

Recommendations for Your Gardening Library

Garden Renovation

Bobbie Schwartz. Timber Press, Portland, OR, 2017. 259 pages. Publisher's price, hardcover: \$24.95.

MANY GARDENERS view renovating their home landscape as a daunting challenge. *Garden Renovation* turns that mountain into a mulch pile by providing a practical approach to the redesign process. Author Bobbie Schwartz capitalizes on her 40-plus years of experience as a gardener and landscape designer to skillfully guide even beginners through their project's phases. She equips readers with the knowledge needed to tackle the tasks on their own, as well as for deciding when to put down the pitchfork and bring in the pros.



The book begins with “Choosing Change,” in which Schwartz briefly outlines her own decision-making process when renovating the “garden from hell” she inherited after purchasing her current home. Subsequent chapters move through the various elements of any renovation, such as “Defining Your Goals” and “Establishing Your Budget,” before concluding with “Success Stories.”

Though Schwartz is based in Ohio, her advice and plant suggestions are broadly applicable. For example, in the chapter on “Assessing and Choosing New Plants,” she both recommends specific plants for a specific purpose, and discusses how to use different types of plants (trees, bulbs, etc.) in the landscape.

I also appreciate her honest critiques of landscaping choices that once may have been mainstream but no longer should be. When discussing ornamental grasses, for instance, she acknowledges that although maiden grass (*Miscanthus* spp.) had been popular several years ago, it is now widely recognized as invasive, so she suggests that gardeners plant “one of the tall switch grasses” (*Panicum* spp.) instead. Such insights remind readers that gardens, landscapes, and the industry itself are ever-evolving, and that as gardeners, we should seize the opportunity to grow and change alongside them.

While *Garden Renovation* is written primarily with the home gardener in mind, it is packed full of enough engaging tips, tricks, and design ideas to stimulate even the most seasoned gardener. The book would make a particularly thoughtful housewarming gift to a new homeowner, or for anyone who has “no idea where to start or what questions to ask.”

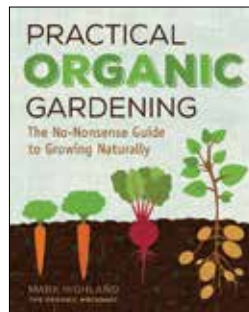
—Dan Scott

An enthusiastic garden renovator, Dan Scott is associate director of gardens and facilities at River Farm, headquarters of the American Horticultural Society in Alexandria, Virginia.

Practical Organic Gardening

Mark Highland. Cool Springs Press, Minneapolis, MN, 2017. 240 pages. Publisher's price, hardcover: \$30.

IN MY experience as a horticultural librarian, I have noticed that people looking for gardening information often are resistant to an overtly organic focus. The prevailing assumption seems to be that conventional gardening is easier. *Practical Organic Gardening* gently challenges this notion, stating that “gardening organically creates less work for the gardener by allowing nature to take its course.” Author Mark Highland couches this message in a general gardening book written in a pleasant and compelling



style. Plus, Highland has lived in Illinois, Florida, Oregon, and now Pennsylvania, so he brings a broad perspective to the conditions and challenges gardeners face across the country.

Intended for home gardeners of all skill levels, the book covers the technical aspects of growing plants organically, from assessing and amending soil to watering techniques and managing pests. Topics such as propagation by both seeds and cuttings, lawn management, and houseplants are included. I was tempted to skim over what appeared to be the more basic sections, but then I realized I would miss important tips. For example, the chapters on soil will change some of my long-standing practices, both for the benefit of the garden environment and my back.

Overall, the discussions are pragmatic but easily understandable, taking care to provide simple definitions and break more complex concepts into bite-size chunks. Most pages include color photographs and other illustrations to support the text.

Highland also does not shy away from controversial topics, such as the limited use of nature-based pesticides in organic gardening or the status of genetically engineered seeds and plants. He recognizes the differences of opinion surrounding these issues and presents balanced arguments, allowing readers to reach their own conclusions.

“It’s your garden, your space,” he writes, “there are no wrong answers, only whittling down the list to what really motivates you to get outside and garden.” That’s what this book is about at its core—encouraging people to become successful gardeners by giving them the information they need.

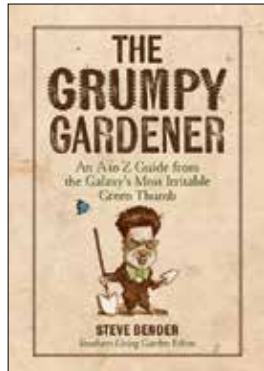
—Brian R. Thompson

Brian R. Thompson is a Seattle area gardener who manages the horticultural book collection for the Elisabeth C. Miller Library of the University of Washington Botanic Gardens.

