

ARNOLDIA REVIEWS

Magnolias. Neil G. Treseder. London and Boston: Faber and Faber. xviii + 243 pages + 48 plates. \$59.95.

It is a great pleasure to bring to the attention of readers of *Arnoldia* the publication of Neil Treseder's long awaited book. Published in collaboration with the Royal Horticultural Society, this volume is destined to become a sought-after classic and collector's item for both present and future horticulturists and botanists.

Based on extensive research into both the botanical and horticultural literature, the main body of Treseder's text presents detailed descriptions of all the north temperate zone species of the horticulturally important and botanically intriguing genus *Magnolia*. Coupled with a chapter entitled 'Revised Survey of the genus *Magnolia* together with *Manglietia* and *Michelia*' contributed by the late James Edgar Dandy (formerly of the British Museum (Natural History) and world authority on the Magnoliaceae), Treseder's book is the closest approach to a monograph of *Magnolia* that has appeared in print. The descriptions of the species and their cultivars, as well as those of the numerous interspecific hybrids of garden origin (to which a section of forty-six pages is devoted) are supplemented by important discussions of the cultural and historical aspects of each taxon, as well as problems relating to their classification, taxonomy, nomenclature, and distribution and original discovery in nature. These descriptions and discussions are greatly enhanced due to Treseder's firsthand knowledge and observations of magnolias in cultivation.

The fourth generation to head the world famous Treseder Nursery, Ltd., Truro, Cornwall, England, Neil Treseder grew up in what might easily be termed "Magnolia Country." Close at hand are the world famous collections of magnolias in Cornish gardens, particularly those at Caerhays Castle and at Trewithen, the home of the late Col. George Johnstone, whose *Asiatic Magnolias in Cultivation* (Royal Horticultural Society, 1955) has since its publication been the standard reference for species of Asiatic origin and can be considered the precursor of Treseder's book. These famous Cornish gardens contain many of the original introductions of Wilson and Forrest, among others, and are the gardens in which several of the more spectacular garden hybrids have arisen. Moreover, Treseder has traveled widely to observe magnolias, including at least one trip to North American gardens, and has corresponded with numerous members of the American Magnolia Society, of which he is a member. On the practical side, Neil Treseder brings years of experience as a practicing nurseryman to bear in the section entitled 'How to Grow Magnolias.' This practical guide covers topics including propagation, pests and diseases, planting, and cold hardiness, while another section outlines the techniques used in hybridization.

Throughout, the volume is well illustrated with line drawings by Marjorie Blamey, while thirty-nine color photographs and nine color reproductions of her original paintings are reproduced on eight special, unnumbered pages. The typography and layout are both pleasing to the eye, and the binding is solid yet flexible enough to allow for easy opening and reading.

And this book does invite reading. The text is in an easy, personable, albeit British, style and is sure to delight both old and new magnoliaphiles — those whose interest is primarily horticultural as well as those whose interests lie in the taxonomy of the genus and the controversy surrounding specific boundaries, particularly in the *Oyama* and *Buergeria* sections of the genus.

Neil Treseder is to be congratulated on a beautiful book well produced and an information-filled, accurate text. My only concern is that the two maps which follow at the end of the book and purport to illustrate magnolia distribution in Asia and North America, respectively, are misleading inasmuch as the boundary lines of natural distribution have not been superimposed over the maps. Despite this one minor oversight, everyone interested in woody plants will want to own this book.

STEPHEN A. SPONGBERG

The Miracle Houseplants: The Gesneriad Family. Virginie F. and George A. Elbert. New York: Crown Publishers, Inc. 242 pages, illustrated with black and white and color photographs. Hardcover \$9.95; softbound \$6.95.

The Elberts, already known for their previous volumes and magazine articles on various aspects of indoor growing and for their involvement with the light gardening movement, have with this volume undertaken their first detailed study of a single plant family. It is not surprising that they should have chosen the Gesneriaceae for this effort, since the popularity of this group (which includes such important houseplants as the African violet, gloxinia, and streptocarpus) has been growing at almost epidemic speed and the last volume covering the family, published in 1967, has long been out-of-print. With such popularity, the number of species and cultivars introduced since 1967 has rendered the earlier volume quite incomplete, even if it were available. It is surprising, however, that the authors should have chosen this time to compile a study of the Gesneriads, since recent introductions and hybridizing efforts have led to considerable taxonomic revision, and a shifting about between genera which will, in all probability, continue for some time. The Elberts, in their somewhat grudging acknowledgement of these changes in nomenclature, and their caustic comments regarding the importance to the taxonomist of seeing his name in print, give this reviewer the distinct feeling that the answer may be quite simple: Whether Gesneriad nomenclature is, or will remain, current was not a priority; they knew the book would sell.

