

# Book Reviews

## Alpines from Mountain to Garden

By Richard Wilford

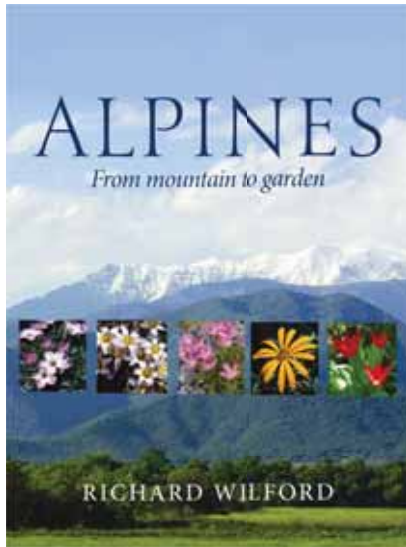
A Botanical Magazine Monograph

Published by Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, UK, 2010

Hardback, 244 pages, 292 × 245 mm, maps, colour photographs and plates  
ISBN 978-1-84246-172-3

\$NZ100.00

Reviewed by Ross Ferguson



This is a handsome book, good enough for any coffee table. However, it is far more than just a beautifully illustrated coffee table book: it is an important contribution to the literature on alpine plants. Richard Wilford is collections manager for bulbs, alpines and herbaceous perennials at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. He has seen many of the plants he describes in their native habitats and he has learnt how to grow them in cultivation. He can therefore write with authority and confidence on the conditions they require.

To most of us, the definition of what an 'alpine' is may seem obvious: it must be a plant of the mountains, a supposition supported both by the title of this book and by the photograph of mountains on the cover. It becomes apparent, however, that this definition may be too restrictive, an oversimplification. Wilford clearly prefers the definition that alpines in the horticultural sense are more than just those plants "above the tree line in mountainous regions". Rather, an alpine can be considered as "any hardy plant that is a suitable size for growing in a rock garden,

alpine trough garden or raised bed". He would therefore include many of the Mediterranean plants growing at lower altitudes since they require the same growing conditions as many 'true' alpines. I am not completely convinced by this broader definition and as a consequence query the inclusion of some plants. I was surprised to find that of the 17 pages describing the alpine plants of Australia and New Zealand, a whole page is dedicated to *Fuchsia procumbens* which, in its original habitat, was restricted to coastal areas of the northern warm temperate parts of the North Island of New Zealand. Hardly what most of us would think of as an alpine. A number of the other plants he describes and illustrates do not seem to fit even within the author's broad definition of alpines as hardy plants that are a suitable size for growing in a rock garden. The marvellous lily *Cardiocrinum giganteum* is a plant of the Himalayan forests – it is hardly an alpine and is more at home in woodland gardens. Certainly it would be a massive rock garden that could house *Cardiocrinum*. Likewise, a number of the bulbs and herbaceous plants described from Japanese forests are best suited to the shade of woodland gardens. Many of these seem delightful plants and it is no wonder that Wilford cannot resist including them and, to be fair, most of the plants discussed and illustrated are what non-specialists would think of as alpines. Indeed, all the plants he describes are most desirable.

The domestication of alpine plants, how they were discovered, classified and brought into cultivation is a major theme with a strong emphasis on cultivation in British gardens. Not surprisingly, the mainstays of many alpine collections in Britain are the plants that come from the mountains of Europe. Alpines were introduced from there in the 16th and 17th centuries and the rate of introduction accelerated in the 18th century. The arrival of these plants was often noted in the early volumes of the *Botanical Magazine* from 1786–1800 (Gorer and Harvey, 1979). Introductions continued in the 19th century and in 1870 William Robinson was able to write *Alpine Flowers for English Gardens*, not a flora but an account

on how to grow such plants in the garden.

