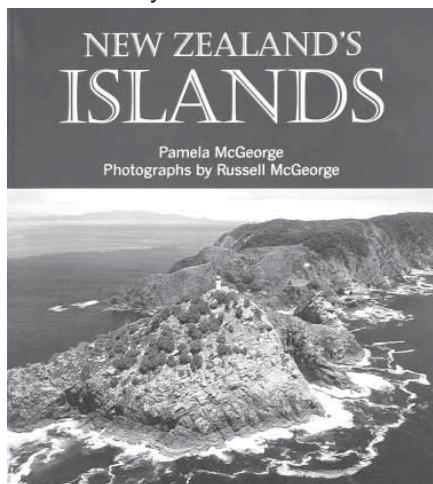


Book Reviews

A selection of the best book reviews of 2005, compliments of the *Weekend Gardener* magazine.

New Zealand's Islands

Pamela McGeorge
with photographs by Russell
McGeorge
David Bateman. \$NZ39.99
Reviewed by Rob Lahood



WHEN friends from abroad come to New Zealand and ask me where to start to explore the country, I've no hesitation in saying get out of the cities and visit the small towns, explore the coast and hop over to some of our glorious islands.

This book by our talented garden writer Pamela McGeorge, and exquisitely photographed by her husband, Russell, surpasses most scenic publications in its coverage of some 130 islands from the Three Kings in the north to the Chathams to Stewart Island in the south.

It is a celebration of our islands with a collection of more than 180 colour pictures and a fascinating text that this reader couldn't put down over the holidays. It is a journey of diverse beauty and a wonderful tale of the people living in many different conditions and circumstances.

For me, pass on the new-world cities and experience our islands.

Write the authors: "No ruined Celtic castles record the legends of these islands; no timeless whitewashed houses glitter ... But prehistoric lizards crawl across their rocks, unique plants

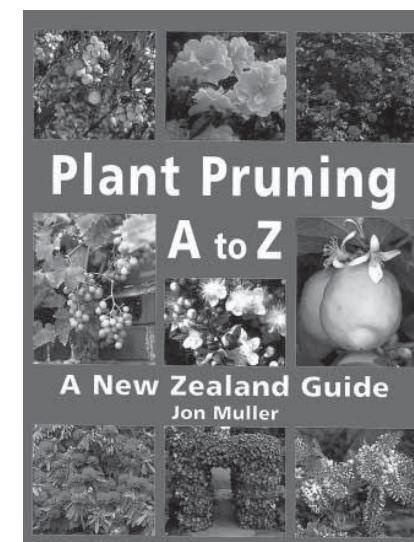
cling to their cliffs and when the Celts were building their castles, Polynesians were establishing fragile footholds on a few of these tiny islands. Make no mistake the story of our islands is a long one."

Recommended with a warning; you'll get itchy feet.

Weekend Gardener, Issue 163, 2005, Page 33

Plant Pruning A to Z A New Zealand guide

Jon Muller
David Bateman. \$NZ29.99
Reviewed by Mike Gowing



TO the uninitiated, pruning is "the dark art" of gardening and, besides plucking up the courage, the novice needs all the practical help they can get. Jon Muller describes a foray into pruning in his introduction. "After looking at the pile of prunings at your feet you may well have asked 'Have I done the right thing?'" What he doesn't say is that the answer is probably, "No".

As Muller points out, pruning is just one part of the picture when caring for plants. "Too often remedial pruning or removal is the result of a plant being in the wrong place to start with."