And sell it will! The Gesneriads have a loyal following that has been waiting for years for an up-to-date reference, and the book is designed to appeal to the collector of assorted houseplants as well. It is into this second category, in fact, that the Elberts themselves fall, although their collection has at one time or another contained an impressive percentage of the Gesneriads that are available in the United States. Their personal observations, to which they give free rein, may differ from those of the Gesneriad hobbyist, but will probably match those of the grower of a mixed collection; unless the Gesneriad in question will out-perform a non-Gesneriad, it is not worth the bother.

Although the major portion of the book (167 of the 224 pages of text) is devoted to an alphabetical survey of the genera, the Elberts have included brief but informative sections that cover the taxonomic characteristics differentiating the Gesneriads, their culture and propagation, a glossary of terms, and lists of suppliers of plants, seed and supplies. It is unfortunate that the addresses of the two national societies devoted to the Gesneriaceae are not included, since it is inevitable that readers of this book will be hungry for more information.

The Elberts' conversational style of writing makes this book a pleasure to read, despite one's occasional anger at the intrusion of their prejudices. As an introduction to the Gesneriaceae, this book will certainly interest many indoor gardeners and inspire them to experiment with some of the less common genera. The photographs alone should start a run on the specialist greenhouses. For the more advanced hobbyist, although the book leaves much to be desired, it will be a much-used reference.

JENNIFER HICKS

Garden Conifers in Colour. Brian and Valerie Proudly. Poole, Dorset, UK: Blandford Press. 216 pages, illustrated. \$5.95.

In the last seven years, at least four important books on identification and cultivation of conifers have appeared in Britain: *Conifers in the British Isles, A Descriptive Handbook* by A. F. Mitchell of the Forestry Service, *Conifers for Your Garden* by Adrian Bloom, *Ornamental Conifers* by Charles R. Harrison, and, now most recently, the present volume by Brian and Valerie Proudly. Mitchell's book contains practical descriptions by a foremost expert and unique information on the identification, location and welfare of major specimens in the British Isles. It is for the taxonomist and connoisseur, not the horticulturist. The Bloom and Harrison volumes both provide lists and colored photographs of the plants most suitable for horticultural purposes, and give valuable information on planting methods, nurturing, diseases, and landscaping principles. Bloom's is selective; Harrison's, comprehensive.

The Proudlys' volume is also primarily for the gardener. It contains colored photographs of selected samples only, and thus preserves comprehensiveness in a limited space. The authors have divided it roughly into thirds. The first section consists of definitions and landscaping and horticultural information. The second comprises 214 color photographs, and the third, brief descriptions of approximately 600 plants. The list was prepared by consulting "Nurserymen's catalogues from twenty-seven firms in ten different countries where conifers are grown."

Although the authors offer their many invaluable horticultural hints against the background of British growing conditions, this should not prevent American interpretations and applications. It is a surprisingly comprehensive book for one that fits in the coat pocket. Britain has provided the conifer enthusiast with yet another volume essential to his or her extending bookshelf.

RICHARD WARREN



A specimen of Fagus sylvatica 'Tortuosa' in winter garb at the Arnold Arboretum. Photo: M. Dirr.



1979. "Arnoldia Reviews." *Arnoldia* 39(1), 26–28.

View This Item Online: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/item/224385>

Permalink: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/partpdf/250158>

Holding Institution

Smithsonian Libraries and Archives

Sponsored by

Biodiversity Heritage Library

Copyright & Reuse

Copyright Status: In Copyright. Digitized with the permission of the rights holder

Rights Holder: Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University

License: <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/4.0/>

Rights: <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org/permissions/>

This document was created from content at the **Biodiversity Heritage Library**, the world's largest open access digital library for biodiversity literature and archives. Visit BHL at <https://www.biodiversitylibrary.org>.