Wilford gives a good account of the botanical exploration of the different alpine regions of the world although he does stress that for gardeners it is the subsequent introduction into cultivation of the plants from these regions that is really important. He notes that from the explorations of western North America only a small proportion of the botanical collections made actually resulted in the introduction of living plants. This is also true of New Zealand. Wilford gives what I consider to be undue emphasis to the work of botanists such as Banks, Solander, the Forsters and Hooker. They collected mainly in coastal regions and it was later travellers who with great perseverance reached the New Zealand mountains with their wealth of endemic plants. The importance of Hooker's floras is rightly acknowledged but I feel more credit should go to his collectors. Sir Joseph Hooker spent only a few months in New Zealand and he was dependent for his specimens on collectors such as William Colenso. Hooker and Colenso developed a real friendship over nearly 60 years although it was a friendship that was not always easy. Hooker could be high-handed: Colenso, a difficult man, often felt that his collections were undervalued and his field observations were largely ignored (Endersby, 2001). Nevertheless it was a collaboration that was very effective. Hooker's floras were made possible only because of the collections of dried specimens sent to him and he acknowledged this by dedicating his floras of New Zealand and Tasmania to his colonial collectors. Even so, Hooker and his collectors' endeavours did not directly result in the introduction of plants into cultivation and in general, this was to come later.

*Alpines from Mountain to Garden* is comprehensive and covers plants from most mountainous parts of the world. I cannot assess the accuracy of the information provided for so many countries so I have concentrated on the pages devoted to New Zealand plants. There are a number of disconcerting if minor errors or statements that could mislead. For example, "Fjordland National Park"

should be Fiordland National Park and the specific epithet for the tree fuchsia *Fuchsia excorticata* is misspelt as "excortica". "Dusky Bay" was the name originally used by Captain Cook (and the name given as the type locality for many Forster collections) but has long been supplanted by Dusky Sound and, to avoid confusion, this should be noted. The Bay of Islands is hardly "at the tip" of New Zealand but some hours drive south of North Cape. A map provided in the book would suggest that Castlepoint is an urban area of equivalent importance to the main centres of Auckland, Wellington, Christchurch and Dunedin, whereas it is a small holiday town with a population of about 2000. William Colenso was sent to New Zealand by the Church Missionary Society not the British and Foreign Bible Society. I was left feeling somewhat uneasy: how accurate was the rest of the book?

There is a good and comprehensive index by botanical name and an index by common name.

The choice of illustrations from *Curtis's Botanical Magazine* is inspired. My favourites were the enchanting *Glauclidium palmatum*,

looking like a miniature Japanese anemone, an illustration by Lilian Snelling, and Mary Grierson's *Iris afghanica*. The latter is a wonderful image of graceful plants almost dancing on the page, one of the most delightful botanical paintings I can remember. The drawing of *Gentiana acaulis* by James Sowerby, originally in the *Botanical Magazine* in 1798, faces a recent photograph of the same plant. Although the sheer intensity of the blue petal colour may not have been captured, the Sowerby illustration emphasises how much more definitive a botanical drawing can be than even a good photograph. An artist can provide information usually not available in a single photograph. Photographing such small plants as most alpinines can be difficult and although many of the other photographs in the book are very good, I did find a disturbing number to be in soft focus, almost impressionistic rather than precise in detail. Most of the landscape or plant habitat photographs are instructive but I did think that the photograph of Punakaiki (captioned as New Zealand's west coast, near Hokitika, South Island) added very little to our understanding of the mountain habitat of our native alpinines.

Living in Auckland in a warm wet climate I can only dream of growing most of the plants described or illustrated. For many gardeners, alpinines are a hobby, for some an obsession. This book makes such an obsession explicable, even reasonable. *Alpinines from Mountain to Garden* is a book to be enjoyed and it can serve as a source of inspiration for those lucky enough to be able to grow them or, even better, see them in their native habitats.