The book tackles 220 common plants – from abelia to wisteria – giving a brief, illustrated description of their habit and

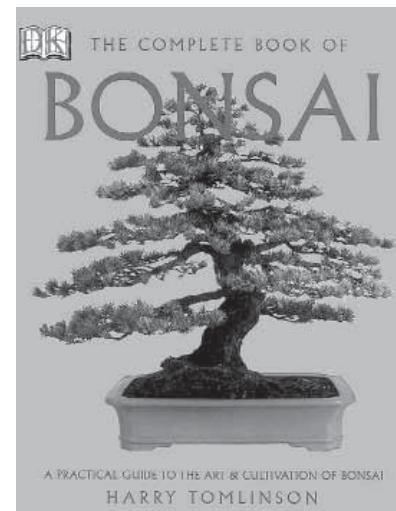
their pruning requirements. The introductory chapters cover the principles of pruning, techniques for trees and shrubs, plant care and the tools required (including some wise, cautionary words on the use of the chainsaw as a pruning tool). At the back there's a useful species-by-species table with the key to how heavily each should be pruned, the opportune time and some general comments.

This manual will help you see the wood from the trees the next time you pick up your secateurs.

Weekend Gardener, Issue 163, 2005, Page 33

The Complete Book of Bonsai A practical guide to the art and cultivation of bonsai

Harry Tomlinson
Published by Dorling Kindersley
Distributed by Penguin
\$NZ49.95
Reviewed by Mike Gowing



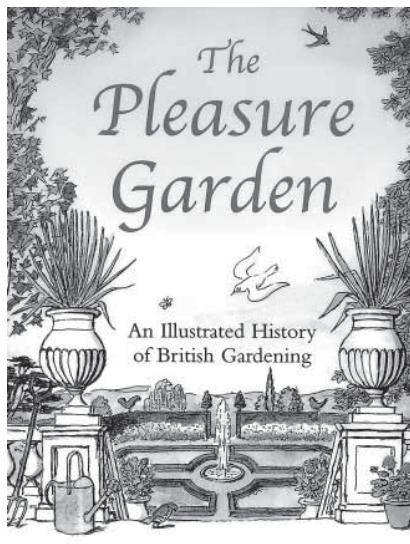
THIS is a new edition of a book first published in 1990 and which has been, judging by the number of reprints, extremely popular. It's not hard to see why. Harry Tomlinson's text is a comprehensive and clear step-by-step introduction to this Japanese horticultural art. As he puts it: "My aim ... is to provide a practical reference work of equal value to the beginner and the more experienced enthusiast." In this the book more than

succeeds. There are clear, illustrated instructions on various styles, containers and tools, and importantly, pruning and wiring techniques. These chapters are backed by a thorough pictorial catalogue of the various species suitable for bonsai and a compendium outlining steps for the care of each.

Weekend Gardener, Issue 164, 2005, Page 29

The Pleasure Garden An Illustrated History of British Gardening

Anne Scott-James and Osbert Lancaster
Frances Lincoln
Distributed by Bookwise
\$NZ29.95
Reviewed by Mike Gowing



IF you've got an eye for the quaint and slightly quirky, the re-publication of a 27-year-old classic will delight you. It's an easy romp through England's gardening past by a well-known garden writer whose cartoonist husband, the late Osbert Lancaster, will be familiar to British newspaper readers and whose work illustrates this book.

It kicks off, as the author puts, with the Roman "peristyle and ends with a patio and may seem a journey from courtyard to courtyard".

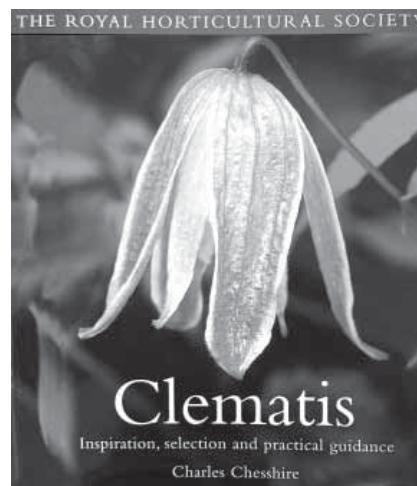
In between, the reader is given insights into such gems as the monastic garden, the grand French manner, the cottage garden and the London Square. *The Pleasure Garden* is, for those

who like their history digestible, an informative, entertaining read. For the questing reader, a bonus is the detailed bibliography.

