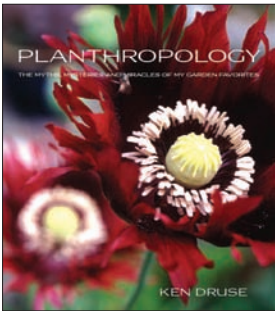


## Recommendations for Your Gardening Library

### Planthropology: The Myths, Mysteries, and Miracles of My Garden Favorites

Ken Druse. Clarkson Potter, New York, 2008. 288 pages. Publisher's price, hardcover: \$50.

I MUST BE ONE of the few plant lovers who hadn't read any of Ken Druse's 10 other highly acclaimed books before discovering his most recent offering, *Planthropology*. The advantage of my ignorance was that I experienced this book as innocently as when, as a new gardener nearly two decades ago, I discovered plants like the marvelous seven son flower (*Heptacodium miconioides*)—one of my first exotic purchases that is still thriving in my overgrown New Jersey garden.



Whether you, too, are new to Druse or an established fan, *Planthropology* is sure to engage you as it did me.

In this ambitious and satisfying book (an excerpt of which appeared in the November/December 2008 issue of *The American Gardener*), Druse takes readers deep into the mysteries of the plant kingdom, revealing little-known botanical facts as well as esoteric tidbits that will amaze and educate even the most experienced gardener or horticulturist. Who knew that Pythagoras invented vegetarianism or that figs have flowers *inside* their fruit? Additionally, *Planthropology* is elegantly designed not only to show to best advantage Druse's bountiful knowledge and love of plants, but also to present his eye-popping photography.

The word “planthropology” is Druse's own creation, coined to describe the study of plants and their histories. While the word may not ultimately make it into the permanent lexicon of gardening (though, personally, I hope it does), it is an apt reflection of the author's genuine passion, knowledge, and respect for his subject.

With this book, Druse expands our understanding of how to take care of the plants we grow, and broadens our appreciation for the way our plants in turn take care of us. “When every person learns more about plants,” writes Druse, “they will discover what we gardeners already know—there are miracles all around us. But the precious living things in our care are not only fascinating, they are necessary to all life on earth.”

—Betsy Hays

*Betsy Hays writes and gardens in northwestern New Jersey. Her blog can be found at [www.betsyhays.com](http://www.betsyhays.com).*

### Between Earth and Sky: Our Intimate Connections to Trees

Nalini M. Nadkarni. University of California Press, Berkeley, California, 2008. 322 pages. Publisher's price, hardcover: \$24.95.

DO YOU RECALL reading recently that a famous forest ecologist had computed that there were only 61 trees for each person on our planet? What about the experiment where Inuit people who had never seen trees in their polar homelands were brought to the tropical rain forest? Have you heard of the ecological organization International Canopy Network that began with treetop studies by a talented, tree-climbing biologist? If not, then you have now been exposed to a tiny bit of Nalini Nadkarni's work.



*Between Earth and Sky's* title evolved from Nadkarni's childhood experience

of seeing the giant National Christmas Tree in Washington, D.C., and thinking of it as a connection between the earth and the sky, and from climbing high into the maples in her parents' yard. In this book, she brings to life myriad examples of biological events, such as the destruction of the oldest living tree, a Nevada bristlecone pine dubbed Prometheus, by a researcher trying to establish its age. The tree's name, from Greek mythology, means “forethought,” which is ironic, given that none was evident before the tree was cut down, but Nadkarni places such events into sympathetic, meaningful historic context.

Nadkarni's well-researched book is packed with interesting information woven together from disparate sources in a well-organized way. For example, she flows seamlessly through an adaptation of Maslow's Hierarchy to baby blocks, poikilohydric foliage, and Deuteronomy. She reviews the importance of the earth's radioactive strontium layer, formed in 1954, to dendrochronology (the science of using tree rings as a way to date historic events) in a way that a lay person can comprehend. Each page reinforces the importance of trees in our lives and to our planet.

If you open this book to a random chapter and read it, you will come away more enlightened. I recommend, however, starting at the beginning. The book is a multi-course banquet of information, and it is best digested in the order it is presented.

—Guy Sternberg

*Founder of Starhill Forest Arboretum in Petersburg, Illinois, Guy Sternberg is also the award-winning co-author and photographer of Native Trees for North American Landscapes and Landscaping with Native Trees.*

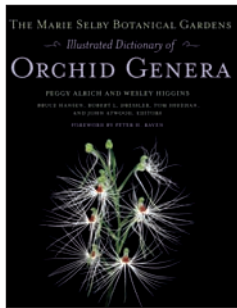
## The Marie Selby Botanical Gardens Illustrated Dictionary of Orchid Genera

Peggy Aldrich and Wesley Higgins. Cornell University Press, Ithaca, New York, 2008. 482 pages. Publisher's price, hardcover: \$49.95.

