

Recommendations for Your Gardening Library

Home Outside: Creating the Landscape You Love

Julie Moir Messervy. The Taunton Press, Newtown, Connecticut, 2009. 249 pages. Publisher's price, hardcover: \$30.

GARDEN DESIGN is often an enigma to homeowners. While they seldom hesitate to spend time and money on interior design, they just can't quite make the leap of faith to put the same effort into designing the great outdoors.



In her latest book, celebrated landscape designer Julie Moir Messervy explains how any property owner can create “a welcoming front yard, a backyard that feels like an oasis, a place outside to entertain, a contemplative area, and a way to ‘flow’ effortlessly through-

out the house and landscape.” The book is a road map that can help you turn your property, whatever its size, into a second home that’s just outside the doorstep.

In an easy-to-follow, six-part process, Messervy reveals many of the techniques that landscape designers use to turn pedestrian properties into exceptional havens where owners can enjoy the solitude, commune with nature, hang out with family and friends, or entertain business associates. She leads you through the process of selecting materials; choosing plants for color, texture, and impact; making the most of your front yard; building on what you already have; framing the focal points, and even designing the garden to better match your personality.

The book is filled with “before and after” photos, drawings, and landscape plans that clearly illustrate all of the key concepts she wishes to convey. Sections like “Working on a Shoestring” and “Landscaping in Phases” describe in detail how homeowners with modest budgets can have gardens as impressive as those on grand estates.

In the final chapter, Messervy presents a case study of a small property to demonstrate the book’s main ideas. She walks you step-by-step through all the methods used by landscape architect Nick Cavaliere to fashion an outdoor space that looks just like a cottage in the woods and is the “perfect size for his active lifestyle.” As Messervy says, “the owner of this house was able—over time—to transform a nondescript landscape into his own true pleasure ground.” With the help of this book, anyone will be able to do the same.

—Jane Berger

Jane Berger is a landscape designer based in Washington, D.C. and the publisher of www.gardendesignonline.com.

Sunflowers: The Secret History

Joe Pappalardo. The Overlook Press, Woodstock, New York, 2008. 256 pages. Publisher's price, hardcover: \$22.95.

IT'S NOT OFTEN that a single-topic horticulture book can spur much interest beyond those who love the plant. However, confessed sunflower stalker Joe Pappalardo



packs much more than the botanical aspects into what he calls “the unauthorized biography of the world’s most beloved weed.” The author’s fascination with his subject—from the flower head’s logarithmic spiral (the most efficient way to pack the maximum number of seeds in an area) to bits of history such as the sunflower’s role in Hitler’s invasion of Russia during World War II—is

reflected in his engaging prose. The reader can’t help but be drawn in as Pappalardo paints a compelling picture of just how integral sunflowers are to our everyday lives.

A veteran science journalist, the author applied the same research skills he’s used at *Popular Mechanics*, the Smithsonian’s *Air & Space* magazine, and *Time* to uncover a wealth of sunflower science and lore. His obsessive research revealed that these plants can “lay legitimate claim to participation in all sorts of historical events and the actions of all kinds of famous characters.” For example, Pappalardo relates how NASA used sunflowers to prove one of Charles Darwin’s theories in Spacelab during the 1960s and how Osama bin Laden used sunflowers to fund al-Qaeda.

The book also brings the unsung heroes and behind-the-scenes characters into the light. These include many of the Sunflower People, as he calls them, “those who have dedicated their lives to the plant.” Among these are plant hunters stalking rare species, and scientists at the United States Department of Agriculture working to track down, catalog, store, and preserve more than 3,000 sunflower species.

If you are a science, history, or trivia junkie, this book is for you. Add the horticultural component, and any plant lover will enjoy this “sunflower’s-eye view of humanity,” despite the lack of photography aside from a few grainy, black-and-white photos. Therein lies my only complaint about the book, but it did not outweigh my appreciation for Pappalardo’s captivating, well-documented research and breezy, easy-to-absorb writing style.

—Doreen G. Howard

Doreen G. Howard, avowed plant nerd, trivia buff, and former garden editor at *Woman’s Day*, writes for a number of publications and experiments with plant breeding in Roscoe, Illinois.

Trees for All Seasons: Broadleaved Evergreens for Temperate Climates

Sean Hogan. Timber Press, Portland, Oregon, 2008. 336 pages. Publisher's price, hardcover: \$39.95.

AN AVERAGE USDA Zone 5/6 gardener might find this new book frustrating, but for an adventurous Zone 5/6 gardener like me, this book will inspire you to try more of these beauties in that proverbial "protected spot."



Personally I love it when a group of plants that might be side-tracked gets a new and thorough treatment such as this book offers. Some may assume it is filled with rhododendrons and related plants, but these are intentionally omitted. Unfortunately palms, bamboos, and yuccas that might otherwise belong are also omitted; still,

more than 300 trees are presented, most with color photographs.

The author, Sean Hogan, and his partner, Parker Sanderson, are the co-owners of Cistus Nursery near Portland, Oregon, where they have trialed and offered many of the trees in this book. If you are fortunate enough to garden in the great arc that runs from the mid-Atlantic states across the south and up to the coastal Washington State/British Columbia border (roughly USDA Hardiness Zone 7 and warmer), this book will open your eyes to possibilities for a greener winter garden. Even experienced, mild-temper-

ate gardeners will find worthwhile discoveries here. "Indeed, it is the challenging, throw-down-the-gauntlet nature of this book," states plantsman Roy Lancaster in the foreword, "that makes it so exciting for gardeners, wherever they may garden."

