

Recommendations for Your Gardening Library

Fresh from the Garden

John Whitman. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, MN, 2017. 544 pages. Publisher's price, hardcover: \$49.95.

GARDENERS OF EVERY level of experience will find *Fresh From the Garden* essential. In it, John Whitman lays out in clear and concise prose the best organic practices for successfully raising a wide variety of edible plants. Although this book purportedly addresses gardening in cold climates (defined as wherever temperatures can drop below 20 degrees Fahrenheit), most of the content would be applicable in warmer regions as well.

Chapters on where and how to plant, dealing with inevitable problems, and harvesting lead the reader step by step through the essentials. Whitman also provides invaluable insights based on his own lengthy experience with growing food. Perhaps this personal touch is why his discussion of organic amendments is one of the best I have ever read. Regarding weed control, I found his burdock and thistle eradication strategies encouragingly doable. And readers may be surprised to learn that a large number of weeds we pull and compost are good to eat!

In the section on pests, the book details the damage each type inflicts on the plant and offers effective organic methods for their control. Whitman also encourages readers to embrace beneficial insects and describes how to attract and support them. One feature I particularly appreciate is that key words in each chapter are bolded, followed by a definition providing in-text enlightenment without the need to jump to the glossary.

More than half of the book is devoted to growing specific plants from asparagus to watermelon, arranged alphabetically by common name across 370 pages. For each plant, Whitman includes cultural information, culinary uses, the nutrition facts for each, lengthy lists of available varieties, and relevant commentary. Even the most advanced vegetable grower will find new and useful information.

This is not a book for armchair reading—you'll need a sturdy table to handle its nearly six-pound weight! But those six pounds will provide you with a single, encyclopedic source of detailed, time-tested, organic gardening advice that will help you raise your best produce yet.

—Keith Crotz

Keith Crotz lives in Chillicothe, Illinois, where he has retired from intensive vegetable production after 34 years. He serves as a board member of Seed Savers Exchange.

Teaming with Fungi

Jeff Lowenfels. Timber Press, Portland, OR, 2017. 172 pages. Publisher's price, hardcover: \$24.95.

MOST PLANTS form beneficial associations known as mycorrhizae with certain soil-dwelling fungi. The word mycorrhizae comes from Greek—"myco" for fungus, and "rhizae" for roots—because these interactions involve these two elements. Jeff Lowenfels's new book, *Teaming with Fungi: The Organic Gardener's Guide to Mycorrhizae*, is a thorough yet accessible look at mycorrhizal fungi and their critical role in plant health and survival.

Lowenfels has written two other books: *Teaming with Microbes* (2010) and *Teaming with Nutrients* (2013). He urges readers to peruse "them all if you want to understand how plants, mycorrhizal fungi and other microbes, and nutrients interact in the soil—they are all interrelated parts of the soil food web." For those readers starting with his newest book, however, I wish he had presented a little more of the basics of the soil food web here so one could dive in with a firmer understanding of the larger ecological context for mycorrhizae.

That said, I advise that you settle into a comfortable chair as Lowenfels delves into some serious science. He begins with important definitions for fungal terms such as hypha, glomalin, septa, and others needed to comprehend mycorrhizae and how they work. He also explains types of mycorrhizal fungi that colonize various plant families; examples include Ericaceae (heathers and heaths), Orchidaceae (orchids), and members of Monotropaceae (Indian pipes, *Monotropa* spp.).

Next, Lowenfels spends a healthy number of pages explaining why, when, and how mycorrhizae are leveraged in agriculture, horticulture, silviculture, hydroponics, and lawncare. He also includes a chapter on how to collect and culture your own mycorrhizal fungi for inoculation purposes. The final sections comprise a resource list, further reading, and an index—but no glossary or citations.

Mycorrhizal fungi are an important but still poorly understood aspect of gardening. I recommend this book for the intermediate to advanced gardener, and certainly for anyone who grows plants professionally.

—Robert Kourik

Robert Kourik is the author of 16 books on sustainable gardening, the most recent is Understanding Roots, Discover How to Make Your Garden Flourish (Metamorphic Press, 2015).