**New Zealand's Islands**  
Pamela McGeorge  
with photographs by Russell McGeorge  
David Bateman. $NZ39.99  
Reviewed by Rob Lahood

**Plant Pruning A to Z**  
A New Zealand guide  
Jon Muller  
David Bateman. $NZ29.99  
Reviewed by Mike Gowing

**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

*New Zealand Garden Journal, 2006, Vol. 9(1)*
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 Chesshire
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 takaha 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.

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**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.

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.

**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 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.


**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.


**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.


**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

The Unusual Life of Edna Walling
Sara Hardy
Allen & Unwin. $NZ35
Reviewed by Chris Segelmann

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 “gallumphing” of our northern gardens, Japanese anemone – or wowed by the high-summer brightness of daisies: copper-red heliunium, 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.rnzih.org.nz