

By Laurie Schenden

Plant Science Library



MOVIE MAKERS, artists, landscape architects and professors would not seem to have much in common, but, in fact, they all could conceivably meet in the reading room of the Plant Science Library at the Los Angeles State and County Arboretum. People with these diverse interests and more have found the Arboretum reference library to be a mother lode of horticultural and botanical information.

At one time or another, movie researchers from MGM studios and Warner Research Library have called the library with questions like, "Where are there Japanese gardens in California?" when they need to simulate a particular area in a film. The answer to the question, "How many kinds of cacti grow in California?" may be needed to verify a line in a script.

When outdoor scenes for the television movie "The Letter" were filmed here last year, the historical section of the Arboretum looked like Singapore in 1939. Few viewers, however, were aware of the backstage search by librarian Joan DeFato that helped make the area into what seemed to be an authentic British colonial garden. Warner researchers used information from a book she found that detailed the



Librarian Joan DeFato (right) helps researchers from many fields use the resources at the Plant Science Library.

vegetables and flowers growing in Singapore in 1939.

"Unfortunately, they're not all that easy," Ms. DeFato said. "But the majority of questions I get I can answer."

As one of the most complete horticultural and botanical reference libraries in the area, the Plant Science Library has some information on just about every recognized plant family. Ms. DeFato, librarian here since 1973, is herself a walking index as she moves among the stacks filled with 200 periodicals and more than 25,000 books and pamphlets. Even when vague questions send her deep into the maze of library shelves, she usually emerges with several references or suggestions on where to get more information.

Routine questions come from home gardeners looking for plant descriptions and editors verifying plant name spellings. Court reporters often record the phonetic sounds

of plant names but call the library for the correct spellings when they begin transcribing their notes.

Some people have questions and are unsure of whom to ask, like the caller who wanted the name of a translucent South American frog he could only describe or another who was curious about the life span of the monarch butterfly. The Metropolitan Cooperative Library System often uses the specialized holdings of the Arboretum library to answer plant-related questions from members.

The Poison Information Center has called for the botanical name of a plant when the patient only knew the common name. The Los Angeles County Forestry Department called for information on eucalyptus trees adaptable to the high desert in California, and a researcher came to find out what plants would have been grown in California during the Mexican period.

Few public libraries have that information, but usually at least two or three of the carefully selected horticultural and botanical volumes in the Plant Science Library will have information on a plant, no matter how esoteric. Because it is compact, users of the Arboretum's library receive individual assistance.

"We don't have all the indexes and computers the public libraries and universities have," said Ms. DeFato, "But you get to know what you have and how to find it. Readers are somewhat on their own at a university library; libraries there don't have as much time for personal care."

Ms. DeFato has also on occasion been a catalyst for new projects in the minds of library users. She referred a woman from UCLA researching a horticultural project at the Plant Science Library to a lecturer at Berkeley who was doing similar work. They found their research complementary, so they began collaborating on a new project.

About one-third of the library users are on the Arboretum staff. For instance, employees in the Education Division use the library references for checking facts and descriptions of unfamiliar plants that the Research Department is planning to introduce to the area. Models for the illustrations on posters, displays and brochures done by the Department are also found in the library, and much of the information used in *Garden* magazine is researched here. Several freelance writers also use the library regularly to gather background information about the uses and correct names of plants. An author who already knows a lot about a particular plant will often search out peripheral facts or folklore upon which to base anecdotes in a story.

The Arboretum taxonomist, James Bauml, and herbarium curator, Suzanne Granger, often use the li-



LuAnn B. Munns

Periodicals now overflowing the library will soon fill the shelves around Joan DeFato in the converted Herbarium.

library sources to research exotic plants and locate the original published description of plants growing on the Arboretum grounds.

Earl Ross, the Arboretum orchidist, reads about places around the world that he plans to explore for new orchids and tropical plants. Then, when he ventures off to remote places like Mt. Kinabalu in the Malaysian state of Sabah, he already knows what plants to look for and what to expect.

The staff and volunteers who answer visitors' questions about where to plant and how to care for new plants often come to the library. The approximately 250 professionals, staff, students and visitors who use the library each month find it a valuable source of botanical and horticultural information. Part of the reason may be the variety of subjects covered by the growing selection of books. The scope of subjects has broadened to include California history, Indians, birds and even hiking in the San Gabriel Mountains.

Many of the new books were acquired with donations from the California Arboretum Foundation. The Foundation paid for more than 80 new books in the last eight months, including *The New York Botanical Garden Illustrated Encyclopedia of Horticulture* and new editions of *Exotica* and *Tropica*. The county budget alone would not have allowed the Arboretum to buy these new volumes and the collection of non-reference books purchased in the last few years, Ms. DeFato said.