Weekend Gardener, Issue 164, 2005, Page 29

Clematis inspiration, selection and practical guidance

Charles Cheshire
Published by Quadrille
Distributed by Southern Publishers Group. \$NZ59.95
Reviewed by Mike Gowing



THERE are a couple of reminders that this Royal Horticultural Society-endorsed book is primarily for British consumption. One is the backing for what, in this country, is a rampant weed, old man's beard (*C. vitalba*). The second is the note that "gardeners who fall in love with the evergreen New Zealand species ... may have to be content to keep them in a cold greenhouse" and that "they look good in pots indoors".

Other than that, this book is a clematis-lover's bible, fulfilling the cover claim that it's a source of inspiration, selection and practical guidance.

There are four main sections: The Clematis Story, tracing the history of the species; Clematis in the Garden, showing the plant's versatility; Choosing Clematis, illustrating a host of different varieties; Good Practice, planting, pruning, training and propagation.

With 200 photographs, this is a specialist publication that will enjoy wider appeal.

Weekend Gardener, Issue 165, 2005, Page 29

Plant

The ultimate visual reference to the plants and flowers of the world

Editor: Janet Marinelli
Published by Dorling Kindersley
Distributed by Penguin. \$NZ99.95
Reviewed by Mike Gowing



THE subtitle's claim that this is the "ultimate visual reference to the plants and flowers of the world" might seem extravagant. However, this encyclopaedia has the endorsement of Britain's Royal Botanic Kew Gardens, a preface by the garden's director Sir Peter Crane and content that will enthral gardeners and conservationists.

Sir Peter says: "This book is the first authoritative reference for gardeners interested in how their passion for plants can contribute to the survival of a species."

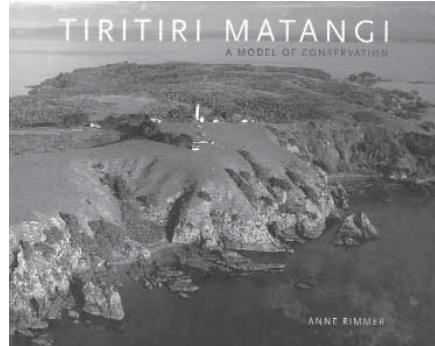
The book is based on the premise that gardeners have a crucial role in ensuring Earth's botanical future as it's estimated that, at current rates of depredation, two-thirds of plant species will have disappeared before the end of this century.

The book opens with clear and concise instructions on how to use its five sections to best effect. Also detailed is the way the book flags such things as threatened species or invasive plants. The general sections cover topics like plant diversity and extinction, and the gardener's role in conservation.

Superbly illustrated and from a wealth of contributors, *Plant* is a must for anyone whose love of gardening spurs them to explore the wider implications of saving our botanic heritage.

Weekend Gardener, Issue 166, 2005, Page 29

Tiritiri Matangi
A Model of conservation
Anne Rimmer
Random House. \$NZ39.95
Reviewed by Rob Lahood



IN one of our greatest "gardening" achievements, thousands of volunteers planting more than 280,000 native trees and plants in just a decade turned Tiritiri Matangi into a model of conservation.

With such massive plantings between 1988 and 1998, it has become a remarkable restoration story of the island's natural vegetation and birdlife.

Tiri was almost devoid of vegetation after a century of farming, but it's now an open sanctuary for birds and a truly international success story. Eleven species of rare and endangered birds plus the tuatara have been successfully relocated to the island off the Whangaparaoa peninsula just north of Auckland.

In a foreword, British conservationist David Bellamy recalls one of his "most inspiring days" spent on Tiri working with children planting native species for the TV series *Moa's Ark* and meeting a takahe chick called Bellamy enjoying its new island home.

