

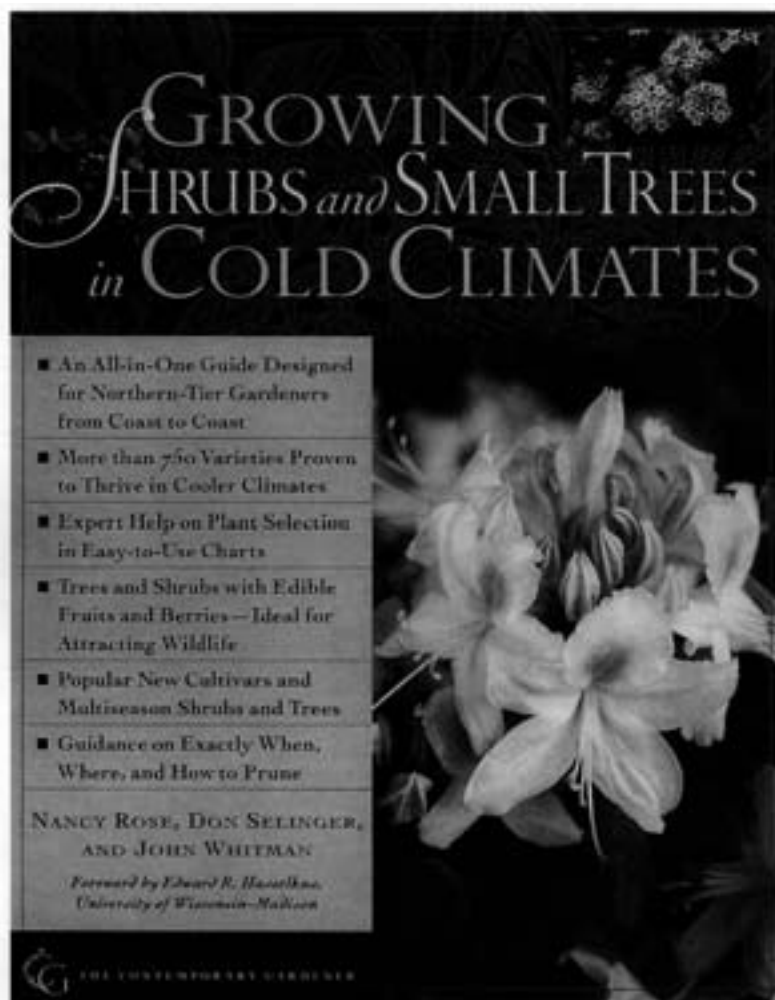
# Book Review: *Growing Shrubs and Small Trees in Cold Climates*

Michael S. Dosmann

*Growing Shrubs and Small Trees in Cold Climates*. Nancy Rose, Don Selinger, and John Whitman. Contemporary Books, 2001. 431 pp., 250+ color photographs. Hardcover. \$49.95. ISBN 0-8092-2491-7

A number of books dedicated to ornamental trees and shrubs rest on my bookshelf gathering dust. Some were valuable in their day but have become out of date with time. Others, though published recently, offer little more than information recycled from other references, or anecdotal information of no use to the serious gardener or horticulturist. But then, much to my surprise and delight, along comes a book like *Growing Shrubs and Small Trees in Cold Climates*.

The authors, all seasoned horticultural professionals, present their collective knowledge about ornamental shrubs and small trees in an easy-to-read format. And although gardeners are targeted as the primary audience, any person who deals regularly with ornamental woody plants will find the book useful. Readers can feel assured that the information is accurate, based as it is on the authors' many years of personal observations and experiences, not hearsay or suppliers' promises. Adding further credence is a foreword by Edward



Hasselkus, professor emeritus of horticulture at the University of Wisconsin.

The theme of cold hardiness is woven into the entire text. As indicated by the title, the book is intended for use in cold climates, primarily the regions encompassed by USDA hardiness zones

1 through 5. Proven hardiness is the major criterion for the authors' recommendations, and their discussion of the topic will be valuable for laypeople and professionals alike.

The book is divided into two parts. Part I, "The Most Popular Shrubs and Small Trees," comprising the bulk of the volume, is organized around fifty woody plant genera within which over 750 different taxa are discussed. I was a bit skeptical at first about the authors' attempt to categorize an entire genus as a single unit, but they are careful to highlight any atypical members. Accompanying each genus entry are outstanding color photographs—a total of more than 250—that include close-up shots of foliage, flowers, and fruit as well as form and habit.

The format is consistent for all entries, with information arranged in clearly defined sections. The section on growth ("How Hydrangeas Grow," for example) provides a good summary of root systems, branching patterns, form and habit, phenology, flowers, and fruiting. The section "Landscape Use" is particularly valuable. Plant uses are classified by the usual categories such as hedges, specimens, groundcovers; more unusual is a list of recommended companion plants that might enable the reader to enhance design effects using complementary textures and flower colors. The "Where to Plant," "Planting," and "Transplanting" sections give thorough details about proper siting and planting methods. The "Problems" section reviews the susceptibilities specific to each genus: insects, diseases, and—a novel category—marauders (primarily deer). Another useful section is "Sources," where specialty nurseries are listed with their addresses and phone numbers. Other topics, all covered in sufficient depth for the layperson, include "How to Care for These Plants" (with clear recommendations for maintenance regimes); "Propagation" (discussing suckering, cuttings, and seed); and "Special Uses" (with instructions for preserving cut or dried flowers).

The final part of each entry, "Varieties," is arranged in chart format and lists recommended species, varieties, and selected clones in addition to giving standard data for each that includes size, flower and fruit color, and hardiness. Almost all taxa are rated on a scale of one through five based on ornamental appeal and performance in cold climates. Additional information provided in the charts or captions might include separate hardiness temperatures for plants and flower buds (*Forsythia*, for example) or recommended male pollinators (*Ilex verticillata*). Missing, unfortunately, is the kind of information that would allow the reader to make clear distinctions among the various cultivars of comprehensive genera like *Syringa*.

The task of deciding which taxa to include in a book like this is a daunting one. While one could identify an omission or two, on the whole the authors have made excellent choices: virtually all the plants covered are deserving of inclusion.

Part II of the book, "The Basics of Growing Shrubs and Small Trees," consists of well-written chapters that discuss in general terms the topics already covered for individual genera: plant selection, site selection and preparation, planting, maintenance, and the like. Terms and concepts are defined with care and clarity, and the glossary at the end of the book is a helpful reference tool. I would have liked the authors to include a "References Used" section with a list of sources for taxonomy and nomenclature, but this is a minor omission; in no way does it affect my hearty recommendation of the book. It has already found a place on my shelf, within arm's reach, and has little chance of collecting dust.

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