She chooses roughly 150 new books each year based on topics popular among library users or recommended by the Arboretum staff. Ideas also come from the roughly 1,000 book reviews she reads annually. Contacts she makes at meetings and conferences of the Council on Botanic and Horticultural Libraries where she is president keeps Ms.

DeFato aware of new trends.

Because of the increasing numbers of books, the library was expanded into the old Herbarium, which moved to the Research Building. The new shelves are stocked with periodicals that previously overcrowded the library shelves. Ms. DeFato is also reclassifying all the books into the Library of Congress system to accommodate more books.

The old system of classification, unique to the Arboretum library, was too limited and inconsistent, said Ms. DeFato. Because many books about different aspects of a subject were lumped under one general classification number, a reader frequently had to look through the whole lot to find what he wanted.

In the Library of Congress system, there is a better breakdown of

New reference works in the Plant Science Library

Impatiens of Africa

by C. Grey-Wilson

The Why and How of Home Horticulture

by D. R. Bienz

Succulent Flora of Southern Africa

by Doreen Court

Spanish Scientists in the New World

by Iris H. W. Engstrand

Square-foot Gardening

by Mel Bartholomew

Bulbs

by George Harmon Scott

Pelargoniums of Southern Africa

by J. J. A. van der Walt and
P. J. Vorster

Acacias: a Field Guide to the Acacias of Southern Africa

by Lynette Davidson and
Barbara Jeppe

State Flowers

by Anne Ophelia Dowden

Victorian Gardens

by John Highstone

The Miniature Palms of Japan

by Yoshihiro Okita and
J. Leland Hollenberg

Flora of Chiapas, Parts 1 and 2, edited

by Dennis E. Bredilove

Abscission

by Frederick I. Addicott

Ferns and Allied Plants, With Special Reference to Tropical America

by Rolla M. Tryon and
Alice F. Tryon

Embroidered Gardens

by Thomasina Beck

Trees and Shrubs of the Southwestern Deserts, 3rd Edition

by Lyman Benson and
Robert A. Darrow

Aloe Vera

by Carol Miller Kent

Exotica, series 4

by Alfred Byrd Graf

Tropica, 2nd edition

by Alfred Byrd Graf

North American Horticulture:

a Reference Guide, compiled
by the American Horticultural
Society

Citrus

by Richard Ray and
Lance Walheim

Western Fruit, Berries and Nuts

by Lance Walheim and
Robert L. Stebbins

Herbs

by Norma Jean Lathrop

Curiosities of the Plant Kingdom

by Reinhardt Hohn

Mamillaria: a Collector's Guide

by John Pillbeam

Lilies, compiled

by Patrick M. Synge

Roses

by Richard Ray and
Michael MacCaskey

The Englishwomen's Garden, edited

by Alvide Lees — Milne and
Rosemary Verey

Gardening in Small Spaces

by Jack Kramer

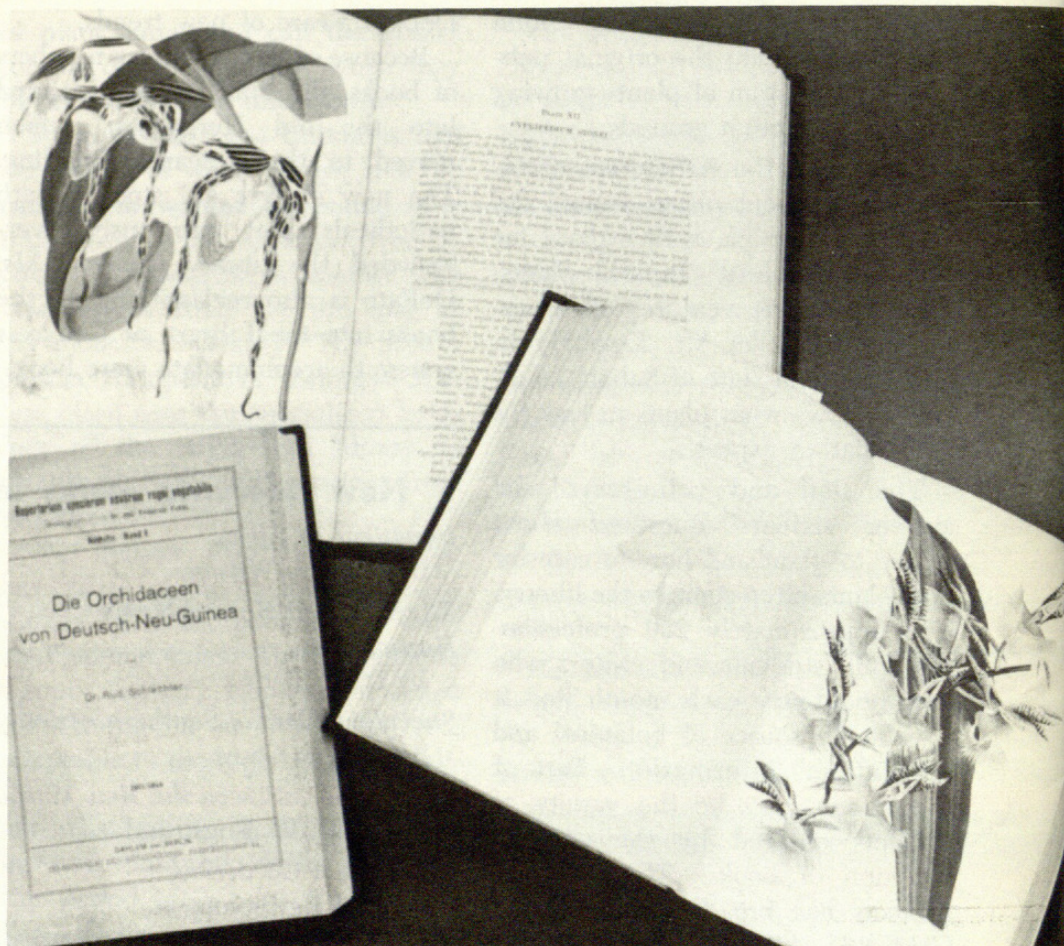
subjects and the books are more easily catalogued and used.