Today the sanctuary is hugely popular with New Zealanders and overseas visitors who are keen to enjoy the natural environment and learn about the flora and fauna. Bellamy urges readers to read the book and then go see the island for themselves.

They are doing this all right; every year more and more people visit the island to see the transformation and take home a

wonderful experience, and the song of native birds. Last year almost 40,000 people visited.

This book provides the definitive history of the island – now one of the many jewels of the Hauraki Gulf – from early Maori occupation through the farming period and wartime activities to the amazing restoration of natural vegetation and birdlife.

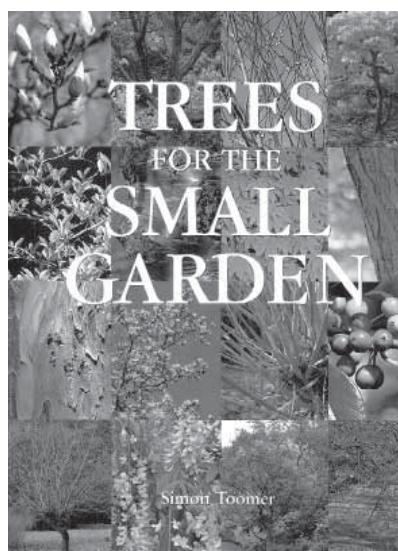
Author Anne Rimmer has done a comprehensive job – even receiving a handwritten letter from Sir David Attenborough complimenting the book and all those who helped make the island what it is today. Lavish illustrations and magical bird studies. Wonderful.

I'm heading for the ferry building.

Weekend Gardener, Issue 166, 2005, Page 29

Trees for the Small Garden

Simon Toomer
Timber Press
Distributed by Reed. \$NZ49.99
Reviewed by Gordon Roberts



HAVING just reluctantly felled a rampant ginkgo that threatened to overwhelm my garden, I thought this book would lead to the choice of a "small" replacement. But "small garden" here doesn't necessarily mean "small" tree – some species in this book can grow to 12 metres.

However, there's enough variety discussed and detail given in this American publication to ensure the tree-buyer makes a suitable choice.

The 80 trees selected are well illustrated and their features, such as leaf, form, foliage, colour, bark and flowers, highlighted.

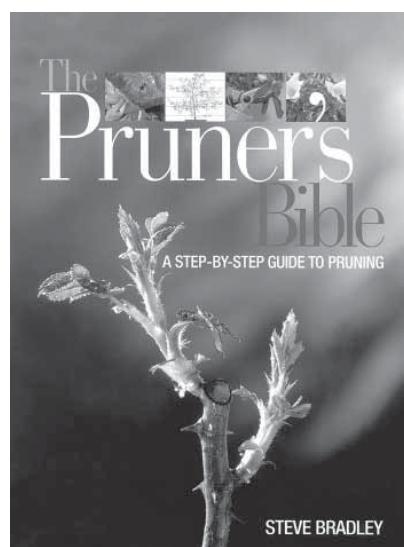
At the back of the book there's a tree selector that helps to pick the right exotic for your garden's conditions.

Before you plant that ginkgo on a pocket-handkerchief, this book might be a useful investment.

Weekend Gardener, Issue 170, 2005, Page 33

The Pruner's Bible

A step-by-step guide to pruning
Steve Bradley
New Burlington Books
Distributed by Reed. \$NZ34.99
Reviewed by Mike Gowing



EVEN enthusiastic gardeners seek reassurance their handiwork with the secateurs is not going to maim or prevent their favourite plant from flowering or fruiting, or destroy its shape.

Whether or not you take the hedge-trimmers to the roses, this book tells you whether you're on the right track when it comes to various species.

The Pruner's Bible tackles 70 popular plants and shows how to prune each individually.

There's a comprehensive introductory section explaining why pruning is necessary and outlining the best tools for the job. There's discussion of basic techniques, such as where to the place the cut according to a plant's bud arrangement.