#### References

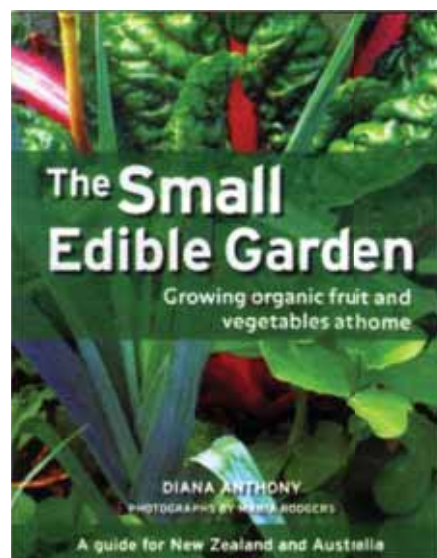
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## A selection of book reviews courtesy of the *Weekend Gardener* magazine

### The Small Edible Garden Growing organic fruit and vegetables at home

Diana Anthony  
Photography by Maria Rodgers  
Published by David Bateman  
\$NZ18.99



With the renaissance in home vegetable gardening and awareness there's no substitute to growing your own vegetables, this book is a timely addition to our shelves.

This is Diana Anthony's seventh book and she certainly needs no introduction to New Zealand readers with titles like *The Ornamental Vegetable Garden* and *Creative, Sustainable Gardening* in her repertoire.

As she points out in the introduction to this compact handbook, small-space gardening presents an exciting challenge of growing the same edibles as gardeners with a large plot.

In keeping with the how-to emphasis of the book, we get plenty of practical help. Crop rotation is a must; raised beds compensate for poor soil and drainage; containers are increasingly suitable for veggie gardening as hybridists are producing crops that

have smaller growth habits.

When it comes to picking a container, Anthony spoils the reader for choice. She canvasses a range of options from grow-bags to window-boxes, depending on what's to be raised in them.

And if you're gardening a pocket-handkerchief plot or not, the plant A-Z will be of interest, as the author lists her top picks for varieties of each vegetable and fruit.

*Weekend Gardener*, Issue 238, 2008, Page 34

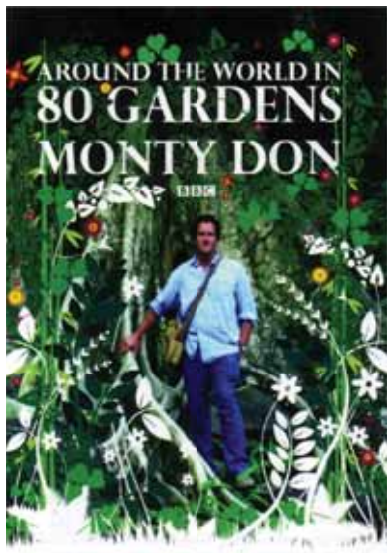
### Around the World in 80 Gardens

Monty Don  
Published by W&N for BBC  
\$NZ70.00

This book accompanies a new 10-part BBC television series. We can only hope *The Living Channel* – with its wonderful treatment of gardening – will pick up the programmes soon and broadcast them to us. As we are



constantly reminded, New Zealand's free-to-air channels have conclusively forsaken the country's leading leisure, and our great love, gardening.



*Around the World in 80 Gardens* includes two New Zealand gardens, Bev McConnell's Ayrlires and the slightly lesser known and very different natives garden in New Plymouth, Te Kainga Marire, the 40-year-old creation of Valda Poletti and Dave Clarkson. The smaller, latter garden Monty includes in his "loved list".

An expensive hardback but a treat, this book is a must for garden voyeurs. Monty circumnavigates the world as his crew visit scores of irresistible gardens in England and Europe, China and Japan, Central and South America, South East Asia and Australasia, India and North and South America.

All the way Don, aided by his television research and film crew, makes interesting observations and conclusions. The book is entertaining – an Englishman's subjective look at wildly different, random gardens.

Monty calls it the trip of a lifetime and stresses his 80 gardens were not intended to be the "best" in the world. Everyone's best would be different.

The journey for the series and the book was actually 10 trips with a return to base each time. This gave Monty and his team time to edit their notes, cut their film, catch their breath and change their clothes and currency for the next stage of their 18-month odyssey.

