

A selection of the best book reviews of 2006, compliments of the *Weekend Gardener* magazine. Part 1 of 2.

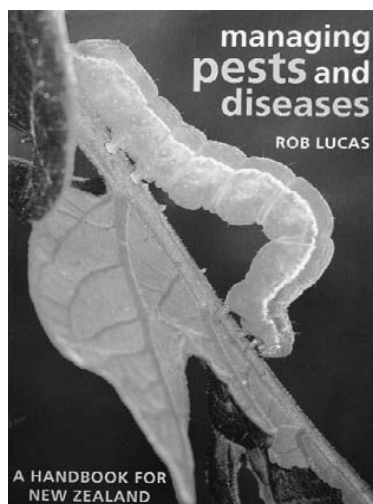
Managing Pests and Diseases

Rob Lucas

Published by Craig Potton

\$NZ39.99

Reviewed by Robert Gordon



THE revised version of this comprehensive, accessible guide is written for New Zealand gardeners by horticultural lecturer and author Rob Lucas.

The excellent layout and clear pictures aside, it is refreshing to have a handbook that doesn't automatically advise gardeners dogged by garden nasties to pour on the pesticide.

The book details many pests of bedding plants, houseplants, vegetables, fruit trees and shrubs including natives. Fungi, bacteria and viruses come under the author's microscope, too. All this is put together in a thoroughly readable style with hints on control bullet-pointed throughout.

There are clear instructions on how to use the book to find the information you need and the two chapters *Clean and Green* and *Safe at Home* are outstanding.

Lucas pulls no punches. For instance, take this "point to ponder": "If you always need to apply pesticide cocktails, then you are the problem ... one appropriate spray applied at the right time, might be the appropriate choice." But this is not a "preachy" book – it's an indispensable bible for all gardeners who have plant health at heart.

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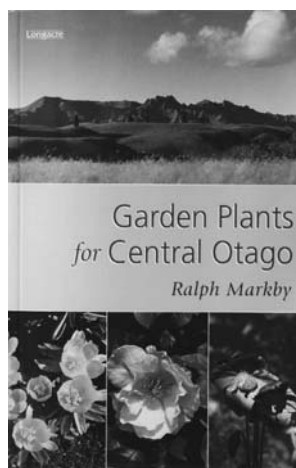
Garden Plants for Central Otago

Ralph Markby

Published by Longacre Press

\$NZ39.95

Reviewed by Mike Gowing



DUNEDIN'S Botanic Garden and its magnificent rhododendrons turned Ralph Markby on to the joys of horticulture some 30 or so years ago. Today a Wanaka resident, this astute observer of plants, habitat and conditions has come up with an invaluable handbook for gardeners who live in that South Island climate of extremes, Central Otago.

The book kicks off with a valuable synopsis of the variations within the region, in climate and soil type, and a wander through the author's favourite plants. A chapter follows on getting the basics right. And Ralph Markby doesn't mince words when it comes to matters of taste. Take this: "Tussock grasses ... look anything but right when mixed with exotic plants. I have seen one bizarre example of large-scale planting of rhododendrons interplanted with tussocks. Oh dear!"

The author splits his A-Zs of recommended plants into eight categories, including trees for small and large properties, conifers, shrubs, perennials, groundcover, climbers, and rock garden, which "provide more enjoyment per square metre than any other sort of garden". Ralph Markby has his own rock garden, as well as first-hand experience of many of the plants listed.

With more and more people choosing to live in this beautiful part of New Zealand, expect this homespun book to enjoy a ready readership. Those in other regions with similar climatic conditions – say, the North Island's central plateau – may also find it a valuable addition to their shelves.

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The Naming of Names

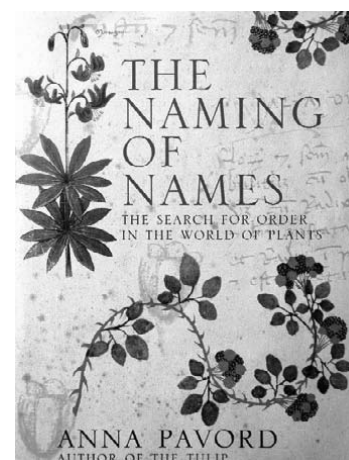
Anna Pavord

Published by Bloomsbury

Distributed by Allen & Unwin

\$NZ95.00

Reviewed by Mike Gowing



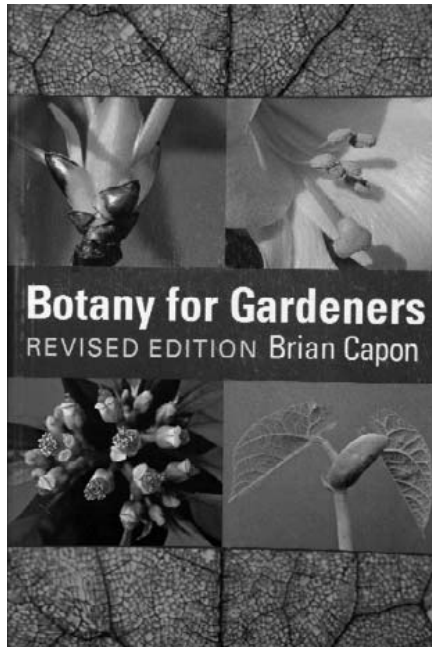
HOW plant species – some 422,000 of them – came to be described and named is taken for granted by most of us – the taxonomic puzzles of our own gardens seem quite enough, thank you very much. But the challenge of classifying our natural world, how to make order from chaos, has preoccupied some of history's brightest minds. Here, Anna Pavord, gardening correspondent for the British newspaper, *The Independent*, brings this quest alive. Her eye for anecdote and detail brings to life philosophers, collectors, apothecaries, botanists and others come to life from the depths of history. Pavord's description of her travels adds further lustre to this intriguing book.

