricted and overlooked, coastal freshwater forest ecosystems. ‘Coastally restricted forests’ are typically dominated by coniferous species, often with a tendency to thrive under suboptimal conditions. These occur exclusively within 250 km of a marine shore in the Northern Hemisphere. This superb volume provides valuable insights into these essentially maritime forests. It elucidates paleo- and neo-endemism, and the paradox of sclerophylly in perpetually moist environments, among other topics. Moreover, the papers collectively highlight ecosystems under threat and/or with previously unrecognized potential.

The 21 chapters authored by 34 individuals are grouped into two sections: Chamaecyparis research, and Systems with diverse dominant. The lead chapter by Laderman introduces some of the key research directives and characteristics of coastal forest communities, summarizing their biogeography and general nature.

Part I includes eleven contributions on different aspects of Chamaecyparis growth, ecology, and forest management. Zobel provides a synthetic perspective.