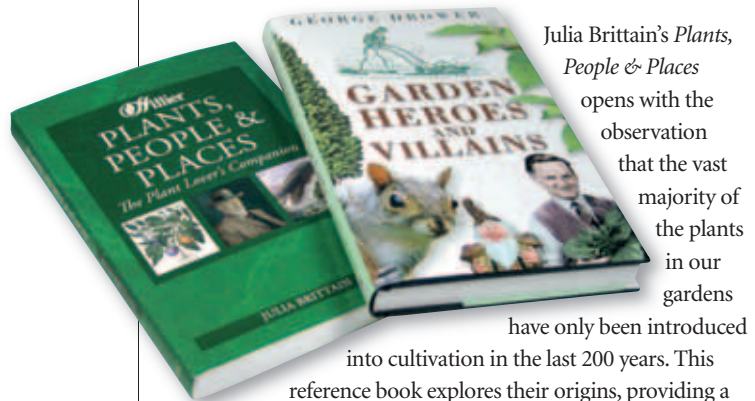


# FEBRUARY EX LIBRIS

The best books on offer this month for gardeners

PLANTS, PEOPLE & PLACES: THE PLANT LOVER'S COMPANION Julia Brittain David & Charles £9.99

GARDEN HEROES AND VILLAINS George Drower Sutton Publishing £14.99



Julia Brittain's *Plants, People & Places* opens with the observation that the vast majority of the plants in our gardens have only been introduced into cultivation in the last 200 years. This reference book explores their origins, providing a crisp and useful introduction to many of 'the people and places whose names are scattered across the plant world'.

Declaring, apologetically, that she will confine herself to temperate gardens, Brittain still manages to range from Californian xerophytes to the sacred mountain of Emei Shan in China. A more thorough compendium of plant hunting is hard to imagine – from the Fortunes, Wilsons and Lobbs through to the Cox family, Roy Lancaster and the Wynn-Joneses of Crùg Farm. Nurserymen are also well represented and modern gardeners such as Carol Klein and Beth Chatto will be proud to take their places among the luminaries described in this book.

Every page contains some delicious nugget, including the fact that the first recorded plant hunting expedition, around 1500 BC, was instigated by Queen Hatshepsut, believed to be the biblical Queen of Sheba. Baljuan in Tajikistan turns out not to be the home-town of Borat, but the no less appalling mile-a-minute plant, *Fallopia baldschuanica*, discovered there in 1883. She also introduces us to Andre Michaux, robbed of his pre-eminent place in plant history by the upheavals of the French Revolution, and Polish Jesuit monk Brother Stefan Fanczak, breeder of the marvellous clematis, *C. 'Polish Spirit'*. Meeting more aristocratic Poles, we finally learn how to pronounce *Paeonia mlokosewitschii* and *Ligularia przewalskii*, while Miss Jessop's rosemary seems all the more upright when we learn her christian name was Euphemia.

With its crystal-clear layout and succession of helpful lists, introductory timeline and excellent and informative maps, this is a must for every student of horticulture and garden history. In fact, gardeners everywhere will wonder how they ever managed without this invaluable little book.

If Julia Brittain's 'miscellany' is all elegance and concision, the same cannot be said of George Drower, whose discursive and exclamatory *Garden Heroes and Villains* is guaranteed to bring out the inner Lynne Truss in the mildest reader. His 'heroes'

range from Heron (*sic*) of Alexandria to Percy Thrower; his 'villains' are largely responsible for unfortunate introductions, from the grey squirrel to Japanese knotweed. But Drower has sense enough to acknowledge that such labels are at best arbitrary, and may be unjust. DDT, consigned to villainy today, did genuinely help to eradicate typhus and malaria. And is it fair to blame Conrad Loddiges for the spread of *Rhododendron ponticum*, rather than the landowners who used his handsome garden plant as cover for game birds?