In Britain, Monty chose to go to just Sissinghurst in Kent and Rousham in Oxfordshire. In France he went to Villandry in the Loire Valley and Giverny in Normandy. That Monty

made it here means, in the scheme of things, Aotearoa has not been badly treated. Australia wins a few more chapters, as do China, India, South Africa and the United States.

In a recent English garden magazine article, Monty was cornered to confess that a garden on the Pacific coast of Chile was one of his favourites.

And he says in this book that Los Villos belonging to Juan Grimm is one of the most beautiful and inspiring gardens anywhere in the world.

He adds that "casually mentioning that I had spent a day with Grimm in his garden increased my own credibility hugely".

No mean statement Monty, as you point out Juan Grimm is almost unknown in Britain but "undoubtedly one of the best garden and landscape designers working today".

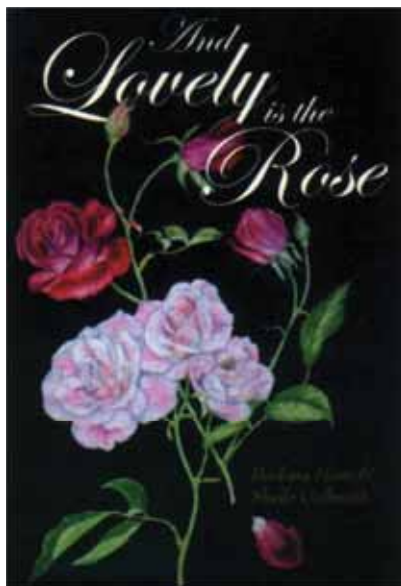
Supported by glorious photos, Monty's narrative is brisk and perceptive, if not a little brief ... but in about 300 pages or so, garden impressions had to be somewhat limited.

Definitely a prized volume, *Around the World in 80 Gardens* will help to burn the midnight oil.

*Weekend Gardener*, Issue 240, 2008, Page 31

### And Lovely is the Rose

Barbara Horn & Sheila Galbraith  
Published by Exisle Publishing  
\$NZ30.00



Lyrical and beautifully illustrated by Sheila Galbraith, this book is disarmingly factual in content. It has detailed comment on the provenance of a wide range of roses throughout history, from 'Stanwell Perpetual'

(1838) to 'Burgundy Iceberg' (2004).

This slim hardback opens with 'Old Blush' – a rose discovered three centuries ago in China. It won over rosarians in the 18th century with its repeat blooms, a quality unknown in European-bred roses of the time. And while old roses get more than a passing nod here, contemporary breeders are well served, too.

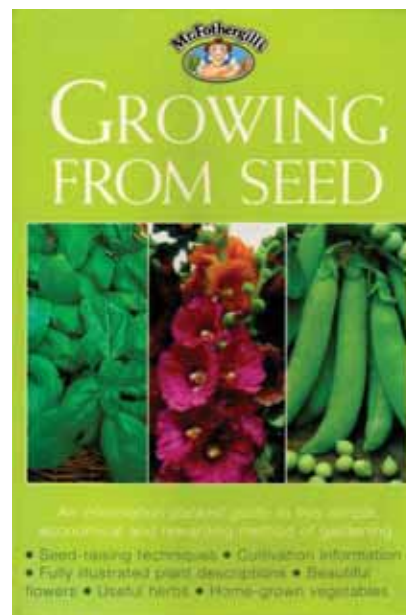
In this vein, David Austin is given prominence as a breeder "who has reintroduced something of the romantic history and fresh beauty of roses esteemed for centuries". Austin's 'Mary Rose' was introduced at Chelsea Flower Show some two decades ago. This rose commemorated the raising of King Henry VIII's vessel of the same name from the mud of the English Channel.

It's exactly this sort of detail backgrounding on more than 50 roses that will make this book a must for rosarians and those just interested in roses alike.

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### Mr Fothergill's Growing from Seed

Margaret Hanks  
Published by Murdoch Books  
\$NZ16.99



This is an information-packed guide to this simple, economical and rewarding method of gardening.

Contents include the seed-raising basics: planting from seed, types of seeds, how seeds get into their packets, how seed germinates, growing on seedlings; soils and potting mixes and pests and diseases.

