

Arnoldia Reviews

Making Things Grow, by Thalassa Cruso

Unquestionably, this book will be enormously popular. Few gardening books, in my memory, have had the advance and continuing publicity given to *Making Things Grow*. The inevitable popularity of this book makes one wish it had been more carefully prepared. Praise or criticism must fall on Miss Cruso's shoulders. No editor's name is given. No credits are given. There is no bibliography. The proofreading of the manuscript leaves much to be desired. A book reviewer is not supposed to *hunt* for errors, I am told, but when the errors jump at you from the pages, it is another matter. "Polydody" and "Rohea" occur more than once in the book. Other misspellings, like "zygocatus," "abutilion," "pulcherria," and "bilfurcatum," show up too frequently. And something called an "aeomema" is most puzzling; she probably means "aeonium."

Miss Cruso's ability to raise one's hackles while watching some of her TV shows has not diminished in this book. About as fast as she deflates old myths, she creates new ones. It is hard to accept such statements as "little plants must have each others' company to thrive;" or when speaking of ferns, "unlike any other plant making use of photosynthesis, they never bloom and set seed;" "pot soil remains in good condition only when it has active roots at work inside;" "flowering plants . . . need a drop by night of from 5 to 8 degrees if they are to continue opening their buds;" "roots will not stir into new growth unless they feel the pressure of earth against them;" or "sage, which is a close cousin both of lantana and salvia, . . ." One could go on quoting more of these flatly stated, very questionable pronouncements, but the above will suffice. It is strange, also, to read of lavish praise given to the use of bone meal in soil mixes.

In the introduction, Thalassa Cruso states her two reasons for writing the book: "to convince would-be gardeners that making things grow indoors is not too complicated for them to manage,

and to bring gardening back for the gardenless gardener." The chapters on "neglectable" plants and indoor lighting are extremely well done and certainly by themselves would bring about these two desired ends. Too many people approach the problems of using artificial lighting for indoor plants with great trepidation. Miss Cruso quite thoroughly allays their fears. The chapter on neglectable plants leaves one with no arguments for not growing some sort of house plants.

A wry sense of humor and a flair for the dramatic add to the pleasures of the book. But occasionally the drama gets a bit out of hand. Both on TV and in the book "potting back" a plant and the necessary chopping away of some of the roots becomes more a performance worthy of the Grand Guignol than a routine gardening procedure.

The drawings done by Grambs Miller are adequate, and only one error seems to have crept in regarding them. On page 116 a mislabelling of azaleas occurs. This is probably not the artist's fault.

One last request, Miss Cruso: please stop referring to cactus "leaves." Those things are really modified stems.

G. P.

Thalassa Cruso, *Making Things Grow*, New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1969. \$6.95

The Book of Spices, by Frederick Rosengarten, Jr.

Books on spices have been written by herbalists, botanists, historians, geographers, and cooks, but this uniquely beautiful, accurate, and readable volume has been written by a man who has grown, processed, and marketed spices and who clearly loves his wares. After identifying "What Are Spices," he treats the reader to a fascinating "Brief History of Spices" that melds the ancient and modern histories of these products of commerce. Thirty-five concise treatments of individual spices follow, identifying the plant botanically, the part of it which is used, its range in nature, and its use, culture, and processing. With each prospectus are a few welcome recipes, for who has not a little-used box of spice on the shelf and yearns for the recipe which

will demonstrate most effectively the characteristic of that single spice.

The author suggests that the first authentic, if fragmentary, records of the use of spices may be associated with the age of the pyramids in Egypt, nearly 4,000 years ago, where onions and garlic are depicted being fed to laborers to protect their health. Uses do not change; how very frequently today one smells onions and garlic still being used as a food, a spice, or — according to some — a sure cure for a cold. Another early use of spices, and perhaps the precursor of the pickling process, was for embalming, yet only in recent years have we proven the germicidal properties of many spice oils. Spicy odors improved the air in a period when sanitation was not what we know today, and the plain starchy foods of the period tasted better when spices were added. The claim that spices were aphrodisiacs was as prevalent then as now.

Whatever the basic reason for the use of spices, history shows us that spices were desired by slaves and kings, by churches and governments, and that they were attained by fair means and foul. Botanical gardens were established in many tropical areas to grow plants from stolen spices. One shares the anguish of a botanist who reported that the spice trees he grew from carefully imported seeds were all male plants incapable of producing the needed and valuable fruit. Commercial fortunes were made, and many lives lost, in the cultivation and trade of spices. New areas of the world were explored for safe routes for trade or new sources of the plant products that modern man buys without peril in the supermarket. The author has selected appropriate facts and presents them well.

Mr. Rosengarten has drawn information from many sources. One almost turns a page quickly to see who is quoted next, for Shakespeare precedes Chaucer or follows Keats. Reports from the Grete Herbal or Culpepper may be as appropriate in this text as a quotation from the Bible, or a table from the USDA or the Commonwealth Secretariat. So, too, with the illustrations in this handsome book. A crude drawing from a manuscript dated 512 A.D., a woodcut from the 16th century, an illustration from *Curtis's Botanical Magazine*, or a sensitive contemporary photograph of a very self-conscious little girl holding her dog near an herb grown in Guatemala are examples of illustrations well chosen and clearly appropriate to the subject. Special attention should be paid to the botanical plates reproduced from early German works completely unknown to botanists I have questioned. These are models of technical excellence of color repro-

duction; the captions are translated. An appendix consists of a few tables of supply and demand statistics, a short glossary, and a useful bibliography. Even the two indices, one to recipes and one to general subject matter, merit a compliment.

I do not know the relative roles of the author or the publisher in this production. Certainly both are to be commended, and I recommend this useful, interesting, and beautiful book.

R.A.H.

Frederick Rosengarten, Jr., *The Book of Spices*, Wynnewood, Pa.: Livingston Publishing Co., 1969. 489 pages, 330 illustrations, 73 color plates. \$20.00.



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