Alpines from Mountain to Garden
By Richard Wilford
A Botanical Magazine Monograph
Published by Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, UK, 2010
Hardback, 244 pages, 292 × 245 mm, maps, colour photographs and plates
$NZ100.00
Reviewed by Ross Ferguson

This is a handsome book, good enough for any coffee table. However, it is far more than just a beautifully illustrated coffee table book: it is an important contribution to the literature on alpine plants. Richard Wilford is collections manager for bulbs, alpines and herbaceous perennials at the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew. He has seen many of the plants he describes in their native habitats and he has learnt how to grow them in cultivation. He can therefore write with authority and confidence on the conditions they require.

To most of us, the definition of what an ‘alpine’ is may seem obvious: it must be a plant of the mountains, a supposition supported both by the title of this book and by the photograph of mountains on the cover. It becomes apparent, however, that this definition may be too restrictive, an oversimplification. Wilford clearly prefers the definition that alpines in the horticultural sense are more than just those plants “above the tree line in mountainous regions”. Rather, an alpine can be considered as “any hardy plant that is a suitable size for growing in a rock garden, alpine trough garden or raised bed”. He would therefore include many of the Mediterranean plants growing at lower altitudes since they require the same growing conditions as many ‘true’ alpines. I am not completely convinced by this broader definition and as a consequence query the inclusion of some plants. I was surprised to find that of the 17 pages describing the alpine plants of Australia and New Zealand, a whole page is dedicated to Fuchsia procumbens which, in its original habitat, was restricted to coastal areas of the northern warm temperate parts of the North Island of New Zealand. Hardly what most of us would think of as an alpine.

A number of the other plants he describes and illustrates do not seem to fit even within the author’s broad definition of alpines as hardy plants that are a suitable size for growing in a rock garden. The marvellous lily Cardiocrinum giganteum is a plant of the Himalayan forests – it is hardly an alpine and is more at home in woodland gardens. Certainly it would be a massive rock garden that could house Cardiocrinum. Likewise, a number of the bulbs and herbaceous plants described from Japanese forests are best suited to the shade of woodland gardens. Many of these seem delightful plants and it is no wonder that Wilford cannot resist including them and, to be fair, most of the plants discussed and illustrated are what non-specialists would think of as alpines. Indeed, all the plants he describes are most desirable.

The domestication of alpine plants, how they were discovered, classified and brought into cultivation is a major theme with a strong emphasis on cultivation in British gardens. Not surprisingly, the mainstays of many alpine collections in Britain are the plants that come from the mountains of Europe. Alpines were introduced from there in the 16th and 17th centuries and the rate of introduction accelerated in the 18th century. The arrival of these plants was often noted in the early volumes of the Botanical Magazine from 1786–1800 (Gorer and Harvey, 1979). Introductions continued in the 19th century and in 1870 William Robinson was able to write Alpine Flowers for English Gardens, not a flora but an account on how to grow such plants in the garden.

Wilford gives a good account of the botanical exploration of the different alpine regions of the world although he does stress that for gardeners it is the subsequent introduction into cultivation of the plants from these regions that is really important. He notes that from the explorations of western North America only a small proportion of the botanical collections made actually resulted in the introduction of living plants. This is also true of New Zealand. Wilford gives what I consider to be undue emphasis to the work of botanists such as Banks, Solander, the Forsters and Hooker. They collected mainly in coastal regions and it was later travellers who with great perseverance reached the New Zealand mountains with their wealth of endemic plants. The importance of Hooker’s floras is rightly acknowledged but I feel more credit should go to his collectors. Sir Joseph Hooker spent only a few months in New Zealand and he was dependent for his specimens on collectors such as William Colenso. Hooker and Colenso developed a real friendship over nearly 60 years although it was a friendship that was not always easy. Hooker could be high-handed: Colenso, a difficult man, often felt that his collections were undervalued and his field observations were largely ignored (Endersby, 2001). Nevertheless it was a collaboration that was very effective. Hooker’s floras were made possible only because of the collections of dried specimens sent to him and he acknowledged this by dedicating his floras of New Zealand and Tasmania to his colonial collectors. Even so, Hooker and his collectors’ endeavours did not directly result in the introduction of plants into cultivation and in general, this was to come later.

Alpines from Mountain to Garden is comprehensive and covers plants from most mountainous parts of the world. I cannot assess the accuracy of the information provided for so many countries so I have concentrated on the pages devoted to New Zealand plants. There are a number of disconcerting if minor errors or statements that could mislead. For example, “Fjordland National Park”
should be Fiordland National Park and the specific epithet for the tree
fuchsia *Fuchsia excorticata* is mis-
spelt as “excorticata”. “Dusky Bay”
was the name originally used by
Captain Cook (and the name given
as the type locality for many Forster
collections) but has long been
supplanted by Dusky Sound and, to
avoid confusion, this should be noted.
The Bay of Islands is hardly “at the
tip” of New Zealand but some hours
drive south of North Cape. A map
provided in the book would suggest
that Castlepoint is an urban area of
equivalent importance to the main
centres of Auckland, Wellington,
Christchurch and Dunedin, whereas
it is a small holiday town with a
population of about 2000. William
Colenso was sent to New Zealand by
the Church Missionary Society not
the British and Foreign Bible Society.
I was left feeling somewhat uneasy:
how accurate was the rest of the
book?

