

# New Books for Pacific Northwest Gardeners

BY BRIAN R. THOMPSON

## Japanese Gardens in North America

“Quiet Beauty: The Japanese Gardens of North America” is itself a book of quiet beauty, and an excellent introduction to Japanese-style gardens throughout Canada and the United States. Photographer David Cobb, from Mosier (near Hood River, Oregon), is particularly adept at emphasizing the contrasts between light and shadow, the subtle reflections in still waters, and the energy of moving water in his subjects. I have visited many of the 26 featured gardens, and he captures the spirit of these very well.

Text author Kendall Brown is an Asian art historian at California State University, Long Beach. His introductory essay places these gardens in the context of what he sees as five distinctive historical periods beginning at the end of the 19th century. The Seattle Japanese Garden—along with gardens in Portland, at the University of British Columbia, and at the Bloedel Reserve on Bainbridge Island—are all placed in the second of these periods, a time of “Building Bridges” following World War II.

Feeling regional pride, I read the chapter on this period first, and I wasn’t disappointed. Brown is good at telling (what are often) convoluted histories. He underscores the importance of our local gardens in the development of the Japanese style in North America: “The Seattle Japanese Garden also set a new standard as the earliest major permanent garden built in North America by well-established designers from Japan.” He further

compliments it as being “...arguably one of the finest in North America.”

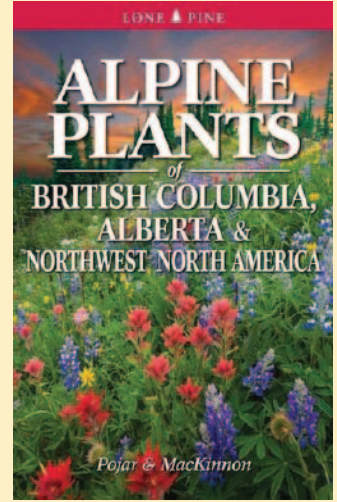
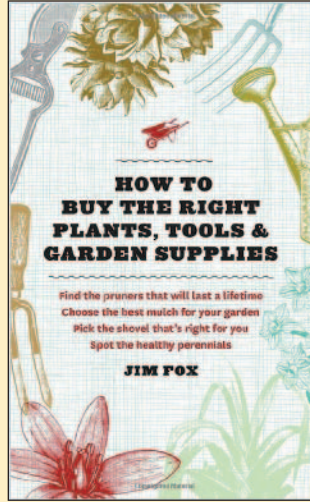
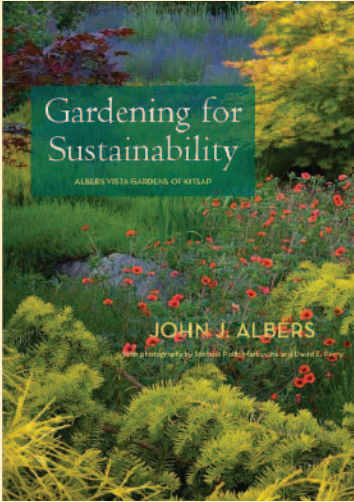
Featured in a later chapter is Spokane’s Nishinomiya Garden in Manito Park, while another 10 gardens from throughout Washington (including the Kubota Garden) and British Columbia are briefly described in the appendices, making this an important garden book for the Pacific Northwest. Brown’s earlier (1999) book, “Japanese-Style Gardens of the Pacific West Coast,” is also worth reading for a more in-depth general history of this style.

## New Garden on the Kitsap Peninsula

“Gardening for Sustainability” is almost two books in one. The first part takes you on an intimate tour of the Albers Vista Gardens near Bremerton, Washington—approximately four acres lovingly crafted by author John Albers and his wife Santica Marcovina over the last 15 years. I kept a post-it note on the garden map for frequent reference as I walked page-by-page through the 14 garden rooms; the history, purpose and plantings of each room were made very real by the considerable descriptive detail and excellent photographs.

“As visitors stand among the Three Islands dreaming of distant lands, they have the choice of proceeding through the open sea of crushed granite or continuing up Madrona Lane.” Transitions like this hold your interest as you continue your tour, picking up ideas to use for your own garden, such as “...the underutilized chaste tree [*Vitex agnus-castus*]... is an





ideal substitute for the [invasive] butterfly bush [*Buddleia davidii*].”

The author’s enthusiasm is especially apparent in a chapter on special collections, including dwarf conifers, striped-bark and Japanese maples and viburnums. Much of his interest in the latter genus was sparked by the collection at the Washington Park Arboretum, which he studied and described while taking classes through the Center for Urban Horticulture in the 1990s.

The second part of the book is a concise essay on landscape sustainability—excellent reading for any gardener. These principles and practices are the basis for the design and maintenance of the Albers Vista Gardens. But despite best intentions, the author freely admits that errors do happen. A section titled “Planting Too Many Unusual Specimens” warns against creating a garden with visual overload, an example of an error that most gardeners have experienced. He concludes that it is best to “...learn from your mistake and move on to the next joyful garden project.”

The garden is open to visitors by appointment or for special events. More information is available at [www.albersvistagardens.org](http://www.albersvistagardens.org).

### How to be a Shrewd Plant Shopper

Jim Fox is a consumer advocate. More specifically, a gardening consumer advocate. His goal is “...to educate you to be a savvy consumer so you can be confident that your gardening dollars are

well spent.” To achieve this goal, he has written a shopping guide: “How to Buy the Right Plants, Tools & Garden Supplies.”

