

Cool Plants for Cold Climates: A Garden Designer's Perspective

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Book Reviews

COOL PLANTS FOR COLD CLIMATES: A GARDEN DESIGNER'S PERSPECTIVE. By Brenda C. Adams. Fairbanks: University of Alaska Press, 2017. 239 pp. \$35.00 (softcover). ISBN: 978-1-60223-325-6.

Gardens as a well-crafted play? Throughout this beautifully photographed and intensely practical gardening guide, COOL PLANTS FOR COLD CLIMATES, Brenda C. Adams, award-winning designer and owner of Gardens by Design located in Homer, Alaska, expands her theatrical metaphor as she evaluates Alaska-appropriate species for their ease of management and artistic impact. Adams, a Pennsylvania native and transplanted California gardener, displays a depth of Alaska gardening knowledge developed from her own observations backed by years of experimentation to find the best plants for northern gardens.

The actual cool plants for cold climates are the main characters and are grouped by annuals, bulbs, grasses, herbaceous perennials, shrubs, trees, and vines. Few of the species selections are typical garden mainstays; the spotlight is on less-common plants and good reasons to put them on the stage. Listed by scientific name followed by variety and common name, information for each species comprises basic needs followed by an exuberant description of best qualities. Love-Lies Bleeding Amaranth is “festooned with long, draping deep red flowers that look ever so much like dreadlocks.” Cliff Stonecrop has “gray-blue foliage tinged with pink, stems flushed with purple, and pink-purple flowers that age to carmine.”

Stunning photographs and colorful writing direct the novice's attention to noticing and enjoying subtleties of the floral show. White Birch, Amur Chokecherry, and Red-Twigged Dogwood are the winter stars, whereas Bicolor Monkshood and Shasta Daisy steal the show in summer. Less dramatic Six Hills Giant Catmint, Masterwort cultivars, and Bloody Cranesbills Germanium serve best as supporting cast members. Giving a season-long display is the role of Shrub Clematis, Totally Tangerine Avens, and Queen of the Buttercups. Large white blossoms of Blizzard Mockorange dominate the scene before this shrub transitions into dark green backdrop. For lighting, high-latitude sunshine “infuses pastels with

intensity and more saturated colors with exceptional liveliness.”

With her commonsense approach, Adams, author of *There's a Moose in My Garden: Designing Gardens in Alaska and the Far North* (University of Alaska Press, 2013), leads the novice through sections devoted to the basics of garden creation as a total sensory integration presenting tactile experience, eye-catching motion, fragrance, and the whirr of hummingbird wings. She offers sound gardening advice on landscape context and how to determine species that will actually thrive in a difficult climate, as well as counsel on topics pertinent to gardeners everywhere who strive to create a pleasing year-round show. Nuggets include cherishing “late-blooming nectar-filled flowers because they're capable of attracting bees,” do your research before accepting “pass-around plants” such as Butter-and-Eggs that are often troublesome over-producers, and “Seek plants that will likely become wonderful old friends.”

Especially helpful to the novice gardener is the section “At the Nursery” where Adams gives specific direction on buying plants in bud, selecting potential purchases free of insect pests and weeds, and investing in the largest specimen you can afford. Other sections give detail on understanding the growing environment of your own garden and choosing plant species that have evolved in soil, moisture, fertility, and temperature regimes similar to those of your planting area. Sidebars furnish detailed information about creating pollinator habitats, use of beneficial insects, preventing infestations of new weeds, “Thoughts on Deadheading,” and experimenting beyond a location's designated hardiness zone. For the more rural gardener, Adams provides information on a plant's attractiveness to hungry rabbits, deer, and moose. A glossary and bibliography are included for those seeking further information.

Well-named and beautifully illustrated, Brenda C. Adams's compilation of cold-adapted plants provides the dedicated gardener with a selection of flowers, grasses, shrubs, and trees suitable for a coastal to interior Alaska climate. Focused on the far north, this book fills a niche for the cold climate gardener with significantly fewer “how to” references than those who cultivate ornamental plants in warm regions. With much of Alaska limited to fewer than six hours of winter daylight, *Cool Plants for Cold Climates* will be a welcome resource for people

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who spend winters by the fireside contemplating appealing plants to thrive in next season's garden display. To see more dazzling photos waiting in the wings, check out <http://www.gardensbybrenda.com>.

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