



2025 GREAT AMERICAN GARDENER AWARDS

The American Horticultural Society (AHS) is proud to announce the recipients of the Society's 2025 Great American Gardeners Awards. These individuals and organizations have contributed significantly to fields such as plant research, garden stewardship, horticultural outreach, and teaching.

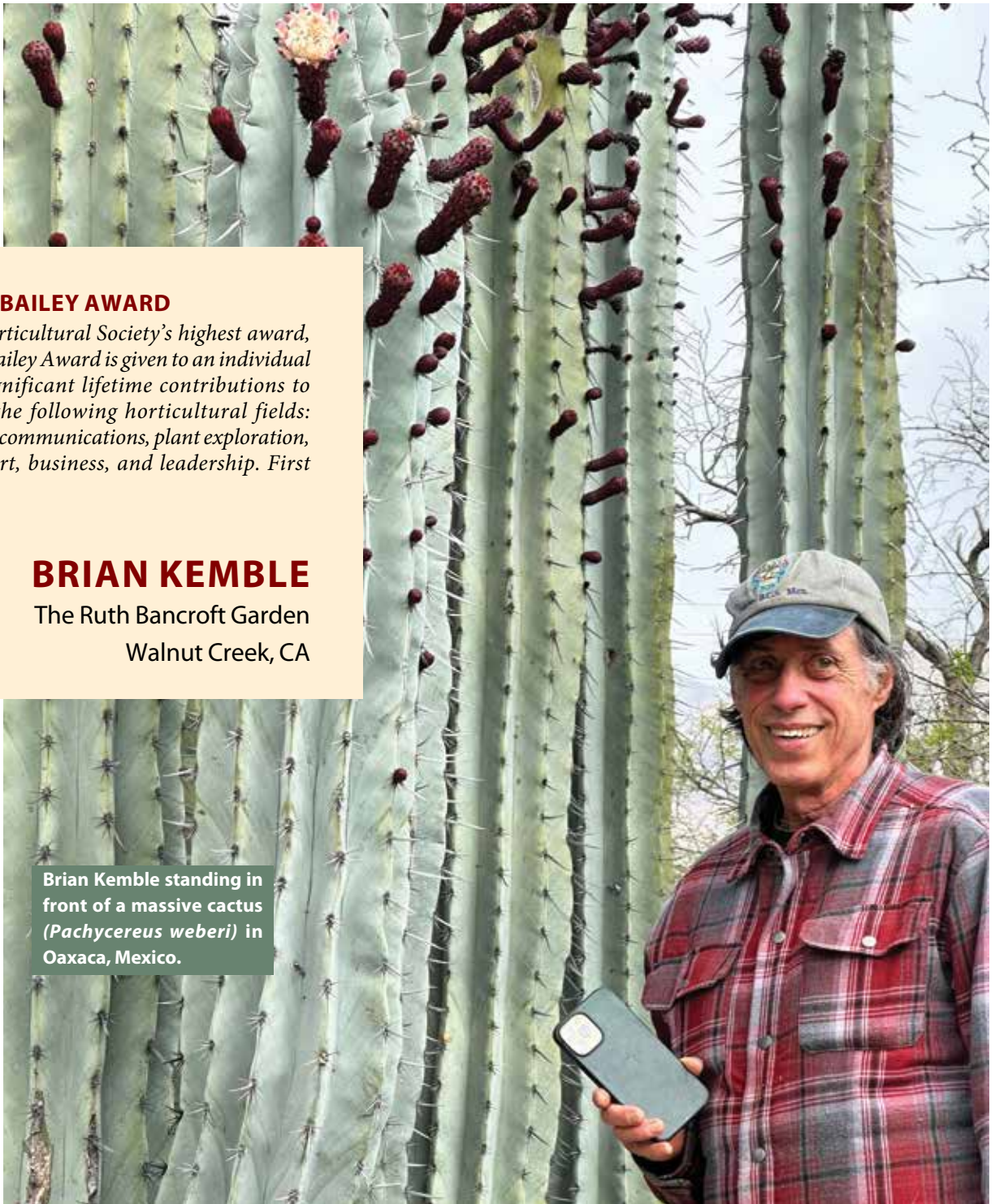
LIBERTY HYDE BAILEY AWARD

The American Horticultural Society's highest award, the Liberty Hyde Bailey Award is given to an individual who has made significant lifetime contributions to at least three of the following horticultural fields: teaching, research, communications, plant exploration, administration, art, business, and leadership. First awarded in 1958.