This is certainly an opinionated book and not always an accurate one. Drower fails to mention, for example, that 'family firm' Sutton's Seeds is now part of international conglomerate, Vilmorin. Can Victorian garden taste really be described as 'austere'? And if garden visiting was truly confined to a handful of grandees before Elsie Wagg initiated the National Gardens Scheme, what of Gilpin or Celia Fiennes? What, indeed, would have become of Lizzie Bennett?

It is also hard to see who this book is for. Uncompromising and not always reliable, it is insufficiently scholarly for the serious garden history student, but too stuffed with (sometimes irrelevant) 'know-how' (a favourite word) for the general reader. Having said that, I did not previously know that the delightfully bonkers Charles Isham, champion of the garden gnome, believed his little figures had a spiritual dimension, or that the modern chainsaw is derived, appallingly, from an obstetric implement. "Surprisingly," Drower observes, "it was quite a while before thought was given to adapting this medical technology for forestry work." Sadly, I'm not sure that this is a joke. *Ambra Edwards is a journalist and garden historian.*

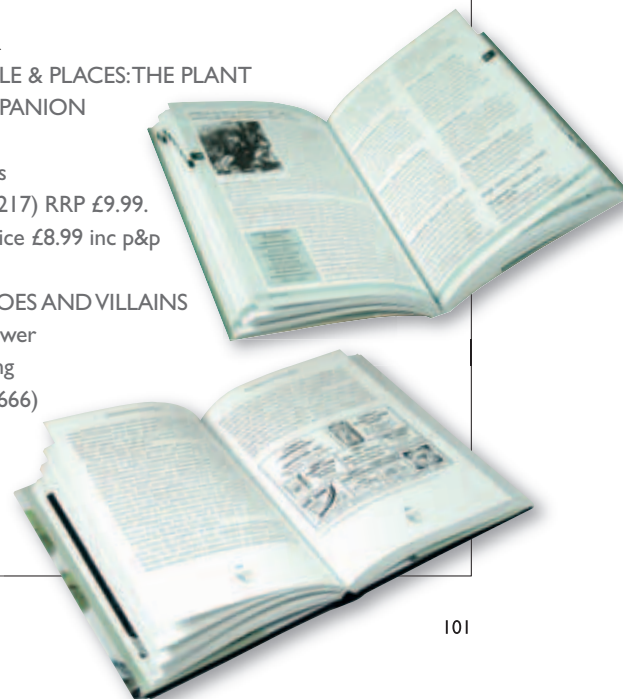
## BOOK OFFER

PLANTS, PEOPLE & PLACES: THE PLANT LOVER'S COMPANION

By Julia Brittain  
David & Charles  
(ISBN 0715324217) RRP £9.99.  
Reader offer price £8.99 inc p&p

GARDEN HEROES AND VILLAINS

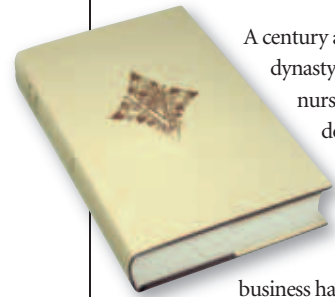
By George Drower  
Sutton Publishing  
(ISBN 0750933666)  
RRP £14.99.  
Reader offer price £13.99  
inc p&p



# FEBRUARY EX LIBRIS

## HORTUS VEITCHII

Republished by Caradoc Doy £95



A century ago, the Veitch horticultural dynasty was at the height of its powers. Its nurseries in Exeter and Chelsea were the dominant force in British commercial horticulture throughout the Victorian era. In 1906, James Veitch commissioned an extraordinary book: *Hortus Veitchii*. It detailed the 1,500 plants the business had introduced and their origins and the lengths its collectors went to secure them (the Veitch nurseries were the first to employ professional plant-hunters).

