

Recommendations for Your Gardening Library

The Bold Dry Garden: Lessons from the Ruth Bancroft Garden

Johanna Silver, with photographs by Marion Brenner. Timber Press, Portland, OR, 2016. 236 pages. Publisher's price, hardcover: \$34.95.

EVERYTHING ABOUT the *Bold Dry Garden*, from the beautiful cover to the wealth of authoritative information it contains, will appeal to fans of succulents and other arid-region plants. But even if you have never planted a single cactus, you will be inspired by the story of Ruth Bancroft and her exemplary dry garden in Walnut Creek, California. This consummate gardener, now 108 years old, has spent more than 40 years building a diverse collection of succulents, shrubs, and trees from arid lands around the world.



Bancroft and her remarkable garden inspired the founding of the Garden Conservancy in 1988 “to preserve exceptional American gardens for the public’s education and enjoyment.” Through this organization, the Ruth Bancroft Garden is currently open to the public, and I was fortunate to visit it recently. Its lush beauty completely mesmerized me.

Reading this book’s detailed descriptions of the garden and examining the exquisite photographs was almost like a return visit. And the discussions of Bancroft’s planting strategies, her ideas of repetition, working with light and shade, and managing the wide ranging climate adaptation of plants gave me—already a desert gardener—a much greater understanding of what is possible despite a lack of water.

Even the captions for the plentiful photos are instructive and insightful, often going beyond the important task of naming species to clarify attributes that contribute to the beauty of each composition. For example, in a close-up shot of a group of small, round cacti, the caption reads, “*Parodia magnifica*, organized into neat rows of bristly spines topped with satiny flowers, creates a formal appearance.”

This book documents an important piece of American garden history that facilitated the introduction of numerous cacti and succulents to our landscapes. As I read through it, it often had me running outside to examine my own garden, looking for rock edges and niches, reimagining my planting design, and hunting potential spaces for plants that poke, swirl, send up rosettes of color, and rise high with sword-shaped leaves.

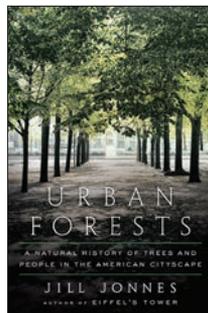
—Linda Larson

Linda Larson inspires others to visit gardens wherever they go through her blog, “A Traveling Gardener wandering, wondering, noticing” at www.travelinggardener.com/wordpress.

Urban Forests

Jill Jonnes. Viking, New York, NY, 2016. 394 pages. Publisher’s price, hardcover: \$30.

POUND FOR POUND (or tree for tree), the most critical trees on the planet are those in urban forests. That’s what I emphasize to my students in the Master Naturalist classes I teach, citing general factoids such as the savings of energy for heating and cooling, sometimes by up to 50 percent; provision of food, nesting sites, and cover to enhance urban biodiversity; filtration of air pollutants and urban particulates; and of course absorbing and converting up to 100 pounds of carbon dioxide per tree annually to fight global climate change. But when those students



ask for a book to find more information, I have been at a loss for what to recommend for a general, non-academic audience.

Along comes Jill Jonnes with *Urban Forests*, which contains some of the most readable and insightful arboreal prose I have ever come across. Jonnes dives deeply into trees and their roles in American cities through various eras of history. The text is laced with facts, dates, and figures gleaned from recent scientific studies that, rather than making one’s eyes glaze over, inspire a profound respect for these resilient trees and the people who champion them.

In addition to detailing the array of environmental benefits trees provide in urban areas, Jonnes deftly illustrates the impact of trees on the well-being of city-dwellers. A poignant example is how an old elm tree that withstood the Oklahoma City bombing in 1995 became an emblem of hope and healing to residents.

A spellbinding storyteller, Jonnes relates the heartbreaking stories of America’s most devastating arboreal tragedies—the annihilation of native elm, chestnut, and now ash trees by introduced pests and diseases. She counterbalances vivid scenes of entire neighborhoods being clear cut with the diligent efforts of the people trying to save these trees from extinction. Through these and other equally compelling anecdotes, the book elucidates the powerful emotional connection humans have with trees.

I found myself so enthralled that I was sorry to reach the end of the book. Fortunately, the 30-page bibliography that Jonnes calls “Notes” offers a lifetime of further investigation into the magical world of urban trees.

—Guy Sternberg

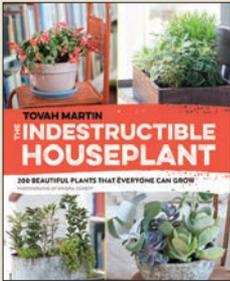
A certified arborist, Guy Sternberg is the primary author of Native Trees for North American Landscapes (Timber Press, 2004). He lives in Petersburg, Illinois.

GARDENER'S BOOKS

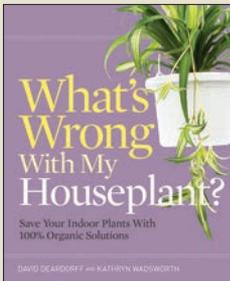
Indoor Gardening

No matter what the season or what's happening outside, plants can thrive in our homes year round. Space, or the lack of it, need not be a limitation. I've grown quite a few herbs on a kitchen windowsill, for example. All that is needed is a can-do attitude and the correct plants. You provide the spirit; these three books will help you plant for success.

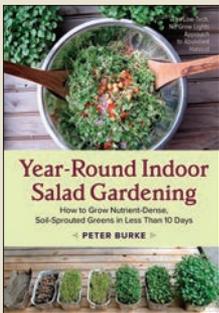
In *The Indestructible Houseplant* (Timber Press, 2015, \$22.95), Tovah Martin has weeded through the world of indoor plants to find over 200 options tough enough for anyone to grow. The key to success is Martin's thorough plant profiles, which include detailed information about the plant, suitable indoor growing conditions, and care for each plant. The friendly, approachable text is accompanied by photographs that will inspire experimentation. Another nice feature is the houseplant care calendar to help keep maintenance on track.



Sometimes, despite all your best efforts, a plant heads south. *What's Wrong with My Houseplant?* by David Dearnorff and Kathryn Wadsworth (Timber Press, 2016, \$24.95) is a go-to manual for diagnosing problems with indoor plants. Each of the 148 plant portraits, organized by plant type, notes common ailments and describes how to provide an optimum household environment. An illustrated rogue's gallery of pests and disease symptoms is accompanied by organic solutions for effectively dealing with them.



Peter Burke's *Year-Round Indoor Salad Gardening* (Chelsea Green Publishing, 2015, \$29.95) demonstrates how easy, fast, and tasty it is to grow nutrient-dense greens indoors. Burke describes his planting methods in detail, but he also provides a quick-start guide to those who would rather plant first and then get into the details. Either way, instructions are easy to follow. There are even recipes for how to use the resulting harvest of greens.



—Mary Chadduck
Special to The American Gardener



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