BRIAN KEMBLE

The Ruth Bancroft Garden
Walnut Creek, CA

Brian Kemble standing in front of a massive cactus (*Pachycereus weberi*) in Oaxaca, Mexico.



Brian Kemble has spent nearly half a century shaping horticulture. As curator of The Ruth Bancroft Garden and Nursery, he has expanded collections, created hybrids, and played a pivotal role in transitioning the garden to nonprofit status. Beyond his curatorial work, he has conducted hands-on research, making succulents more accessible. A horticulturist, researcher, plant explorer, teacher, and mentor, Kemble's contributions are far-reaching.

LEADERSHIP AND ADMINISTRATION

Kemble's leadership has been pivotal in transforming The Ruth Bancroft Garden into a vibrant public space in the Greater San Francisco Bay Area. Once a private collection, the garden now draws 40,000 visitors annually and was praised by Travel + Leisure as "the most beautiful garden in the world." It also served as the inspiration for the founding of The Garden Conservancy.

As curator, Kemble has expanded the plant collection, introduced new hybrids, and preserved older specimens. His decades-long connection to the garden has fostered a deep understanding of its unique climate and soils. This expertise has allowed him to establish effective horticultural practices, guide staff, and ensure the optimal presentation of the garden's exceptional arid-climate plants.

Amid growing concerns about climate change, Kemble has championed climate-conscious gardening, showcasing the beauty and resilience of plants from arid regions. The Ruth Bancroft Garden now stands as a model for climate-resilient landscapes, demonstrating sustainable practices that extend beyond its gates. Kemble's dedication to public education

has been central to the garden's mission, promoting waterwise, sustainable gardening within the broader community.

PLANT EXPLORATION AND RESEARCH

While Kemble has devoted decades to a small botanical garden in suburban California, his plant explorations have spanned the globe. He has sought out succulent plants in their natural habitats,



Agave montana, native to Mexico, in a photo taken by Brian Kemble.

studying their distribution, cultural requirements, and taxonomy. These journeys have informed his work in creating new hybrids, advancing conservation efforts, and sharing knowledge about rare species. As an avid photographer, Kemble has contributed images to numerous publications and is currently developing

a field guide to the plants of Oaxaca.

Renowned for his encyclopedic understanding of dry gardens and his expertise in the genera *Aloe* and *Agave*, Kemble has spent his career seeking out exceptional succulents, propagating them, and making them accessible to hobbyists and professionals alike. One such variety is *Aloe* 'Hellskloof Bells', introduced by the Huntington in 2007 through its International Succulent Introductions program. His research and explorations have played a key role in the growing recognition and popularity of succulents in North America. These resilient plants, prized for their heat tolerance and durability, have become a gateway to horticulture for a new generation.

COMMUNICATION AND TEACHING

An engaging educator, Kemble has expanded The Ruth Bancroft Garden's education programs globally, sharing insights through tours, online videos, and workshops. With over 600 publications, he writes for both casual gardeners and professionals, deepening public understanding of succulents and arid gardening.

A skilled photographer and artist, Kemble has exhibited *Agave* images and contributed widely to botanical publications. He has also lectured internationally, from The Martha Stewart Show to the 2021 International Symposium at Seoul Botanic Park.

A respected leader within the Cactus and Succulent Society of America, Kemble's influence extends across the U.S. and beyond. His colleagues praise his mentorship, generosity, and lifelong dedication, noting how he shares plants, seeds, and knowledge with the same enthusiasm that has defined his career. ■

Great American Gardeners Award Committee

Holly Shimizu, committee chair, AHS board member, and former director of the US Botanic Garden (MD)

Diane Blazek, executive director, All-America Selections/National Garden Bureau (IL)

Lee Coykendall, former senior education specialist at the US Botanic Garden (Washington, D.C.)