The Grumpy Gardener: An A to Z Guide from the Galaxy's Most Irritable Green Thumb

Steve Bender, Oxmoor House, New York, NY, 2017. 255 pages. Publisher's price, hardcover: \$25.99.

I ADMIT it was sometimes difficult to stop laughing enough to continue reading *The Grumpy Gardener*. Aside from being an incredibly knowledgeable, dirty-fingernail gardener, Steve Bender is also adept at infusing his gardening experiences with irascible humor and wit. The book assembles Bender's "Grumpy Gardener" columns and other musings during his tenure as garden editor of *Southern Living* magazine into an A to Z format, spanning African violets and azaleas to xeriscaping and ZZ plants.



The laughs begin immediately with the introduction, in which

he already has his tongue firmly in cheek while noting how extraordinary his book's readers are. "So many trivial matters compete for your attention—world peace, climate change, job stress, marital accord, budget woes, choosing the perfect wine for dinner," he writes, "yet you have conquered the clamor and opened the one book written this century that can bring you hours of joy, fulfillment, and enlightenment every day."

From there, he moves on to African violets, grumping about how these once popular flowering houseplants now are seen as "akin to receiving your AARP membership card" and dismissed as "grandma plants." Puzzled as to why these easy-care, attractive plants have fallen from favor, he suggests perhaps it's because "they do need light and water to live, which doesn't fit in with today's active lifestyles."

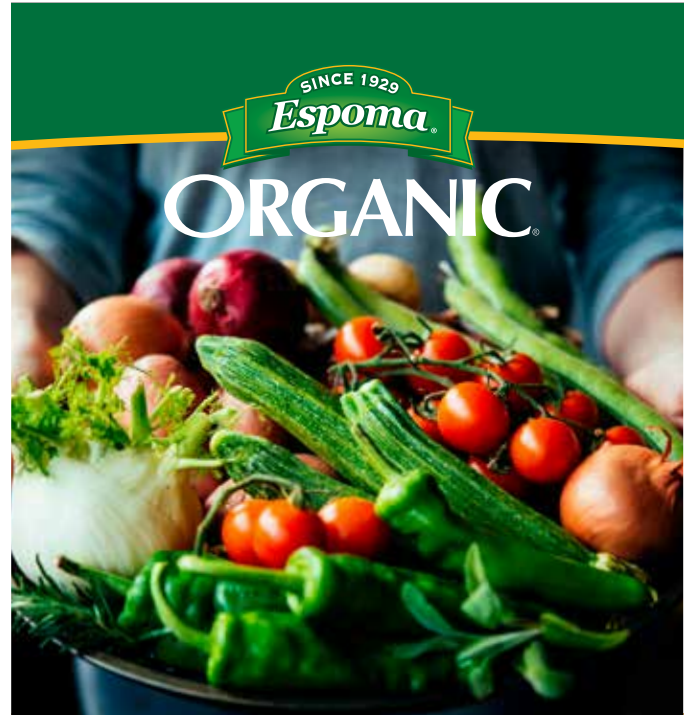
Plenty of other plants are not "worth a Ramen noodle," in Bender's opinion. These include his list of "Ten Troublesome Plants" that don't do well in the South and the "Foul Five" that he calls the "worst things you can plant in front of your house." He's also got strong feelings about live Christmas trees, likening the experience of getting one to "giving yourself a root canal," what with the hassle of getting it home, keeping it watered, and the needles burrowing into the carpet despite the protection of having a tree skirt under its branches.

In between, Bender shares his humorously cantankerous views on such related subjects as chain saws, fire ants, grubs, manure, and rubber mulch, until at last, he ends with ZZ plant. He can't resist having a little fun with this one, explaining that "*Zamioculcas zamiifolia* is native to Zanzibar. (Zorro reportedly found it there at the zoo.)" It's a real plant; look it up!

While those aforementioned trivial matters will still be there after closing the book, you'll at least find yourself more joyful, fulfilled, and enlightened while attempting to choose that perfect bottle of wine for dinner.

—Linda Yang

Linda Yang, former garden columnist for The New York Times, is author of *The City Gardener's Handbook* (Storey Publishing).