The Veitches were major players in the orchid frenzy of the day and were the first to hybridise orchids in the 1850s, which, at the time, was highly controversial. When Thomas Lobb sent back the first examples of *Vanda caerulea* from India, they sold for £300 each. The book makes no mention of this but notes that '...it was exhibited at a meeting of the Horticultural Society of London, held in Regent Street and received with marked favour. The large flowers of soft light blue, tessellated with azure blue, are of great beauty.' The limited edition volumes were not for general consumption but gifts to libraries, universities, botanists and prestigious customers. A copy now fetches quite a price.

The Veitch name died out in 1969, but still resonates loudly. There are few gardens without a plant whose origins can be attributed to its legacy. Exeter horticulturist Caradoc Doy is an authority on the nursery and has republished a facsimile of this seminal work to mark its centenary. The aim was to examine and, if necessary, reclassify everything in it, but this demanded a book in itself, something he is currently working on, along with a long-term project to create a garden dedicated to introductions that are endangered or slipping out of cultivation.

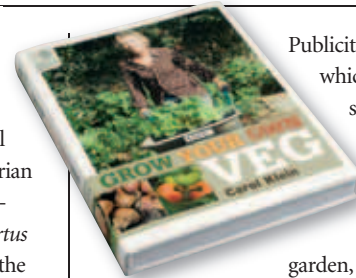
Doy has gone to extraordinary lengths to ensure the authenticity of the book. He meticulously sourced a thick, slightly yellowy paper to mirror the Victorian original and even had a special brass stamping plate made to replicate the cover embossing. The result is wonderful; its weight, feel and look (including the now obsolete Victorian font) demand it be treated with the care of a precious text. The price reflects the huge effort involved, but it's worth it for those interested in one of the greatest influences on the development of British gardens. *Tom Gard is a gardening journalist and runs a nursery based in Devon, as well as organising trips to European football clubs.*

Copies of *Hortus Veitchii* are available direct from Caradoc Doy priced £95, inc p&p. Tel 01392 877225 or visit [www.caradocdoy.co.uk](http://www.caradocdoy.co.uk)



## GROW YOUR OWN VEG

By Carol Klein Mitchell Beazley £16.99



Publicity for this book-of-the-TV-series, which started in January on BBC2, says it's aimed at beginners. I think novice veg growers might find it a bit daunting. Carol Klein is known for her no-nonsense approach and inspires us to garden, but the book didn't have as much of her trademark gumption as I was expecting. Maybe the publishers are banking on the TV series giving beginners a kick-start and have planned the book as back-up for reference.

It is, however, thorough, accurate, reliable and strong on recommending the varieties of vegetables to grow – as to be expected from the RHS, which produced the book with Carol. She introduces each vegetable with 'Carol's veg notebook', a page of tips, followed by a double-page spread about the best sites and soils, how to plant and cultivate and when to harvest.

On the downside, you have to plough through the text sometimes to get to the point and neither the photographs nor the captions are that hardworking. Basic information as bullet points and less text in the passive would have given the book more energy and made it more accessible. I did, however, like the selection of 40 vegetables – tender veg like okra and aubergines get their own section and there are useful tips on growing Florence fennel and asparagus, summer squashes, chicory and edible flowers, vegetables that not all books of this kind cover. I am also taken by the grid-based 3m x 3m plot at the RHS Garden Harlow Carr, which features on TV and appears in the 'Growing in a Small Space' section. I will follow this when I prise up some decking in my garden to use in my veg patch next spring. However, a bit more on the mechanics of this 'square-foot' gardening method would have been fascinating for those of us without *Good Life*-sized suburban gardens.

This book would appeal more to seasoned gardeners than beginners, but novices may turn to it in subsequent years to troubleshoot or maximise yields. But when you start out, you don't need to read a hefty tome. The things that really get you hooked as a gardener are the thrill of seeing your first drill of seeds sprouting into life, or harvesting your first bumper crop of runner beans. Just get out there and start planting...

