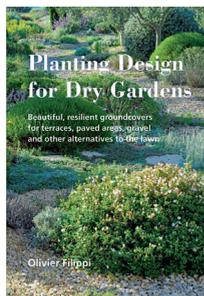


# Book Reviews



**Planting Design for Dry Gardens**, by Olivier Filippi, 240pp, 2016, Filbert Press, £35, ISBN 9780993389207

Although the title would lead you to think this book was about dry gardens, Olivier Filippi's thorough research with thought-provoking examples leads you down a completely different 'garden path'. As the subtitle ('Beautiful, resilient groundcovers for terraces, paved areas, gravel and other alternatives to the lawn') suggests, this book is fundamentally about the ground space in a garden that could be so much more than green. It leaves the reader thinking about the immense array of plants, colours and perfume that would excite the ground of any garden, and is packed with the author's own beautiful photographs.

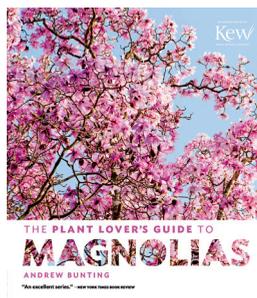
The first two thirds is the heart of the book. Here, Filippi takes you on a detailed journey, from the history of lawns and their uneconomic use, to that of learning from the wild, and the use of natural groundcover as examples. This part sets the scene for more practical details, including sections on meadows, steppes, natural grasslands, and perennial and shrub groundcovers. Each section provides explanations of useful terms, good exemplar pictures with legends, plant combinations and useful plant lists.

Before the book finishes, with an encyclopedic section on more than 200 plants, Filippi provides useful tips and techniques on developing such a garden, from soil preparation to reducing maintenance.

What I love about this book is that it will sit on the shelf quite comfortably with Beth Chatto's *The Dry Garden*, and a select few books on Mediterranean-style gardening, to be referred to time and time again for inspiration. And, although Filippi has written it from the point of view of cultivation in dry conditions, I cannot overestimate how useful this book will be to gardeners, enthusiasts and students in wetter areas of the UK as well.

This is a well-written, balanced book, full of useful information and perfectly chosen pictures.

**Robert Brett** is Curator at RHS Garden Hyde Hall.



**The Plant Lover's Guide to Magnolias**, by Andrew Bunting, 232pp, 2016, Timber Press, £17.99, ISBN 9781604695786

A former president of Magnolia Society International and curator of Scott Arboretum of Swarthmore College in Philadelphia, Andrew Bunting is ideally equipped to write authoritatively and clearly about magnolias. This book gives a lively account of why magnolias have been an integral part of his life since his school days, how and why they form

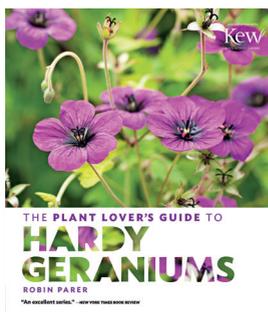
an important part of gardens and urban landscapes, and, most importantly, how to grow and propagate them.

The main body of the book provides beautifully illustrated profiles of 146 magnolias, incorporating brief notes on size and habit, US hardiness zones, flowers, foliage, fruit, cultivation, origin and whether they have received the RHS Award of Garden Merit. He follows Figlar and Nootboom's taxonomic treatment of the *Magnoliaceae*, which recognizes *Magnolia* as a large genus that now includes what were previously classified as *Manglietia*, *Michelia* and *Parakmeria*. It therefore includes plants such as *Magnolia foveolata* 'Shibamichi' (previously a *Michelia*), with its creamy yellow, scented flowers set against evergreen foliage with golden indumentum on the underside – a fine, upright growing newcomer suitable for growing in milder counties of the UK.

Also included are less familiar cultivars of American species such as *M. grandiflora* and *M. virginiana*, and recently introduced cultivars of the late Dennis Ledvina, such as *M.* 'Rose Marie', and John Kuhlman's introduction of *M. officinalis* var. *biloba* 'Fireworks'. The last has tantalizing reddish pink tepals on this normally white-flowered, summer-flowering species. Although of US origin, all the above need to be grown more widely in the UK.