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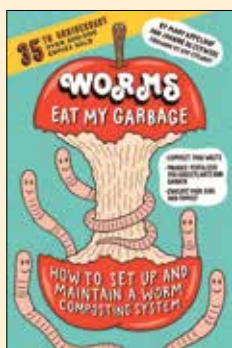


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GARDENER'S BOOKS: UPDATED EDITIONS OF FAVORITE REFERENCES

SPRING IS traditionally a time for renewal and rejuvenation, especially in the garden. Even books about gardening are getting a refresh. These recently released books are revised and expanded versions of old favorites. To better reflect current garden trends, the authors have added chapters to address topics such as water conservation, contemporary design ideas, and more. While you are busy chanting the spring cleaning mantra “out with the old, in with the new,” why not apply this to your newly dusted bookshelves and find space for these updated gardening guides?

Worms Eat My Garbage: How to Set Up and Maintain a Worm Composting System



reiy Publishing, 2017, \$14.95) is celebrating its 35th anniversary with an updated third edition. Originally written by the late vermicomposting legend and self-proclaimed

“worm woman” Mary Appelhof, this version includes new information added by Joanne Olszewski. The result is an even more complete guide to vermicomposting that will teach new generations of eco-conscious readers how to put worms to work, turning food scraps into fertile worm manure.

How to Grow More Vegetables



been a beloved manual for edible gardening since it was first published in 1974. This ninth edition continues to cover all the bases for sustainably growing food in home

gardens or small scale commercial enterprises. Jeavons expands on his previous discussions of how to “live better on fewer resources” by adding sections on water conservation techniques, selecting the most nutrient-dense crops, how to increase composting efficiency, and more, complemented by helpful illustrations and charts.

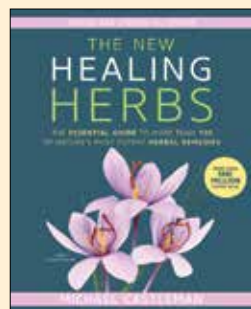
Already widely regarded as one of the most comprehensive books on gardening with



perennial plants, ***The Well-Tended Perennial Garden*** (Timber Press, 2017, 34.95) by Tracy DiSabato-Aust raises the bar even higher in its expanded and revised third edition. Updates

include the addition of numerous new cultivars and species—with an emphasis on natives and wildlife-friendly plants—along with many more photographs and illustrations. As always, it’s packed with down-to-earth advice on designing and maintaining beautiful perennial gardens.

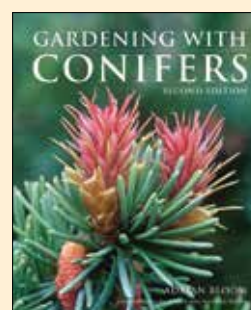
The New Healing Herbs: The Essential Guide to More than 130 of Nature's Most Potent Herbal Remedies



In the fourth edition of ***The New Healing Herbs: The Essential Guide to More than 130 of Nature's Most Potent Herbal Remedies*** (Rodale Books, 2017, \$23.99), author Michael Castleman adds the most current research results about the health effects of more than 130 plants. It also includes five new herb pro-

files: cannabis, stevia, purslane, rooibos, and saffron. For each herb, Castleman describes its therapeutic benefits, healing history, medicinal myths, prescription recommendations, and growing guidelines. A black-and-white drawing depicts a sprig or sometimes the whole plant being described.

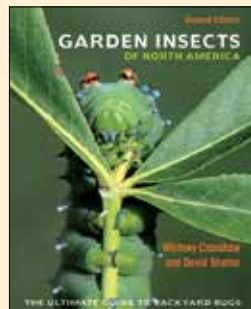
Gardening with Conifers



First published 15 years ago, ***Gardening with Conifers*** (Firefly Books, 2017, \$29.95) by renowned British plantsman Adrian Bloom is now in its second edition. Along with lavish photography and a fresh look, this iteration features an extensively

revised conifer “directory” of 600 different species and cultivars. Plus, it includes a few completely new sections, such as “Conifers that Grow On You,” which depicts the 50-year development of the impressive conifer collection in Bloom’s own garden.

Garden Insects of North America



Gardeners trying to identify bugs in their backyard would do well to consult ***Garden Insects of North America*** (Princeton University Press, 2018, \$35). This second edition, by entomologists Whitney Cranshaw and David Shetlar, builds upon the original from 2004 to yield an even more exhaustive

encyclopedia of insects and other creatures commonly encountered in garden settings. It is cleverly organized by the plant parts affected, which helps narrow down the culprits that may be causing observed symptoms or other damage. Hundreds of clear color photographs are also invaluable for identifying the suspects.

—Mackenzie Nichols, Editorial Intern