In the A-Z plant directory that follows, pruning is divided into three sections: formative, routine and remedial. Tips, like when to prune each plant and why, are carried along the bottom of the page.

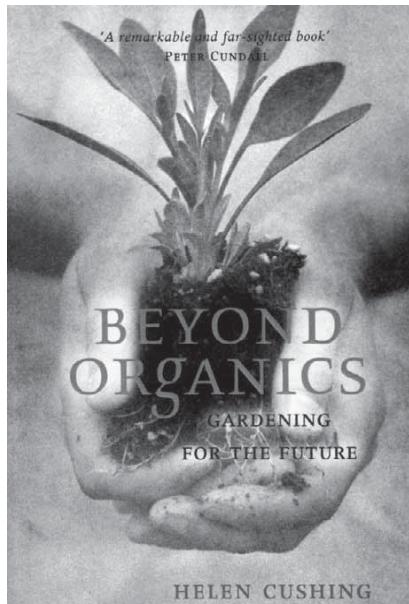
Clear illustrations and photos bring the techniques required for each species alive.

At this price *The Pruner's Bible* is a practical investment for beginner and old-hand alike.

Weekend Gardener, Issue 171, 2005, Page 29

Beyond Organics

Helen Cushing
ABC Books. \$NZ35.00
Reviewed by Gordon Roberts



AUSSIE horticulturalist and garden writer Helen Cushing has a singular aim – “to place gardeners and environmentalists on common ground”, starting with the belief that “small is beautiful and that the contribution of each garden to the wider environment should be as rich and positive as we can help it to be”.

Cushing points the way to transforming your garden into one that is low maintenance, low water and ecologically sound, with advice on climate, soil and which plants to choose, notably ones that will be happy in your garden, not those that crave what your soil or climate lacks.

Inevitably, she takes a few pot-shots along the way, among

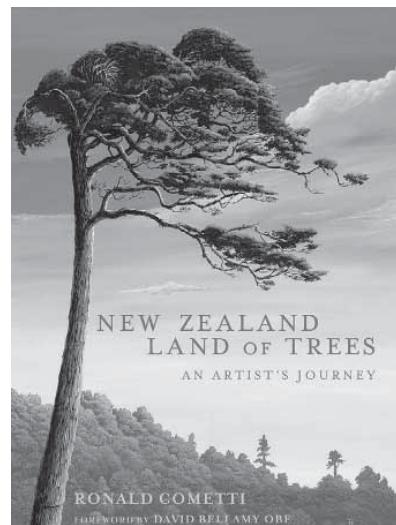
them: “Gardening books and the gardening media will always tell you to fertilise... Remember they have to fill their pages and their airtime with advice or they are out of a job.”

For the conventional gardener, a challenging, thought-provoking read.

Weekend Gardener, Issue 173, 2005, Page 33

New Zealand Land of Trees An Artist's Journeys

Ronald Cometti
Reed Publishing. \$NZ39.99
Reviewed by Mike Gowing



THE glowing tribute from the British doyen of the conservation movement, David Bellamy, to the New Zealand artist/author recognises Ronald Cometti as a kindred spirit in the cause. And there's no doubt that, with less than 20 per cent of New Zealand's native forests left, this book is timely.

As the subtitle, *An Artist's Journey*, suggests, this is a colourful personal and pictorial record of 30 examples of native tree specimens throughout the country, ranging from the contorted trunks of pohutukawa that grace the coast of the Coromandel Peninsula to the dense moss-covered veterans of the southern beech forests.