The Naming of Names is such a trove of information, it's cheap even at its fairly hefty price.

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Botany for Gardeners

Brian Capon
Published by Timber Press
Distributed by Craig Potton
\$NZ34.99
Reviewed by Mike Gowing



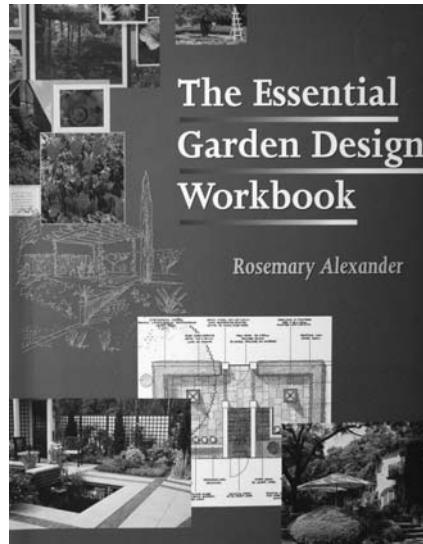
ALTHOUGH we are involved with growing plants, possibly the last time we tried to get to grips with botany was when we drew pictures of dissected beans from the nature table at primary school. *Botany for Gardeners* is an ideal way to revisit Botany 101. It deals with germination, the structure of plants and their adaptation to the environment, in fact the whole process of growth in a simple, no-nonsense way. Particularly pertinent are chapters on how plants use water, minerals and light and on how fruits are formed from flowers.

American Brian Capon, a botany professor at UCLA, has revised his best-seller from more than a decade ago to include a couple of dozen new pictures. There's also a succinct appendix on the mysteries of plant taxonomy. Although crammed with interest *Botany for Gardeners'* readable style makes it readily accessible for the least scientific of us, myself included.

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The Essential Garden Design Workbook

Rosemary Alexander
Published by Timber Press
\$NZ54.99
Reviewed by Robert Gordon



IF you're a serious gardener wanting to start from scratch, here's something to chew over. For once the cover blurb has it right – it's not a book that's just about pretty pictures, but a step-by-step practical guide.

Rosemary Alexander is founder-principal of the English Gardening School in London's Chelsea but there's much – particularly in the sections on research and design and development – that can be considered fundamental to sound garden design anywhere in the world.

It'll take a bit of persistence on the part of the layperson to absorb the detail in this book, but Alexander has a no-nonsense approach, as her warning on the use of herbaceous plants shows: "Avoid using too many different types of plants, which can result in borders that look restless and unbalanced," she says. "To give continuity, repeat certain groupings."

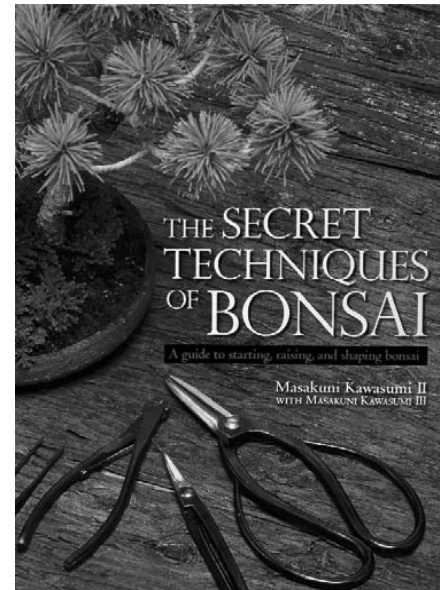
But the real strength is Thomas's attention to design minutiae (even down to a checklist on what to watch out for if you use imitation paving).

The Essential Garden Design Workbook is a worthwhile investment if you have garden dreams but need a toolbox to make them happen.

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Secret Techniques of Bonsai

Masakuni Kawasumi II and
Masakuni Kawasumi III
Published by Kodasha
Distributed by Bookwise
\$NZ47.95
Reviewed by Geoff Fitzpatrick



FOR those who have already tried their hand at the Japanese art of bonsai and want to venture beyond basic techniques, this is an ideal book. But this famous father-and-son team cover all the basics, too: opening chapters deal with species and style for bonsai and how to start a bonsai, either growing from seed (misho), cuttings (sashiki) and yamadori, collecting wild seedlings. There's a chapter devoted through the toriki method of layering. The author outlines the advantages of this over other methods, including the fact a presentable bonsai can be made in very short time.

There are also comprehensive chapters on the other including pruning, repotting, bud trimming. Daily care and how the various tools are used for the different tasks are also dealt with.

Clear black and white photographs are used to illustrate techniques, while colour pictures show the results in all their restrained glory. *Secret Techniques of Bonsai* is a manual that both the novice or the aficionado will appreciate, and at a reasonable price.

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