The rare book room, located in the former Herbarium office, will safeguard the valuable collection from theft and allow even more space in the main library.

Authors, illustrators, historians and architects come to the library for specialized information. Home gardeners come to browse through the collection of periodicals that include favorites like *Sunset* magazine, *Smithsonian*, *Historic Preservation*, *Landscape Architecture*, *Horticulture* and, of course, *Garden* magazine.

So whether readers are looking for local history, the complete works of Shakespeare or a rare Australian plant, the Plant Science Library is a valuable source for references and Ms. DeFato an almost inexhaustible reference source.

Laurie Schenden, a part-time member of the Arboretum staff, received her bachelor's degree in journalism from Michigan State University.



Rare books, like those on orchids donated by Mrs. George C. Kennedy, contain useful information for modern botanists.

LOS ANGELES STATE AND COUNTY ARBORETUM, Arcadia

MAY 1 — 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Baldwin Bonanza
Plant Sale

MAY 15 — 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Epiphyllum Show
Epiphyllum Society

MAY 21, 22 — 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Satsuki Azalea Show
Satsuki Azalea Society

MAY 28, 29, 30 — 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Bonsai Show
Santa Anita Bonsai Society

MAY 28, 29, 30 — 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Fuchsia Show
National Fuchsia Society

JUNE 4, 5 — Saturday 12 to 5 p.m.

Sunday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Bromeliad Show and Sale
Southern California Bromeliad Council

JUNE 11, 12—Saturday 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Sunday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Show of miniature roses
San Gabriel Valley Rose and
Horticultural Society

JUNE 25, 26—Saturday 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.

Sunday 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Gladiolus Show
Southern California Gladiolus Society

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

MAY, JUNE, JULY 1983

JULY 1, 2, 3 — 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Cactus and Succulent Show
Cactus and Succulent Society
of America

All events sponsored by the
California Arboretum Foundation

DESCANSO GARDENS, La Canada

MAY 26 — 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.

Paseo por Descanso, a special walking
tour — Reservations necessary

JUNE 5 — 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Annual Arts & Crafts Faire
on the lawn

JULY 10 — 2:30 p.m.

Music on the Green
Hal Towle and His Musical Friends
of Descanso

JULY 17 — 2:30 p.m.

Concert on the Green
Pasadena City College Swing Band

JULY 24 — 2:30 p.m.

Ballet on the Green
California Repertory Ballet Company

JULY 31 — 2:30 p.m.

Excerpts of Tales of Shakespeare
Charlie and Annie Star
All events sponsored by
Descanso Gardens Guild

SOUTH COAST BOTANIC GARDEN, Palos Verdes Peninsula

MAY 14, 15 — 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Fiesta de Flores
Plant Sale

MAY 21, 22—Saturday 1 p.m. to 5 p.m.
Sunday 11 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Rose Show
South Coast Rose Society

JUNE 4, 5 — 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Fuchsia Show
South Coast Branch of National
Fuchsia Society

JUNE 11, 12—Saturday 12 to 4:30 p.m.
Sunday 9 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

Cactus and Succulent Show and Sale
South Coast Cactus and Succulent
Society

JUNE 19 — 2 p.m.

Demonstration — miniature terrariums
of begonias, ferns, gesneriads
Bee Sutton

JUNE 26 — 2 p.m.

Talk — Culture of begonias
Goldie and Doug Frost
All events sponsored by South Coast
Botanic Garden Foundation



Schenden, Laurie. 1983. "Plant science library." *Garden* 7(3), 5–8.

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Holding Institution

Missouri Botanical Garden, Peter H. Raven Library

Sponsored by

Los Angeles Arboretum

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