Although the author lacks formal botanical qualifications, he has an expert illustrator's eye for detail. Bright, clear depictions of the foliage adorn the text with full A4 pictures devoted to each specimen on the facing

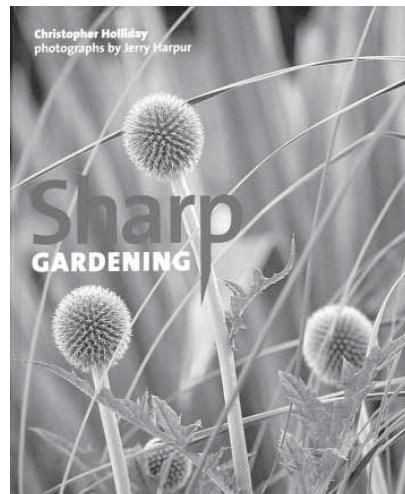
pages. The text is rich in personal anecdote – an easy yet informative read.

New Zealand Land of Trees is a compelling summary of a dedicated conservationist's vision of one of our most priceless assets – our native trees.

Weekend Gardener, Issue 173, 2005, Page 33

Sharp Gardening

Christopher Holliday
Frances Lincoln
Distributed by Bookwise.
\$NZ69.95
Reviewed by Mike Gowing



HANDS UP those who don't have any idea about what constitutes “sharp gardening”? A clue can be found in the fact the author is said to be the holder of the largest British collection of New Zealand flaxes.

Yes, New Zealand turns out to have quite a bit to do with sharp gardening – got the point? Sharp gardening means gardening with swords, straps and spikes interspersed with contrasting plants – ornamental grasses, low-maintenance perennials and the like.

In Britain, the author created a bit of a stir with his first sharp garden in Cumbria, exciting the attention of the national press and getting it featured on the BBC's Garden World.

Holliday defines sharp gardening as a “different kind of gardening” that guarantees: massive impact however small the plot; an even spread of interest throughout the year; tolerance of dry conditions;

structure relying on planting rather than hard landscaping; an exciting look using an exotic type of planting; low maintenance planting without a lawn.

If this seems familiar, you're not wrong. New Zealand gets ample credit in this densely illustrated hardback, alongside California and (for Brits) other exotic climes.

Auckland's Ayrlies, Bev McConnell's amazing garden, gets a full two pages and pictures, including a stunning shot of the swimming pool's surrounds. Bev's use of *Doryanthes palmeri*, *Agave geminiflora*, *Acanthus spinosus* and *Furcraea gigantea*, to name a few, are singled out. Perhaps Ayrlies can lay claim to being the original "sharp garden"?

Another influence on this emerging style is that of expat garden designer James Fraser. The pictures of Fraser's garden with its fountain grass and red tussock defy the reader to place it in a suburban south London plot.

If this sounds like coals to Newcastle, it isn't. This book has a lot to commend it to the Kiwi gardener, particularly those who battle with an arid coastal section and are bold enough to seek a strong statement.

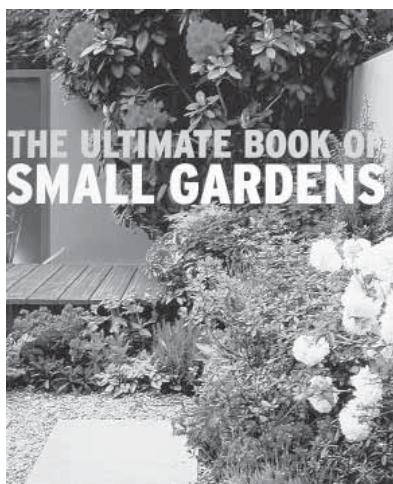
Weekend Gardener, Issue 176, 2005, Page 35

The Ultimate Book of Small Gardens

Graham Rice

Reed. \$NZ79.99

Reviewed by Gordon Roberts



GRAHAM RICE, author of 22 gardening books and Chelsea Flower Show judge, grew up in a

small garden, his own first garden was tiny and he has created gardens in small spaces ever since. In a phrase, he's well-qualified on the topic.

Here, then, is a master class offering practical advice on designing a small space to meet your needs, whether in an existing garden or an empty plot.

As Rice puts it, the one thing the size of a garden should not restrict is your imagination.

The book strolls through structural features, the practicalities (such as weed prevention, pruning and composting), garden styles and stocking the garden. There's a brief chapter, too, on preventing problems; looking at pest and disease prevention and control.

