Basic Books for the Library

This is the final article taken from the series of talks presented at the Massachusetts Horticultural Society’s conference on botanical and horticultural libraries in November 1969. — Ed.

An institutional library, whether a public, college, or society library, is the place to go when one wants an answer to “any” question. There are two basic kinds of library tools needed to answer such questions. One is subject matter materials: books, magazines, and bulletins. Then there are the indices, atlases, dictionaries, encyclopedias, and textbooks that are needed to get at the information in the subject matter materials or to supplement those materials. Because subject matter libraries tend to be weak with regard to supplementary materials, it has seemed useful to compile a list of references.

The following titles are, in my experience, the basic references needed to make a subject matter botanical and horticultural library work. Those titles preceded with an asterisk are absolutely essential; there can be no substitutes for them. The other titles on the list are extremely useful, but not absolutely essential. This list does not include purely subject matter books.

Dictionaries


*Foreign language-English dictionaries for all of the modern European languages, Latin, and classical Greek.

**Bibliographies & Nomenclators**


*Bibliography of Agriculture. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Agriculture, 1942+. Title and reference listings of articles in the various fields of agriculture. Coverage of botanical and horticultural titles is probably more extensive than Biological Abstracts, but it is not an abstracting journal.


*Pritzel, G. A. The Thesaurus Literaturae Botanicae*. (2nd ed.) Leipzig: Brockhaus, 1871. This is the one basic, essential library tool. One simply cannot function without it. Authors and their dates, titles and dates of publication, size, numbers of pages, and miscellaneous notes. Also extensive systematic lists of titles at the back. Reprinted in 1950.


Synoptic Works and Dictionaries


*Engler, A., and K. Prantl. *Die Naturlichen Pflanzenfamilien.* (1st ed.) 4 vols. in 24. Wilhelm Engelmann, 1887–1914. If only one work of this kind can be had, this should be it! Particularly valuable for the illustrations. A second edition has been started but is not complete — and is very expensive. Reasonably priced copies of the first edition can still be found in the second hand book market.
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*Miller, P. *The Gardener's and Botanist's Dictionary.* (9th ed., by T. Martyn.) 2 vols. London: Law & Gilbert, 1807. This is the most useful edition for all save nomenclatural purposes for which the 8th ed. is essential. It has extensive synonymy, as well as much information about economic uses.


**Economic Plants**


**Plant Anatomy**


**Textbooks and Miscellaneous References**

*Atlante Internazionale del Touring Club Italiano*. (5th ed.) Milan: Touring Club Italiano, 1936. In my opinion, this is the best of the older atlases. Many people, however, prefer Haack or Scobel.


Johansen, D. A. *Plant Microtechnique.* New York, McGraw-Hill, 1940. This is the basic work in print. Zimmermann's work is still useful.


*Royal Horticultural Society Color Chart.* (1st or 2nd ed.) London: Royal Horticultural Society, 1938–1939, 1966. There are other color charts, but this seems to dominate the field.


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