A-Z plant listings cover flowers, herbs and vegetables and there is a substantial planting chart and index.

This is a little gem of a book that will prepare you for experiencing the wonder of creating new life in your garden and enjoy the satisfaction of gathering home-grown flowers, herbs and vegetables.

It is especially written for Australia and New Zealand and takes into account the various climatic zones.

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### Creating Outdoor Rooms

Leeda Marting

Published by Gibbs Smith

Distributed by Bookwise International

\$NZ59.99



The author of this American title founded the popular South Carolina-based company Charleston Gardens, a catalogue, website and retail store in Charleston.

Leeda Marting has an eye for good design. Here she presents inspirational ideas for creating outdoor rooms that truly extend the home and provides ideas for accessories for these areas.

Hardback and full of colour plates, *Creating Outdoor Rooms* is inspirational but really is confined to outdoor rooms and courtyards and lavish ones at that.

There is lots on furniture, choosing accessories, using architectural elements and fountains and bringing these areas alive through entertaining.

Oozing the old charm of the Southern States, this book would have limited applications for New Zealand properties; just those in the very top bracket.

However, it nevertheless gives the reader a real vision for adapting on a smaller, less grand scale.

Definitely full of great ideas even if the properties are over the horizon.

*Weekend Gardener*, Issue 245, 2008, Page 34

### Quick and Easy Container Gardening

20 step-by-step projects and inspirational ideas

Tessa Eveleigh

Photography by Debbie Patterson

Distributed by Southern Publishers

Group

\$NZ44.99



Kiwis are ingenious gardeners and brilliant garden artists. Perhaps the artistic element is what container gardening is all about.

What's in one person's junk is another's treasure: so to with containers for gardens.

This book published in London provides the DIY container gardener's dream, even if most of the ideas for containers themselves, while very diverse, don't have the sheer rustic genius that the Kiwis might conjure.

Everything is very prim and proper.

But besides the 20 projects included, *Container Gardening* is packed with ideas and inspiration with containers providing endless instant colour possibilities.

Some interesting and unusual container ideas are presented including plastic water bottles, gift bags and kitchenware.

Reading this lot and there seems to be little you can't grow in containers.

There's a chapter on 'crops in pots' showing how to grow fruit, vegetables and herbs and there's a section on decorating the garden with pots for summer parties.

We know there are basic traps in container gardening. But this book deals with the basic techniques in some depth and also includes valuable detail about locating containers in the garden.

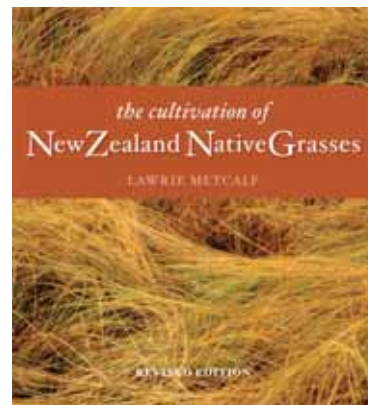
*Weekend Gardener*, Issue 245, 2008, Page 34

### The Cultivation of New Zealand Native Grasses

Lawrie Metcalf

Published by Random House

\$NZ34.99



First published in 1998, *The Cultivation of New Zealand Native Grasses* has been updated to 120 pages in a new format.

Regarded as something of a gardening classic, the book covers the techniques for the propagation, cultivation and care of our native grass plants.

It is illustrated with line drawings and colour photographs.

The author Lawrie Metcalf is a leading expert on New Zealand native flora and has written other books on the cultivation of native species.

This comprehensive title covers buying plants, soils, planting, spacing, mulching, maintenance, and propagation by seed and division.

Its practical advice includes landscaping with natives, specimen planting, ground-covers, rock gardens, shady areas, watersides and damp places. It also covers coastal gardens, natural or wild gardens, environmental plantings, containers, sculpture and roof gardens.

*Weekend Gardener*, Issue 253, 2008, Page 32

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