Book Review: Mosses in the Garden

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_Moss Gardening Including Lichens, Liverworts, and Other Miniatures._ George Schenk. Timber Press, 1997. 261 pp., 97 colored photos. Hardcover. $34.95

This book is one of the few available in bookstores that deals with the use of bryophytes, mainly mosses, and other forest cryptogams, such as lichens, lycopods, and spike-mosses, in cultivation both outdoors and in. The author has lived and worked in several mossy cities around the world, including North Vancouver, Seattle, and Auckland, where a mild temperate climate promotes a lush and rich moss flora, and he has developed a strong affection for the beautiful world of mosses. The humid environs of the Pacific Northwest also assure his success in introducing natural moss populations into home gardens and potting designs. Readers living in drier or colder regions, however, may not be as successful.

_Moss Gardening_ consists of fifteen chapters that cover a wide variety of topics, from moss gardens in Japan and Europe, alpine and rock gardens, to bonsai moss decoration. Practical tips and observations on growing mosses under garden conditions and in miniature containers are scattered throughout the pages. Included in the text are exhilarating color photographs of pretty moss gardens and individual moss species. The reader cannot help but be infected by the author’s love and appreciation for mosses after reading the book. Mr. Schenk, also the author of _Rock Gardens_ and _The Complete Shade Gardener_, is to be congratulated for a job well done.

As a professional bryologist who studies moss diversity and also grows mosses in small containers for teaching demonstrations, I am impressed by Mr. Schenk’s general knowledge of mosses, especially of the conditions they grow in in nature. The author repeatedly reminds us that success in moss gardening depends on choosing the right mosses for the garden site and matching the site to the conditions of the natural habitat. Despite this, I would caution readers that the book is not a guide to growing ornamental mosses from spores. Moss gardeners or potential users of mosses for ornamental purposes should not look to this book for formulas for growing particular species of moss in your backyard.

Anyone who has tried growing mosses outside their natural habitats quickly learns about the difficulty of maintaining a transplanted population under manmade conditions over a period of time. Seen in this light, I particularly like Chapter 7, in which the author describes five practical methods of planting and maintain-
ing moss carpets in gardens. Likewise, Chapter 10, which introduces the growing of mame, or tiny mosses, in containers and miniature terraria for indoor display, is elucidating and educational. Tips for growing green moss cover for vascular bonsai plants are equally useful. As a lover of mosses, I do not like Chapter 15, which discusses the business aspect of selling mosses and lichens to the public. Since these two groups of forest cryptogams are slow growers in nature, this suggestion will further diminish our mossy forests, which are still the only profitable source of marketable moss material in this country. Reports of damaging harvests of wild populations by nurseries and plant shops in the Pacific Northwest have seen print many times in local newspapers and national news magazines.

Scientifically, I found only a few errors. For example, Plate 77 is not Drepanocladus uncinatus as identified, but is a Rhytidiadelphus, and it is doubtful that the moss illustrated in plate 81 is Hygrohypnum luridum. Also, I would not follow the advice to grow Encalypta ciliata on a slab of lava with Hypnum cupressiforme (see page 132, also plate 56). Encalypta is a strong calciphile and will grow only on a calcareous substrate.

Moss Gardening is mainly concerned with the garden beauty of the subject plants and minimally the science, as its author notes in Chapter 1, and it is for the book's aesthetic and horticultural values that I recommend it to both gardeners and nongardeners of mosses. This lyrically written book has done justice to a group of plants that is often overlooked and underappreciated in our biological world.

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