You will find some surprise entries among those listed in the book's subtitle: "Acacias, Magnolias, Hollies, Bays, Hawthorns, Myrtles, Olives, Oaks, and More." Examples among familiar genera such as *Magnolia* and *Quercus* include some newly available Chinese magnolias (formerly in the genera *Mangletia*, *Michelia*, and others) such as *M. champaca* and *M. compressa* with intensely fragrant flowers or the gigantic *M. yunnanensis*. Of course, space is provided for the more common *M. grandiflora* and *M. virginiana* and all varieties include some specific growing tips. Similarly the represented oaks range from common live oaks and cork oaks to new varieties from China and Mexico.

If you have been tempted to try something possibly tender, but still potentially growable, this is the book to compare the merits of old and new *Acacia* species, evergreen *Prunus*, and a gold mine of *Eucalyptus*. There are even tips for the notoriously touchy, but much drooled-over Chilean flame tree (*Embothrium coccineum*). If global warming is inevitable, as it seems, this book may provide the proverbial silver lining for cool-climate gardeners.

—Jim W. Waddick

Jim W. Waddick has written books devoted to irises, peonies, and bananas. A two-time medal-winner from the American Iris Society, he tries to garden in the difficult climate of Kansas City, Missouri.

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Edible Gardening

VEGETABLE SEED SALES are breaking records and even the White House now features a kitchen garden. No doubt about it, edible gardening is all the rage these days. As well it should be, considering that growing your own food can provide some of the freshest produce you'll ever eat, and can even be a lot of fun. You can also grow interesting and tasty varieties otherwise unavailable in the grocery store. Whether you have been cultivating edible plants for years or are new to the colorful world of vegetables, fruits, and herbs, the following recently published books are sure to provide insight and inspiration.

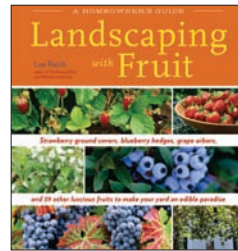
Even a tiny patch of ground or a couple of containers on a deck can yield surprisingly bountiful results. If you're dubious, *Fresh Food from Small Spaces* (Chelsea Green Publishing, 2008, \$24.95) will set you straight. This practical guide explains how to squeeze all you can from every available square inch because, as author and life-long city-dweller R. J. Ruppenthal puts it, "no space is too small or too dark to raise food." Granted the darkest spots may only be good for cultivating edible mushrooms or setting up a worm composting system, but this book contains plenty of other ideas for making the most of the smallest of spaces. For example, it describes how to take advantage of vertical space and zeros in on compact varieties—particularly those that will produce in low light conditions.

The Backyard Homestead (Storey Publishing, 2009, \$18.95), edited by Carleen Madigan, also makes a compelling case for the abundance a modest amount of space can produce. Aimed more at those who garden on an average-sized suburban plot than land-strapped city folk, this book proclaims that on a mere quarter of an acre, you can come pretty close to self-sufficiency. It covers a variety of techniques for intensively growing vegetables, fruits, nuts, and grains, along with foraging from nature and raising livestock.

You'll also find recipes, preservation information, and other tips for enjoying your harvest. Pithy sidebars, charts, lists, and line drawings offer further instruction and help to break the breezy text into bite-sized chunks.

Edible plants not only provide nourishment, they also bring a range of colors, textures, scents, and forms to a garden. In *Landscaping with Fruit* (Storey Publishing, 2009, \$19.95), Lee Reich points out that most fruit-bearing plants—unlike annual vegetables—can contribute ornamental interest for years,

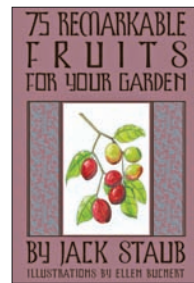
paying a double dividend when carefully incorporated into a garden's design. This book delves into how to do just that.



Chapters on landscape design basics, planting considerations, and cultural requirements precede an "encyclopedia" of fruit plants, which Reich selected for their ease of culture in temperate climates, ornamental value, and tastiness of fruits. Each plant's listing includes a general description as well as information about its growing

needs, seasons of interest, recommended varieties, and harvest tips. Colorful photographs, illustrations, and landscape plans round out the book.

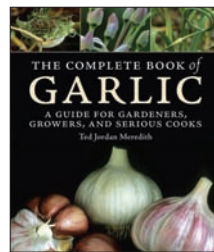
You'll find many more fruity options in *75 Remarkable Fruits for Your Garden* by Jack Staub (Gibbs Smith, 2008, \$19.95).



Heirlooms and modern hybrids, North American natives and exotics all make appearances, with Staub taking pains to include the "best of the current batch of available cultivars in every case." Rather than a manual on how to grow these plants, this book is more of a collection of essays that mingles historical tidbits and lore with growing tips and droll anecdotes to give readers a tantalizing taste of each fruit. Every

plant is also beautifully rendered in watercolor illustrations by Ellen Sheppard Buchert. Fans will want to seek out Staub's similar volumes on vegetables and herbs as well.

For something on one specific edible plant, there's the *Complete Book of Garlic* (Timber Press, 2008, \$39.95) by Ted Jordan Meredith. Garlic is beloved the world over for its culinary and medicinal uses, and this 330-page tome will help you truly appreciate all this pungent bulb has to offer. Meredith asserts that if your only experience with garlic is the mediocre grocery store variety, you have been missing out. Happily, garlic grows well in a wide range of climates and conditions, so he recom-



mends giving some of the many cultivars in the book a try in your garden. The book details cultivation as well as preparation methods for getting the most out of garlic's flavor and medicinal properties. Botany buffs will enjoy the chapters on natural history, garlic structures and their functions, and taxonomy. Dozens of large color photos throughout the book help to illustrate the diversity of garlic and its subtle beauty.

—Viveka Neveln, Associate Editor