

## **Alpines: from Mountain to Garden**

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## Book Reviews

ALPINES: FROM MOUNTAIN TO GARDEN. By Richard Wilford. Richmond, Surrey, U.K.: Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, 2010. 244 pp. £29.00, \$48.00 in U.S.A. (hardcover). ISBN 978-1-84246-172-3.

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This beautifully illustrated book traces alpine plants from their homes in high mountainous regions around the world to growing them in rock gardens for everyone to enjoy. Alpine plants appeal to gardeners because of their small size, neat habit, and relatively large flowers. These plants appeal to botanists and ecologists because of their abilities to withstand harsh environments and their interesting adaptations in growth form and physiology.

This volume looks at the geography, history, and cultivation of alpine plants. Alpine plants can be found on all continents—at high elevations above timberline on tropical mountains to near sea level in Arctic and Antarctic tundra. The author distinguishes between “true alpinists,” those plants that grow in habitats above the tree line and those plants that grow in subalpine zones that are like alpinists in every respect except their elevation on the mountain slope. “... there are many plants that grow in subalpine woods and along streams that are perfect for an alpine plant collection. This means that, in horticultural terms, an alpine is classed as any hardy plant that is a suitable size for growing on a rock garden, alpine trough garden, or raised bed. This vague definition covers an assortment of plants, including bulbs, cushion plants, meadow flowers, small shrubs, and woodland perennials.”

The book includes a history of plant hunters that explored and collected plants that now adorn our gardens. Each chapter contains lovely inserts about a particular species along with its history, growth requirements, and botanical drawing from *Curtis's Botanical Magazine*. The oldest drawing dates back to 1792. I only wish the names of the various plant hunters had been included in the index.

The book describes various methods of growing alpinists along with lush photographs of beautiful gardens. The next eight chapters describe alpinists from each continent: Europe, North America, South America, Australia and New Zealand, Japan, China and the Himalaya, Western and Central Asia, and Africa. These chapters start with a map of the region, a description of the mountains, and description of the alpinists along with their growth requirements. Each of these chapters ends with a bibliography and references.

The book ends with two indices: the first index to scientific names and cultivars, and the second to common names. I wish these had been combined so people who are not familiar with the scientific names could have a cross-reference. In addition, a more complete index including plant hunters and mountain ranges would be helpful.

Overall, the book is wonderful—full of good information, spectacular photographs, beautifully laid out, and a pleasure to read.

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