Kate Delaney, director of career development, Society of American Florists (PA)

Panayoti Kelaidis, AHS Board member and senior curator and director of outreach at Denver Botanic Gardens (CO)

Dr. David Kopsell, professor of horticulture, Illinois State University (IL)

Kelly D. Norris, author, plantsman, and landscape designer (IA)

EMERGING HORTICULTURAL PROFESSIONAL AWARD

Given in the early stages of an individual's career, this award recognizes significant achievements and/or leadership that have advanced the field of horticulture in America.

AMANDA BRATCHER

North Carolina Cooperative Extension
Sanford, NC



Amanda Bratcher is the horticulture agent for the North Carolina Cooperative Extension in Lee County. She trains and leads Master Gardeners, enhances the Pollinator Haven Garden, coordinates the Pollinator Census, and oversees the regional Small Farms Camp. She also provides technical expertise and education for the Farm to Early Care and Education Project.

Bratcher is known for forging connections across government agencies and conducting site and farm visits to ensure local growers receive essential support. Her innovation, leadership, and horticultural expertise have raised awareness of the critical role of state university extension systems while setting a high standard for community engagement and collaboration.

Before joining the Cooperative Extension, Bratcher curated the Mobile Botanical Gardens and Juniper Level Botanic Garden. Her career began with internships at Sarah P. Duke Gardens, JC Raulston Arboretum, Daniel Stowe Botanical Garden, the National Tropical Botanical Garden, and Polly Hill Arboretum. She holds a Bachelor's degree in horticultural science (with minors in plant biology and agroecology) from NC State University and a Master of Science from the University of Edinburgh and the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh.

JANE L. TAYLOR AWARD

Given to an individual, organization, or program that has inspired and nurtured future horticulturists through efforts in children's and youth gardening.

AMY PADOLF

Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden
Coral Gables, FL



Amy Padolf is the Director of Education at Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden, overseeing multidisciplinary plant science programs from Pre-K to postgraduate studies.

For nearly three decades, Padolf has developed innovative, hands-on science education programs. During her 15 years at Fairchild, she has designed, coordinated, and secured funding for national and international plant science initiatives, including the award-winning Fairchild Challenge, which engages over 125,000 Pre-K–12 students annually in STEM-focused education.

Her notable projects include the Million Orchid Project, the nation's largest orchid conservation education initiative, and the creation of the first botany magnet elementary and high schools. She partnered with NASA to launch Growing Beyond Earth[®], an international citizen science project supporting indoor agriculture for space and Earth, and developed the first maker space in a botanic garden for advancing food production technology.

A recognized leader in botanical education, Padolf delivered the keynote address at the 8th Global Botanic Garden Congress in Singapore (2024), highlighting education's role in preventing plant extinction. She holds a BS in Rhetoric, an MS in Science Education, and is currently pursuing a Ph.D. in Education Research.

GARDEN STEWARDSHIP AWARD

Given to a public garden that embraces and exemplifies sustainable horticultural practices in design, maintenance, and/or programs.

BETTY FORD ALPINE GARDENS

Vail, CO



Betty Ford Alpine Gardens is a leading botanical garden focused on alpine environment conservation. Situated at 8,200 feet in the central Rockies, it's North America's highest garden, attracting nearly 200,000 visitors annually.

The Gardens feature alpine plants from around the world, an Alpine House, and conservation programs that emphasize native plants and Rocky Mountain ecosystems.

The Mountain Waterwise Garden promotes drought-tolerant landscaping, and the renewable-powered Education Center offers the Sustainable Landscaping Series and Colorado Alpine EcoFlora Project. Sustainability efforts include drip irrigation, electric tools, non-synthetic fertilizers, zero-waste events, and diverting 80 percent of waste through composting.

Beyond the Gardens, Betty Ford Alpine Gardens co-published the *North American Botanic Garden Strategy for Alpine Plant Conservation* and collaborates globally with organizations like the Global Sustainable Tourism Council, IUCN, and Botanic Gardens Conservation International.

LANDSCAPE DESIGN AWARD

Given to an individual whose work has demonstrated and promoted the value of sustainable horticultural practices in the field of landscape architecture.