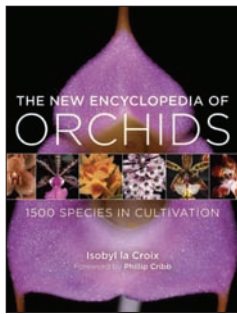
## The New Encyclopedia of Orchids

Isobyl la Croix. Timber Press, Portland, Oregon, 2008. 524 pages. Publisher's price, hardcover: \$59.95.

THE RELEASE OF these two enormously important works in the same year offers a unique snapshot of the "State of the Orchid" at this point in time. The snapshot aspect of the books is significant because, as noted in *The Marie Selby Botanical Gardens Illustrated Dictionary of Orchid Genera* (IDOG), orchid taxonomy is "presently unstable." In other words, five or 10 years from now, the names used for the plants in these volumes may be rather different.



IDOG is from America's preeminent center of orchidology, the Marie Selby Botanical Gardens in Sarasota, Florida, while the *New Encyclopedia of Orchids* (NEO) is a product of the British orchid establishment, which Isobyl la Croix represents admirably. Both books feature wonderful illustrations and photographs and superbly written text. However, there are differences in the two books that can help the casual orchidist to decide which he or she needs, if acquiring both is not an option.



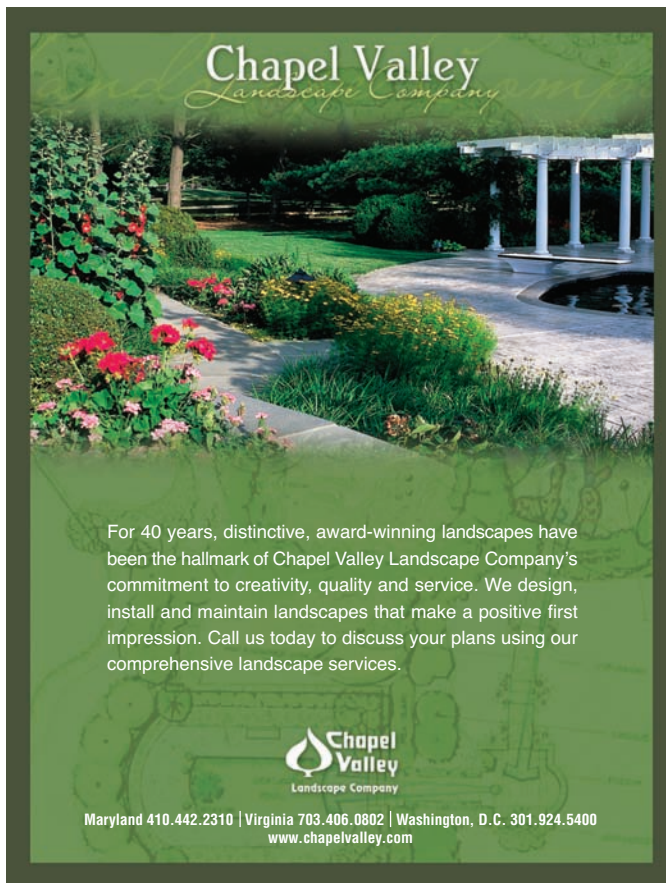
IDOG is precisely as advertised: an illustrated dictionary of orchid genera. It lists all orchid generic names, past and present, with the most current status along with an illustration of a representative species and a brief description of the genus as a whole. No species, no hybrids, no cultural information. As a basic reference—one that would enable the seeker to discover the most current genus name—it is certainly without modern peer.

On the other hand, NEO is an encyclopedic treatment of 1,500 orchid species currently in cultivation. Its introductory section covers general orchidology (i.e., what is an orchid, how did they evolve, where do they grow) and has cultural information that is far more useful than is typical of most British orchid books, which tend to be parochial in approach. Illustrations are larger and show more of the flower habit than those in IDOG.

If you are looking for the most exhaustive contemporary listing of orchid genera, I recommend the dictionary. For information about culture, habitat, and particular species, the encyclopedia is the better choice. However, both of these volumes deserve to be part of any serious horticultural library.

—Ned Nash

*Ned Nash has grown orchids most of his adult life, both professionally and as a hobbyist. He has written about orchids and orchid-related subjects almost as long as he has grown them.*



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