There is a good and comprehensive
index by botanical name and an index
by common name.

The choice of illustrations from
*Curtis’s Botanical Magazine* is
inspired. My favourites were the
enchanting *Glaucidium palatum*,
looking like a miniature Japanese
anemone, an illustration by Lilian
Snelling, and Mary Grierson’s *Iris
afghanica*. The latter is a wonderful
image of graceful plants almost
dancing on the page, one of the most
delightful botanical paintings I can
remember. The drawing of *Gentiana
acaulis* by James Sowerby, originally
in the *Botanical Magazine* in 1798,
faces a recent photograph of the
same plant. Although the sheer
intensity of the blue petal colour
may not have been captured, the
Sowerby illustration emphasises how
much more definitive a botanical
drawing can be than even a good
photograph. An artist can provide
information usually not available in
a single photograph. Photographing
such small plants as most alpines
can be difficult and although many
of the other photographs in the book
are very good, I did find a disturbing
number to be in soft focus, almost
impressionistic rather than precise
in detail. Most of the landscape
or plant habitat photographs are
instructive but I did think that the
photograph of Punakaiki (captioned
as New Zealand’s west coast, near
Hokitika, South Island) added very
little to our understanding of the
mountain habitat of our native alpines.

Living in Auckland in a warm wet
climate I can only dream of growing
most of the plants described or
illustrated. For many gardeners,
alpines are a hobby, for some an
obsession. This book makes such
an obsession explicable, even
reasonable. *Alpines from Mountain to
Garden* is a book to be enjoyed and
it can serve as a source of inspiration
for those lucky enough to be able to
grow them or, even better, see them
in their native habitats.

**References**

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**Available from Touchwood Books**

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**A selection of book reviews courtesy of the Weekend Gardener magazine**

**The Small Edible Garden**
Growing organic fruit and vegetables
at home
Diana Anthony
Photography by Maria Rodgers
Published by David Bateman
NZ$18.99

With the renaissance in home
vegetable gardening and awareness
there’s no substitute to growing your
own vegetables, this book is a timely
addition to our shelves.

This is Diana Anthony’s seventh
book and she certainly needs no
introduction to New Zealand readers
with titles like *The Ornamental
Vegetable Garden and Creative,
Sustainable Gardening* in her
repertoire.

As she points out in the introduction
to this compact handbook, small-
space gardening presents an exciting
challenge of growing the same
edibles as gardeners with a large plot.

In keeping with the how-to emphasis
of the book, we get plenty of practical
help. Crop rotation is a must; raised
beds compensate for poor soil and
drainage; containers are increasingly
suitable for veggie gardening as
hybridists are producing crops that
have smaller growth habits.

When it comes to picking a container,
Anthony spoils the reader for choice.
She canvasses a range of options
from grow-bags to window-boxes,
depending on what’s to be raised in
them.

And if you’re gardening a pocket-
handkerchief plot or not, the plant
A-Z will be of interest, as the author
lists her top picks for varieties of each
vegetable and fruit.

*Weekend Gardener, Issue 238, 2008, Page 34*

**Around the World in 80 Gardens**
Monty Don
Published by W&N for BBC
NZ$70.00

This book accompanies a new 10-part
BBC television series. We can only
hope *The Living Channel* – with its
wonderful treatment of gardening –
will pick up the programmes soon
and broadcast them to us. As we are
constantly reminded. New Zealand’s free-to-air channels have conclusively forsaken the country’s leading leisure, and our great love, gardening.

Around the World in 80 Gardens includes two New Zealand gardens, Bev McConnell’s Ayrlies and the slightly lesser known and very different natives garden in New Plymouth, Te Kainga Marire, the 40-year-old creation of Valda Poletti and Dave Clarkson. The smaller, latter garden Monty includes in his “loved list”.

An expensive hardback but a treat, this book is a must for garden voyeurs. Monty circumnavigates the world as his crew visit scores of irresistible gardens in England and Europe, China and Japan, Central and South America, South East Asia and Australasia, India and North and South America.

All the way Don, aided by his television research and film crew, makes interesting observations and conclusions. The book is entertaining – an Englishman’s subjective look at wildly different, random gardens.

Monty calls it the trip of a lifetime and stresses his 80 gardens were not intended to be the “best” in the world. Everyone’s best would be different.

The journey for the series and the book was actually 10 trips with a return to base each time. This gave Monty and his team time to edit their notes, cut their film, catch their breath and change their clothes and currency for the next stage of their 18-month odyssey.

In Britain, Monty chose to go to just Sissinghurst in Kent and Rousham in Oxfordshire. In France he went to Villandry in the Loire Valley and Giverny in Normandy. That Monty

made it here means, in the scheme of things, Aotearoa has not been badly treated. Australia wins a few more chapters, as do China, India, South Africa and the United States.

In a recent English garden magazine article, Monty was cornered to confess that a garden on the Pacific coast of Chile was one of his favourites.