A succinct treatment, this must-buy book enables readers to quickly grasp what is new, and to absorb the wealth of information about this genus, from a hands-on professional who has magnolias flowing through his blood.

**Jim Gardiner** is Executive Vice President of the RHS and a former president of Magnolia Society International.



**The Plant Lover's Guide to Geraniums**, by Robin Parer, 260pp, 2016, Timber Press, £17.99, ISBN 9781604694185

The main part of this book is entitled '140 Hardy Geraniums for the Garden' but related cultivars are included so that more than 400 are actually described. It also includes sections on how the plants grow, cultivation, propagation and where to use them – the last covering rock gardens, borders and shaded areas.

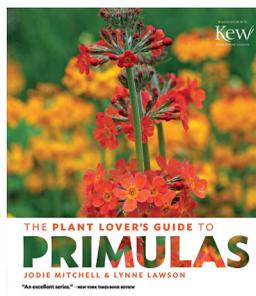
Compared to recent books on the genus, the content covers similar ground to my *Hardy Geraniums* (2015) but benefits from a wealth of large photographs. Also, it describes many new cultivars that have been introduced since Birgitte Bendtsen's *Gardening with Hardy Geraniums* (2005).

The close-up images of flowers are excellent but the descriptions suffer from not having photographs of the whole plant – there are some of these but not enough. For some species and cultivars, flower size is not given – this is important because *Geranium* flowers range from 1.5 to 5cm in diameter. The leaves of hardy geraniums also vary considerably in size and shape. The book does have some photographs of leaves but several are misleading – the leaves of *G. dalmaticum* (2.5cm) look similar in size to those of *G. himalayense* (7cm).

The book also suffers from a slight US bias – there are lists of plants

recommended by American designers, which are of little use to British gardeners. Also, the sizes given for some plants are much larger than they reach in the UK. Similarly, some of the information in the plant descriptions does not apply in the UK; for example, *G. x cantabrigiense* is said to rebloom in autumn but flowers in early summer only in the UK. There are also a few minor errors in nomenclature, such as 'Mrs Charles Perrin' should be listed as a cultivar of *G. phaeum*, not *G. monacense*.

This is an affordable and attractive reference which may lead more gardeners to grow geraniums. It will appeal to both the beginner and experienced enthusiast. **Margaret Stone** has a Plant Heritage National Plant Collection of *Geranium x cantabrigiense*, *G. macrorrhizum* and *G. sanguineum*.



**The Plant Lover's Guide to Primulas**, by Jodie Mitchell & Lynne Lawson, 248pp, 2016, Timber Press, £17.99, ISBN 9781604696455

*Primula* is a large genus, with well over 400 species native to a wide range of wild habitats. So, covering primulas for the garden, greenhouse and showbench in an affordable, colourful and accessible book is not easy.

The challenge is not to provide comprehensive coverage of them all – impossible in a book of this size –

but to tempt gardeners to grow more and advise on the best. Therefore, this is not a book of reference but a book of temptations.

The authors run the historic Barnhaven Primroses nursery in France, so, with the help of other nurseries and their customers around the world, are well placed to make thoughtful choices and selections of plants. Interesting species, such as the uncommon, and beautifully scented, Himalayan *P. munroi* are featured, as are widely available double-flowered polyanthus such as 'Elizabeth Killelay', and forms of the increasingly popular *P. sieboldii*. Double primroses included range from the very ancient 'Lilacina Plena' to the contemporary Belarina Series. Their choices are wise.

However, this book, and the others in the series, is intended to appeal to both British and American readers, so the plant choice has been carefully researched on both sides of the Atlantic. But, while American hardiness zones are included for all the plants, the American hardiness system has been rejected by the RHS in favour its own system, yet RHS ratings are not included. Also, why are some plants that hold the RHS Award of Garden Merit included, but others are not mentioned? And do no primulas have American awards?

The overviews of botany and classification are excellent, and the cultural guidance too. Also, there are unusually comprehensive guides to seeing and buying primulas, on both sides of the Atlantic, and on finding out more about the plants.

With the clear and accessible writing style, good information, fine photography and elegant design readers will surely be tempted to try more primulas.

**Graham Rice** is Editor-in-Chief of the *RHS Encyclopedia of Perennials*.