

Reading...

By Dan McNamara, HHH Horticultural

TREES AND SHRUBS FOR WESTERN GARDENS. Gordon Courtright. 1979 Timber Press. 239pp., illus. \$42.50

Here is a practical visual dictionary of all the plants obtainable from seven of the largest wholesale nurseries in California and the Northwest, omitting those which are closely related to or visually indistinguishable variations of others. Of the 771 color plates, practically all are of specimen plants, five to 15 years old, and standing alone, so that their true form and habit can be readily appreciated. Only a small handful—primarily vines and hedge

plants—are shown in closeups covering about one square foot of foliage.

The book has six major sections—dividing the plants by typical height and type: Low, Medium and Tall Growing Shrubs, Trees, Vines and Conifers. In addition to these major divisions, there are many other valuable features: a simple planting guide gives a clue to the general soil conditions preferred for each plant; temperature ratings (approximate, of course) for each plant, by Zone, from three to ten; a botanical index which includes, as well as the plate number, both the botanical name where nursery practice differs from that of the botanist; and a second cross index with common names alphabetized to help where the botanical name is not known. On top of all this, there are lists of plants by flower color, for fragrance, for seashore plantings, and for use in dry or damp places.

Gordon Courtright is a practical nurseryman with over 40 years of experience, and he has written a practical book for the superintendent to select landscape plants from—a book written in the language of a nursery catalog rather than of the botanists.

The illustrations for the most part are of excellent quality, while the descriptions give preferred uses and individual quirks that make plant selection an easier matter than usual. Beautifully printed on a semi-gloss paper, and in a binding made to last, this is a book every plantsman should have in his library, even at a price that causes a small gulp . . . it's worth it.

PLANTS FOR GROUND-COVER. Graham Stuart Thomas. London. J.M. Dent xxv + 273 pp., 72 pp Illustrations, 32 in full color.

To many of us, "ground-cover" signifies only pachysandra, ivy and vinca, which, delightful as they may be in small doses, and satisfactory as they are for many purposes, are just the beginnings of ground cover.

Golf courses, like public parks, and the surrounding public and industrial buildings, have many areas which are put into grass simply because nothing else has been suggested. Yet, amenity horticulture, as the British put it, is as necessary and desirable there as in our private gardens.

As we all know, a stretch of close-mown turf is a pretty thing. With a contrast, even in just the height of mowing, it can become beautiful. Ground covers, in some variety, offer an easy means to provide low-maintenance plantings to provide more contrast—in color, in form, and in texture—especially around the Clubhouse areas. They can control weeds on hills, in marshy areas, where tree roots and rocks make mowing hazardous, and in those places where soil and light conditions make turf impractical.

It has become the fashion these days to pass over English gardening and horticultural books as being impractical for this country because cultural conditions are so different, and detailed directions for specific plants do not apply here. It seems to me, though, that there is far more difference between, for instance, Oregon and Arizona or Texas than between England and Missouri or Illinois! We can make adjustments to climatic conditions for plants quite easily; adjusting our ways of thinking is a lot harder.

Thomas lists and discusses here literally hundreds of plants—woody, climbers, and herbaceous—to give wide choices for any part of the United States. He lists them by use, by preferred habitat, and by soil requirements. He points out, not just their favorable aspects, but the difficulties which they can cause, as well. This book, though written for the amateur, is an authoritative reference for the professional groundskeeper, the landscape architect, and, yes, the Golf Course Superintendent.

Graham Thomas, by the way, is a top notch plantsman himself, awarded the Victoria Medal of Honour and the RHS Veitch Memorial Medal. He has been official Gardens Adviser to the National Trust, which administers many of Britain's finest estate gardens.

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