*Celia Woolfrey is a journalist who has gardened on an allotment for ten years in southwest London.*

### BOOK OFFER

#### GROW YOUR OWN VEG

By Carol Klein  
Mitchell Beazley (ISBN 1845332938)  
RRP £16.99. Reader offer price £14.99 inc p&p

## OTHER RECENTLY PUBLISHED BOOKS FOR GARDENERS



### THE GARDEN GALLERY

By Rachel Bebb & John Garfield  
A photographic book featuring sculptures from a Hampshire gallery in garden settings. All proceeds go to the Naomi House Children's Hospice. Call 01794 301144 to buy a copy.  
The Garden Gallery £15 plus p&p



### THE NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN

Edited by Gregory Long & Anne Skillion  
The National Historic Landmark in the heart of New York City through text and hundreds of photographs.  
Harry N Abrams £29.95  
ISBN 0810957442



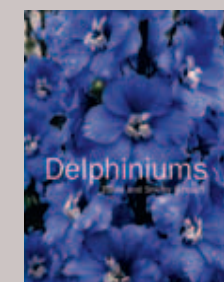
### SUCCESS WITH ORGANIC FRUIT/SUCCESS WITH ORGANIC VEGETABLES

By Yvonne Cuthbertson  
Two comprehensive guides full of advice on growing organic produce.  
Guild of Master Craftsmen Publications Ltd £12.95  
ISBN 1861084838/1861084781



### RSPB POCKET GARDEN BIRDWATCH

By Mark Ward  
The complete guide to attracting and identifying garden birds, including which plants and trees to grow to create a bird-friendly environment.  
Dorling Kindersley £5.99  
ISBN 9781405318174

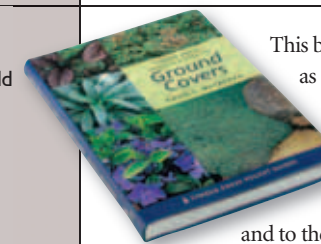


### DELPHINIUMS

By Dave and Shirley Bassett  
An authoritative guide to growing, raising and breeding these spectacular garden flowers by experts who offer practical advice on creating year-round colour.  
Batsford £25  
ISBN 0713490020

## POCKET GUIDE TO GROUND COVER

By David S Mackenzie Timber Press £14.99



This book by David S Mackenzie is labelled as a pocket guide, but you would need a pretty big coat pocket if you wanted to take it out and about with you. Packed into its 240 pages is a wealth of information, both precise and to the point. An interesting introduction leads on to a section entitled 'Ground Covers for Specific Purposes and Locations'. Here you will find plants for spring colour, small areas, light shade and even those that are 'fire-retardant'. The latter selection is less relevant to UK gardeners than those in North America, for whom the book is primarily aimed. However, this should not put British readers off; the author provides a colour 'European hardiness map' marked with equivalent US hardiness zones so that any plant within the comprehensive A-Z section can be checked for suitability.

Plant entries in the A-Z, with both botanical and common names, provide a general overview with description, size, habit and growing conditions for more than 1,000 perennials. Each one is also assigned a hardiness rating on a scale of one to ten. The accompanying colour photographs (more than 300 of them) are of high quality and were almost all taken by the author, and accurately represent the plants. Detailed close-ups are combined with medium-distance shots.

Although most of the cultivars and varieties covered here are available to UK gardeners, a few may be difficult to source. So consult the *RHS Plant Finder* or trawl the internet before setting your heart on a plant you cannot get hold of. The book's section on nursery sources lists just two UK nurseries against 29 North American, so is not particularly beneficial.

In *Ground Cover*, the author has managed to create an informative and attractive reference work that should appeal to any gardener looking to solve that ever-present problem of covering bare areas of earth.

It's also nice to know that when I do find a coat with large enough pockets to fit this book it won't snag because its soft back cover has thoughtfully had its corners clipped. *David Gardner trained the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and is now a freelance garden writer.*

### BOOK OFFER

#### POCKET GUIDE TO GROUND COVER

By David S. Mackenzie  
Timber Press  
(ISBN 0881927988)  
RRP £14.99. Reader offer price £13.99 inc p&p