LAUREN SPRINGER

Fort Collins, CO



For over four decades, Lauren Springer has shaped western U.S. gardening with her innovative, plant-driven, site-specific designs. From her groundbreaking book *The Undaunted Garden* to her work at The Gardens on Spring Creek in Fort Collins, CO, she has profoundly influenced the region's landscape aesthetic.

Springer introduced a contemporary plant palette, now widely embraced by initiatives like Plant Select. Her private gardens and collaborations with Denver Botanic Gardens have been featured in *Country Gardens*, further cementing her legacy.

By cultivating, breeding, and introducing plants suited for water-wise, sustainable landscapes, Springer has transformed horticultural practices. With expertise in both wild and cultivated plants, she masterfully integrates them into designed spaces. Her public naturalistic gardens inspire home gardeners and professionals alike, fostering a deeper connection between people and plants.

Widely published and publicly celebrated, Springer's creative approach remains as relevant today as ever. Her designs and writing have provided a new framework for crafting landscapes in challenging climates and ecosystems.

B.Y. MORRISON COMMUNICATION AWARD

Recognizes effective and inspirational communication—through print, radio, television, and/or online media—that advances public interest and participation in horticulture.

STEPHANIE COHEN

Collegeville, PA



Stephanie Cohen is a celebrated author, speaker, and horticultural communicator with over 30 years of experience. Known for her lively, practical, and environmentally conscious approach, she makes gardening accessible and engaging.

Her debut book, *The Perennial Gardener's Design Primer*, became a best-seller with Storey Publishing, setting the standard for perennial gardening guides. She followed with *Fallscaping* and *The Nonstop Garden*, and her writing has appeared in *Country Living Gardener*, *Fine Gardening*, *Organic Gardening*, and *Green Profit*.

Drawing from plant trials and her role as founding director of the Arboretum at Temple University, Cohen blends hands-on expertise with academic insight. As a horticulture and design professor, she has mentored generations of professionals.

A leader in the Perennial Plant Association, Garden Communicators International, and the former American Nursery and Landscape Association, Cohen has championed sustainability, collaboration, and inclusion. She has earned awards from the Philadelphia Horticultural Society, a GardenComm fellowship, and Garden Communicator of the Year.

As *Fine Gardening's* Editor Emerita, Cohen continues to educate and inspire, making horticulture more accessible to all gardeners.

FRANCES JONES POETKER AWARD

Recognizes significant contributions to floral design in publications, on the platform, and to the public.

AMY MERRICK

New Hampshire, New York, and around the globe



Amy Merrick is a floral designer, stylist, writer, and teacher whose work is described as “pure poetry, both simple and refined.” She honed her expertise running a New York City floral studio, creating arrangements for museums and magazines. Her journey has taken her from flower farming in Washington State to gardening in England, studying ikebana in Japan, and teaching foraged floral arranging in Italy.

She has designed installations for The Metropolitan Museum of Art, MoMA PS1, and Kamisoe Studios in Kyoto, with her work featured in numerous major magazines.

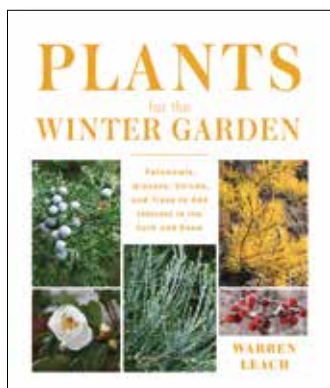
Merrick's book, *On Flowers: Lessons from an Accidental Florist*, blends film photography, intimate essays, and fresh inspiration for living with flowers. Named a Best Gift Book of the Year by *InStyle*, it has been praised in *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Real Simple*, and *Flower Magazine*. Her floral design, writing, and photography have also appeared in *House & Garden UK*, *Vogue*, *Architectural Digest*, and *The Wall Street Journal*.

Featured in Jennifer Jewell's *The Earth in Her Hands: 75 Extraordinary Women Working in the World of Plants*, Merrick has influenced floral design for over 15 years, inspiring designers and flower lovers worldwide. ■

2025 AHS BOOK AWARD WINNERS

Each year, the American Horticultural Society recognizes outstanding gardening books published in North America with its annual Book Award. Nominated books are judged by the AHS Book Award Committee on qualities such as writing style, authority, accuracy, and physical quality. This year three award recipients, listed below, were selected from more than 33 nominated books published or released in 2024.

