BOOK NOTES


This English translation of a book first published in German in 1981 will be a watershed event for serious perennial gardeners. There is no other book that treats the aesthetic use and cultural care of perennials in such a thorough and organized manner. The senior author was director of the testing and evaluation garden at Weihenstephan, near Freising, Germany, and as such is a philosophical lineal descendent of the great German horticulturist Karl Foerster. The book is the distillate of information from three decades of objective study of the performance of a wide range of perennials in various aesthetic combinations across many habitats.

The beginning sections describe in a general way the variety of growth forms into which perennials are classified, their propagation, long-term performance, and how the habitat and gardener influence them. Separate sections provide insight into siting, design, planting, and maintenance.

The heart of this book, however, is the classification of garden habitats, each accompanied by an annotated list of plants suitable for the sites described. Such categories as Woodland, Woodland Edge, Open Ground, Rock Garden, Border Perennials, Water’s Edge and Marsh, and Water are subdivided into even finer divisions. Thus the section on Woodland Edge has subsections on perennials confined to the woodland edge; perennials more loosely bound to the woodland edge; perennials for special conditions on or near the woodland edge; and spring-flowering bulbs and their allies. A final level of classification breaks each of these down even more specifically. For example, the section on perennials more loosely bound to the woodland edge is subclassified into perennials with border character for garden-type maintenance; invasive perennials; tall perennials with border character for moist soils, and so on. Each of these small categories is associated with a list of perennials, annotated as to their garden characteristics and requirements, and cross-referenced to other lists that, taken together, encompass the breadth of a species’ habitat tolerance. The lists also key each species to the aesthetic groupings for which they are best suited (called “sociability”).

This is a complex book, and one packed full of information that experienced gardeners will find extremely useful. It comes at an opportune time, when the North European garden idiom is finding wide acceptance in America and when naturalistic gardens are in fashion. I have found it most useful when planning for a new garden area or trouble-shooting in problem areas of the garden. I merely describe the habitat as well as I can and look in Hansen’s book for the classification that most closely fits. The plant lists associated with that classi-
fication suggest possibilities that I adapt to my specific needs.

This work represents the magnum opus of an outstanding plantsman. Its beauty lies in its completeness. It is not simply a copy or update of previous works, but an entirely new and unique treatment of perennials. I find little difficulty in using the book as a guide for American garden conditions and feel that we are fortunate to have this translation available.

Richard W. Lighty

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Whether gracing the Charles River or growing in a vacant lot, willows suffer the bane of familiarity. Ubiquitous in many regions, willows are often overlooked by horticulturists who have come to associate the regrettable traits of commonly encountered forms with the entire genus. While many willows are, in fact, troubled by numerous pests and brittle branches, an array of relatively unknown species are fine garden performers and offer a wealth of multiseason ornament. That many of these species have remained undiscovered is more a consequence of ignorance than any lack of merit.

Christopher Newsholme can be credited for doing much to remedy this situation with his new book, Willows: The Genus Salix, Mr. Newsholme, who maintains Great Britain's National Willow Collection on his property in Devon, has produced a long-needed treatise that outlines not only the classification and economic uses of Salix, but also provides a thorough review of cultivated forms and their culture and use in the landscape.

As Newsholme demonstrates, making a case for willows as worthy landscape plants is not difficult. Numbering over three hundred species, the genus Salix is one of the most diverse of temperate woody genera—a fact well illustrated by a visit to the willow collection of the Arnold Arboretum where throughout the year little-known willow species, ranging from stately trees to prostrate shrubs, contribute to the beauty of the landscape. Beginning in early January near the Arboretum meadow, the cottony-white one- to two-inch catkins of the violet willow (Salix daphnoides) emerge in abundance on a strongly columnar twenty-five-foot tree. Later, in early spring, a nearby seven-foot shrub of black pussy willow (Salix gracilistyla var. melanostachys) displays curious black-brown catkins that are soon dotted by orange-red anthers that mature to a pale yellow. On Chinese Path, Salix fargesii, introduced by the Arnold Arboretum in 1910, displays lustrous deep green summer foliage followed in the fall and winter by shining red bud scales that are abundant on low, almost horizontal, two- to three-foot branches.

Willows: The Genus Salix illustrates these and many other hardy forms with many line drawings, sixty-five color plates, and well-written descriptions that emphasize ornamental features, seasonal effects, habit, and other information essential to selecting and siting willows in garden settings.

Newsholme's book deserves particular praise for its organization. Rather than describe willows in the typical encyclopedic format, the author has organized the species into four groups based on scale and use in the landscape. Ranging from Ornamental Trees and Shrubs for Large Gardens, Parks and Estates to Tiny Willows for Sink Gardens,
these categories allow the willow neophyte to proceed with confidence in sorting out the right plants for particular landscape roles.

If Newsholme’s guide has a shortcoming, it is its lack of more precise information about cold hardiness. One can only hope that an American author will eventually provide detailed information about the performance of willows in the extremes of our climate, as well as indicate where many worthy but uncommon species can be located in American nurseries. Until then, *Willows: The Genus Salix* is certainly the best available reference for those gardeners willing to experiment with the unusual forms of a familiar genus.

*Richard Schulhof*


From Frederick Law Olmsted’s plan for Riverside, Illinois (that half-town, half-country setting for an idealized life), to the crabgrass suburb of current culture, America has long had a love/hate relationship with the lawn. Is it a pastoral setting for family and community life or an environmental anachronism? This book is neither a guide to the perfect lawn nor a condemnation of a national obsession. It is a carefully measured and highly readable essay on the lawn as a typological phenomenon. It details our devotion to perfecting the type and makes recommendations for an ecologically responsible continuance of this deeply ingrained American landscape tradition.

The readability is a credit to intelligent editing as this book has a complicated authorship. Bormann and Geballe are forest ecologists while Balmori is a landscape architect. All teach at the Yale School of Forestry and Environmental Studies. The book is a product of a graduate seminar with students credited as contributors. The subject was chosen to give focus to the complexity of environmental education. By describing the cost and physical effect of fertilization, water supply depletion and pollution, and waste disposal in relation to lawn care, the subject is tied to the larger issues of global environmental planning. The authors define two types of lawns: the “industrial lawn,” carefully limited in grass species, regularly mowed and watered, and dependent on the lawn industry for sustenance; and the “freedom lawn,” a diverse mix of drought-tolerant grasses in combination with other plants that are stress resistant and require minimal intervention for survival, and hence are environmentally benign.

The book offers case studies of homeowners who have developed alternatives to the lawn—wildflower meadows, woodlots, groundcover beds. But the “freedom lawn” allows the traditional greensward with all its attendant pleasures: recreation, community gathering, visual unity. The book’s unique contribution is the weaving together of landscape history and ecological theory. The idea of the green lawn as a setting for a detached house is traced from its source in the mild, moist climate of England to its transformation as the matrix for American suburban towns. Frank J. Scott, the chronicler of the birth of the American suburb, wrote in 1886, “an unbroken lawn around the dwelling should typify the unwritten page in the opening book of earnest life.” The “freedom lawn” proposed in this book permits the opportunity for the earnest life to be played out on a bed of green while improving the local environment and contributing to a heightened recognition of our collective responsibility for a healthy earth.

*Phyllis Andersen*