

## Recommended Gardening Books

by Jane Capen, Bell County Master Gardener

If you have been in a bookstore lately, in the gardening section, you will have noticed the proliferation of books on gardening. Search for "gardening" on Amazon.com and you will come up with over 30,000 "hits". More and more people are gardening these days, and garden writers are doing their best to provide them with advice. How do you know which book is best for you? This article presents a few thoughts and recommendations on choosing the garden books that are right for gardeners in Texas.

The first thing to think about when choosing a book is where you live. Get a book that is as locally specific as you can. This is especially important for those of us living here in central Texas. We need books on Texas, or better yet, central Texas, gardening. If you buy an average garden book, such as the ones published by some of the major magazines, the plant information may be inappropriate for our region. Remember, they are trying to appeal to all gardeners, most of who live in cooler climates than we do. While there will be good basic advice on planting, fertilizing, etc, specific advice on plants may be wrong. Remember that what is "full sun" in Iowa is considerable less than "full sun" in Texas. A plant these books say needs full sun may simply broil to death here.

It is also advisable to remember that there are several different regions in Texas with very different climates and soil types. What thrives in dry El Paso may perish quickly in more humid Houston. In some parts of the state, soil is acid; in others it is much more alkaline. (If you are wondering, soil here in central Texas is alkaline.)

One of the best overall garden books continues to be Neil Sperry's Texas Gardening. He covers the best annuals, perennials, shrubs, trees, fruits and vegetables for Texas. Along with this is good information on soil preparation, fertilization, and general gardening for Texas.

For those who wish to stick with native plants, Sally and Andy Wasowski's book, Native Texas Plants: Landscaping Region by Region is a must. The Wasowski's cover an amazing number of plants and their growth requirements as well as advising in what regions of Texas the plant will thrive. How to Grow Native Plants of Texas and the Southwest by Jill Nokes is another classic and comprehensive book on the subject.

Of course, many gardeners have a particular interest and want more specific books. For those who love antique roses, which tend to do very well here, Dr. William Welch's Antique Roses for the South is a fine book. Michael Shoup, who owns the Antique Rose Emporium in Brenham, is the author of a beautiful book called Roses in the Southern Garden. Liz Druitt's Organic Rose Garden is also outstanding. Ms. Druitt tends to give the most candid opinions of various roses, and does an excellent job of noting their characteristics in her book. She also gives very good information on rose care.

For those who are more interested in perennials, Dr. William Welch's Perennial Garden Color and Julie Ryan's Perennial Gardens for Texas are both excellent books. Both contain lots of information. Ms. Ryan's book is available in paperback, but Dr. Welch's looks better on your coffee table.

Gardeners who are interested in growing herbs may enjoy Southern Herb Growing by Madalene Hill and Gwen Barclay with Jean Hardy. The authors live in Roundtop, Texas, so they are familiar with Texas, its weather and soils. Not only do they cover an extensive variety of herbs in their book, they also provide recipes for using them.

If you have plants, you are going to have bugs. For those who are having insect problems, Malcolm Beck and John Garrett's The Texas Bug Book: the Good, The Bad, and The Ugly, has numerous pictures to help you distinguish the beneficial insects from the harmful ones, as well as how to discourage or eliminate the ones you do not want. Their methods are organic, an appealing concept to many gardeners.

Of course one can find books on growing fruits and vegetables in Texas. There are books on organic gardening for Texas, landscaping in Texas, just about anything you could want. In addition, Dale Groom has a handy gardening journal called My Texas Garden, with pages for each weeks progress in the garden, space to diagram your garden, pages to record what plants you acquired, when and where you planted them, etc. It's very useful for those of us who remember that we bought a certain plant, but can't seem to

remember exactly where we put it in the garden, and do not wish to accidentally disturb it while it is dormant.

Now, having made my case for using books geared toward Texas gardening, I want to mention one other that is very useful. The Southern Living Garden Book (2004, Steve Bender, Ed.) is a remarkably comprehensive book for anyone gardening in the southern United States. The South is broken down into several different climate zones in order to be as specific as possible about what plants will grow where. There are a number of lists of plants for shade gardens, dry gardens, rock gardens, plants for southern heritage gardens, and many more. In addition, there are guides to gardening terms, gardening techniques and plant care.

This is only a brief list of some of the fine gardening books for Texas gardeners. There are many others. The point is that if you are going to buy a garden book, do look for one that is in tune with where you live and how you garden.