AHS's 2025 Book Award Committee was chaired by **Viveka Neveln**, garden editor for BHG.com in Des Moines, Iowa. Other committee members are **Scott Aker**, a garden communicator and director of the Cheyenne Botanic Gardens in Wyoming; **Christine Froelich**, a horticulturist, landscape designer, and consultant in the Rochester, New York, area; **Jim Long**, a garden book author and nursery owner from Blue Eye, Missouri; **Lucy Mercer**, a garden writer and blogger in Atlanta, Georgia; **Georgia Silvera Seamans**, a writer, podcaster, and adjunct professor of environmental studies at New York University; and **Brian Thompson**, a horticultural librarian at the University of Washington in Seattle.



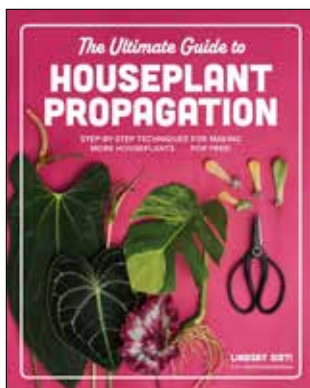
Plants for the Winter Garden
by Warren Leach (Timber Press)

Scott Aker appreciates how the book is organized by the different attributes the plants provide in the winter landscape. “That to me makes it helpful if you’re looking for, say, a focal point accent or a fastigate plant,” he said. “I think for the average gardener, that makes it very easy to use.” Georgia Silvera Seamans said, “Winter is often an overlooked season in the landscape, so it was really exciting to read a book that has put so much thought into how beautiful the outside can look in the winter.”

Brian Thompson was among several committee members who felt that the book had relevance for gardeners in many regions of the country. “I liked the balance between text and illustrations,” he added.

Honorable Mention

The Light Eaters: How the Unseen World of Plant Intelligence Offers a New Understanding of Life on Earth by Zoë Schlanger (Harper)



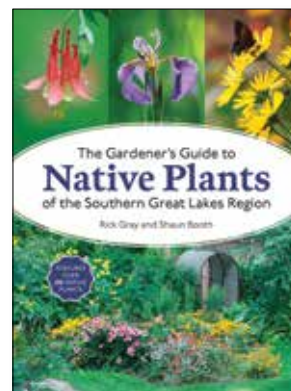
The Ultimate Guide to Houseplant Propagation
by Lindsay Sisti (Cool Springs Press)

Impressed by the attention to detail, committee members lauded this book’s organization, accessible yet authoritative writing style, and top-notch images. “It’s cool that this book is both instructional and inspirational” said Viveka Neveln. “It really makes you want to try some of this stuff. And, I will say, it is laugh-out-loud funny in some parts.”

Lucy Mercer agreed, noting that “the author’s voice is so fresh and so funny, it really just keeps you going.” She also praised the design and layout, especially the “beautiful, crisp images.”

Christine Froelich said, “I was won over by the organization of it and the way the author ties everything together. I thought I knew a lot about houseplants until I started reading this book.”

“The care that she took with illustrating each step was amazing to me. I’ve been at this [gardening] way too long yet I learned things from this book,” said Aker.



The Gardener’s Guide to Native Plants of the Southern Great Lakes Region
by Rick Gray and Shaun Booth (Firefly)

Committee members praised the book’s format and content, calling it a strong model for other regional garden guides.

“I know it’s a regional book, but there was so much to appreciate,” said Christine Froelich. “The user-friendly organization and practical advice stood out, especially the details on which wildlife each plant attracts.”

Brian Thompson was impressed by the depth of plant information and found the appendices particularly useful. “There’s a lot of great information packed in there,” he noted.

Georgia Silvera Seamans highlighted the images, saying they provide a clear view of plant parts—flowers, seeds, and foliage. She also emphasized the importance of regional guides, encouraging more authors to focus on native plants in specific areas ■