Where Rice's eye and experience really excel is in the final chapter entitled *Plants for Purposes*.

His advice is to the point. On hedging, for instance, he says: "planting hedges in a small garden is a risky business because they can take space that can be better used for more attractive plantings"; on water gardens: "Even the smallest garden has room for a water feature of some kind but, when planting, it is important you choose varieties carefully..."

There's also a useful plant list for difficult situations, but remember to reverse the two poles for New Zealand conditions.

Weekend Gardener, Issue 176, 2005, Page 35

The Unusual Life of Edna Walling

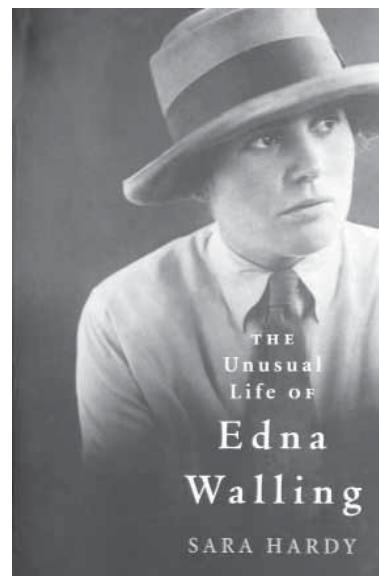
Sara Hardy

Allen & Unwin. \$NZ35

Reviewed by Chris Segelmann

BUT for a twist of fate, the name of one of Australia's best known landscapers might have meant more to Christchurch gardeners than it does to their counterparts in Melbourne.

Edna Walling came to Christchurch from Britain in 1911 as a 16-year-old. In five years she had a stint working on a North Island cattle station before becoming a nurse aide.



But when her family moved to Melbourne, Edna went, too – sparking the career of a pre-eminent landscaper who designed more than 300 gardens between 1920 and 1960 and whose writings informed a generation of Australian gardeners.

Sara Hardy, playwright and actress, became captivated with this singular woman when she played the part of Walling in a play. While other books have explored Edna the garden designer, Hardy says her purpose was to probe "the woman behind the work".

There's no doubt that Hardy's research is exhaustive – there are allusions to lesbianism and a comparison of one friendship to that of Vita Sackville West and Virginia Woolf.

Despite the wealth of biographical material, the author is forced to resort to transparent conjecture to set the scene for episodes and relationships – a device that fails to ring true.

Nonetheless, Hardy's depiction of this tireless gardener and her relentless determination sweep the reader along. Walling's will to succeed in a male-dominated domain and to stamp her own style is richly portrayed, particularly in the story of the 'village' that was her vision, Bickleigh Vale and her own house, Sonning.

Walling's attraction to stone as a medium and the evolution of her style to include predominant

plantings of natives, rather than exotics, will strike a chord with many Kiwi gardeners.

The Unusual Life of Edna Walling is an absorbing read and whets the appetite for more detailed reading on her landscaping legacy.

Weekend Gardener, Issue 176, 2005, Page 35

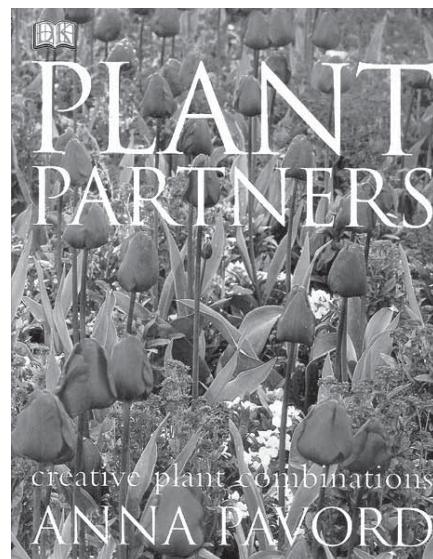
Plant Partners Creative plant combinations

Anna Pavord

Published by Dorling Kindersley

Distributed by Penguin. \$NZ39.95

Reviewed by Carl Minchin



GOOD companions are crucial to good gardening. In the veggie garden they keep bugs at bay: in the flower garden they turn drabness or daub into delight. This book is about the latter.