Many general gardening books touch on plant buying or tool selection, but typically include the information at the back of the book or in a brief introduction that the reader hastily skims over to get to the real excitement—an encyclopedia of plants in glorious color. Fox recognizes how critical this basic information is for all gardeners, experienced or not, and uses clarity, broad experience and considerable wit to engage the reader, leaving the colorful photos and plant bios to the several other books that he recommends.

I found the author’s insights into the process of buying and selling plants particularly engaging, demonstrating his perspectives as both an avid collector of specialty plants and as a long-time nursery worker. “To get good service, you need to be a good customer,” he strongly recommends. For example, spouting your own expertise is a quick way to shut down any helpful advice you might receive from the true expert.

After reading this book, I have a much better appreciation for the dedicated men and women who own and run nurseries and must be skilled at managing both plants and people. All so that we can have the cool plants we really, really want.

### Field Guide to Alpine Plants

Jim Pojar and Andy MacKinnon became household names, at least among those households



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## New Books for Fall Reading

- *The Good Life Lab: Radical Experiments in Hands-On Living*, by Wendy Tremayne and Dale Dougherty (Storey Publishing, 2013; \$18.95)
- *Backyard Foraging: 65 Familiar Plants You Didn't Know You Could Eat*, by Ellen Zachos (Storey Publishing, 2013; \$16.95)
- *Must-See Birds of the Pacific Northwest*, by Sarah Swanson and Max Smith (Timber Press, 2013; \$19.95)

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interested in native plants, with the publication in 1994 of “Plants of the Pacific Northwest Coast.” Since it was published, it has been the most popular field guide in the Miller Library because of its clarity, organization and plant keys—and for the many features that give it added value.

Now, the two British Columbia authors/editors have matched their earlier work with a new title, “Alpine Plants of the Northwest.” While the previous work was a comprehensive study of all plants west of the Cascades, this book extends to the alpine and subalpine areas from the coast east to the Rockies, including north to the Yukon and Alaska. This is a large region, but as the number of plants that thrive above the timberline is limited, the guide is quite manageable, especially for those who hike in these areas. Like the earlier book, the Lone Pine publication has a soft but weather-resistant cover, making it worth having at least one copy in your hiking party.

This model for field guides anywhere is a good blend of information for a broad range of competencies. Detailed keys, required by those who are knowledgeable or expert, are nicely matched with photographs, drawings and descriptions that will aid anyone in identification. Vexing, hard-to-distinguish species have additional aids, such as a chart with descriptive comparisons of both leaves and flowers of the many *Potentilla* or a page of leaf silhouettes of the members of the Carrot Family (*Apiaceae*).

But even if you are not a high-country traveler, there is much to recommend in this book. The extensive introduction is much more than a how-to-use-this-guide as it provides an excellent background, covering both the history and change of the geology and climate of the area of study, as well as the adaptations of plant life. Throughout the body of plant descriptions are short sidebar essays to supplement the introduction.

Some of these are just for fun, such as the authors’ top-10 favorite alpines, chosen by “flower size relative to the entire plant; appearance and color; impact factor; plant chutzpah or

élan.” What is number one? It’s the mountain sapphire (*Eritrichium nanum*), a cushion plant with stunning, powder-blue flowers. Elsewhere, all five contributing authors describe their favorite alpine areas of the region.

This sense of fun is present throughout all the writing, but typically with a thoughtful point to make. “In past books, we’ve argued that scientific names are worth learning because they are generally more stable over time [...but] it’s becoming more and more difficult to make that argument with a straight face.” This leads to a discussion of the regular changes that now occur in plant genera and families due to advances in genetic analysis. The authors conclude, “You can also learn scientific names to impress people,” throwing in the tabloid-quality tidbit that singer/model Carla Bruni married former French president Nicolas Sarkozy partly because “he knows all the Latin names” of plants!

### Briefly

Audrey Lieberworth enjoyed an active, outdoor childhood in Seattle, but not until she left for Scripps College did she realize “...just how much the connections I made with these [Seattle] landscapes as a child had shaped the person I had become.” The result of this revelation is her senior thesis, “Seattle’s Orchards: A Historic Legacy Meets Modern Sustainability.”

The heart of this work is a survey of 11 orchards—some historical, others recently planted—including their history, their setting in the neighborhood, and types of trees. Also reviewed are the communities supporting each orchard, broad-based programs that support the preservation of trees throughout the city, and the role of the Seattle Department of Parks and Recreation. This engaging report is available in print at the Miller Library, but also online from Scripps (see “Bibliography—Autumn 2013” below).

Two helpful books from our neighbors to the south are worth knowing about if you are planning a garden to attract wildlife or feature native plants. Both “The California Wildlife Habitat Garden” and “California Native Gardening” are

written by authors from the Bay Area and have a greater affinity for the northern part of their state. This is to our advantage, as many of the techniques and recommended plant selections will work in our region, too.

Finally, be sure to read “The Drunken Botanist.” While author Amy Stewart lives in Eureka, California, she is a frequent visitor to Seattle, and this book is just too much fun not to include as a local resource. The subtitle tells it all: “The Plants that Create the World’s Great Drinks.” Cheers! ☺

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**BRIAN THOMPSON** is the manager and curator of the Elisabeth C. Miller Library of the University of Washington Botanic Gardens. He is also a current member of the CBHL Literature Award selection committee.

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