"The whole point of gardening," pens British garden writer Anna Pavord, "is to think about our plants' needs and then, by placing them in good company, to make them shine as brightly as they are able."

Pavord chooses 60 star perennials and for each offers two companions, her "supporting cast", to accompany them in the border. The combinations are given season by season and Pavord's forthright choices are underpinned by her dictum: "Flowers Need Foliage".

Pavord hammers home that leaves are "vastly more important in creating satisfying and enduring planting schemes than flowers".

The first question to be asked when you fall for a floral beauty in the garden centre is, "What will this look like without its flowers?"

Pavord exhorts the gardener to live dangerously and experiment; sometimes her palette has a boho streak the more conservative among us will blanch at.

Yet who could fail to be reawakened by her autumn combination of teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*), cosmos and that "gallumph" of our northern gardens, Japanese anemone – or wowed by the high-summer brightness of daisies: copper-red helenium, fiery euphorbia and blazing yellow coreopsis.

So if you're groping to mix and match, look no farther afield. Opinionated this brilliantly illustrated book may be, but it's a great starting point for a spring review of our gardens.

Weekend Gardener, Issue 178, 2005, Page 36

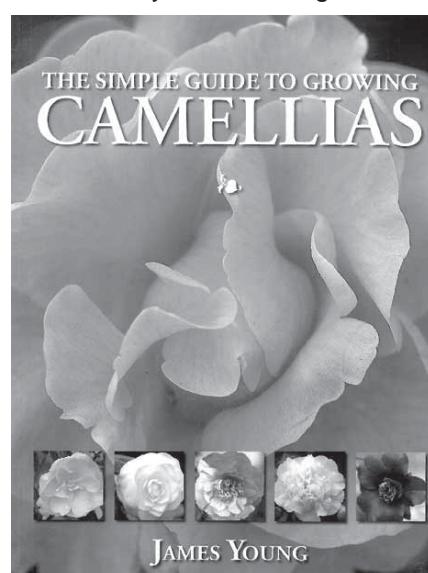
The Simple Guide to Growing Camellias

James Young

Published by 4C Publishers

Distributed by Southern Publishers Group. \$NZ19.95

Reviewed by Mike Gowing



THE recent article on Northland plantsman Jim Finlay (*Weekend Gardener*, Issue 175) would have won the approval of Aussie camellia lover James Young. Certainly Jim Finlay's 1981 hybrid 'Scentuous' gets his thumbs up, for Young grows it – along with

another of Jim's fragrant hybrids, 'High Fragrance' – in his own garden across the Tasman.

A sounder, more reasonably priced primer on camellias would be hard to find – particularly one tailored to southern hemisphere conditions.

It covers all bases from the well-trodden origins of the genus that now has more than 25,000 garden varieties.

There's to-the-point background on species camellia, as well as Japonicas, Sasanquas, Reticulatas, Williamsii's and hybrids.

Their likes and dislikes are thoroughly covered – cultivation, pests and diseases and so on. And there's an instructive section on espalier training – Sasanquas are favoured on north-facing walls.

The bulk of the book is taken up with a gallery and pen portraits of 275 forms of camellia arranged by class.

Given Kiwi gardeners' love affair with this beautiful plant, *The Simple Guide to Growing Camellias* will find an eager readership.

Weekend Gardener, Issue 178, 2005, Page 36

Book review archive

Our entire archive of book reviews (from the *Journal of the Royal New Zealand Institute of Horticulture* 1981, under its various names), together with book reviews from the *Weekend Gardener* magazine (from Issue 86, November 2001) are now available on our website at www.rnzh.org.nz