And he says in this book that Los Villos belonging to Juan Grimm is one of the most beautiful and inspiring gardens anywhere in the world.

He adds that “casually mentioning that I had spent a day with Grimm in his garden increased my own credibility hugely”.

No mean statement Monty, as you point out Juan Grimm is almost unknown in Britain but “undoubtedly one of the best garden and landscape designers working today”.

Supported by glorious photos, Monty’s narrative is brisk and perceptive, if not a little brief ... but in about 300 pages or so, garden impressions had to be somewhat limited.

Definitely a prized volume, Around the World in 80 Gardens will help to burn the midnight oil.

Mr Fothergill’s Growing from Seed
Margaret Hanks
Published by Murdoch Books
NZ$16.99

This is an information-packed guide to this simple, economical and rewarding method of gardening.

Contents include the seed-raising basics: planting from seed, types of seeds, how seeds get into their packets, how seed germinates, growing on seedlings; soils and potting mixes and pests and diseases.

A-Z plant listings cover flowers, herbs and vegetables and there is a substantial planting chart and index.

Lyrical and beautifully illustrated by Sheila Galbraith, this book is disarmingly factual in content. It has detailed comment on the provenance of a wide range of roses throughout history, from ‘Stanwell Perpetual’ (1838) to ‘Burgundy Iceberg’ (2004). This slim hardback opens with ‘Old Blush’ – a rose discovered three centuries ago in China. It won over rosarians in the 18th century with its repeat blooms, a quality unknown in European-bred roses of the time. And while old roses get more than a passing nod here, contemporary breeders are well served, too.

In this vein, David Austin is given prominence as a breeder “who has reintroduced something of the romantic history and fresh beauty of roses esteemed for centuries”. Austin’s ‘Mary Rose’ was introduced at Chelsea Flower Show some two decades ago. This rose commemorated the raising of King Henry VIII’s vessel of the same name from the mud of the English Channel.

It’s exactly this sort of detail backgrounding on more than 50 roses that will make this book a must for rosarians and those just interested in roses alike.

Weekend Gardener, Issue 240, 2008, Page 31

And Lovely is the Rose
Barbara Horn & Sheila Galbraith
Published by Exisle Publishing
NZ$30.00
This is a little gem of a book that will prepare you for experiencing the wonder of creating new life in your garden and enjoy the satisfaction of gathering home-grown flowers, herbs and vegetables.

It is especially written for Australia and New Zealand and takes into account the various climatic zones.

Creating Outdoor Rooms
Leeda Marting
Published by Gibbs Smith
Distributed by Bookwise International
$NZ59.99

The author of this American title founded the popular South Carolina-based company Charleston Gardens, a catalogue, website and retail store in Charleston.

Leeda Marting has an eye for good design. Here she presents inspirational ideas for creating outdoor rooms that truly extend the home and provides ideas for accessories for these areas.

Hardback and full of colour plates, Creating Outdoor Rooms is inspirational but really is confined to outdoor rooms and courtyards and lavish ones at that.

There is lots on furniture, choosing accessories, using architectural elements and fountains and bringing these areas alive through entertaining.

Oozing the old charm of the Southern States, this book would have limited applications for New Zealand properties; just those in the very top bracket.

However, it nevertheless gives the reader a real vision for adapting on a smaller, less grand scale.

Definitely full of great ideas even if the properties are over the horizon.

Quick and Easy Container Gardening
20 step-by-step projects and inspirational ideas
Tessa Eveleigh
Photography by Debbie Patterson
Distributed by Southern Publishers Group
$NZ44.99

Kiwis are ingenious gardeners and brilliant garden artists. Perhaps the artistic element is what container gardening is all about.

What's in one person's junk is another's treasure: so to with containers for gardens.

This book published in London provides the DIY container gardener's dream, even if most of the ideas for containers themselves, while very diverse, don't have the sheer rustic genius that the Kiwis might conjure.

Everything is very prim and proper.

But besides the 20 projects included, Container Gardening is packed with ideas and inspiration with containers providing endless instant colour possibilities.

Some interesting and unusual container ideas are presented including plastic water bottles, gift bags and kitchenware.

Reading this lot and there seems to be little you can't grow in containers.

There's a chapter on 'crops in pots' showing how to grow fruit, vegetables and herbs and there's a section on decorating the garden with pots for summer parties.

We know there are basic traps in container gardening. But this book deals with the basic techniques in some depth and also includes valuable detail about locating containers in the garden.

The Cultivation of New Zealand Native Grasses
Lawrie Metcalfe
Published by Random House
$NZ44.99

First published in 1998, The Cultivation of New Zealand Native Grasses has been updated to 120 pages in a new format.

Regarded as something of a gardening classic, the book covers the techniques for the propagation, cultivation and care of our native grass plants.

It is illustrated with line drawings and colour photographs.

The author Lawrie Metcalf is a leading expert on New Zealand native flora and has written other books on the cultivation of native species.

This comprehensive title covers buying plants, soils, planting, spacing, mulching, maintenance, and propagation by seed and division.

Its practical advice includes landscaping with natives, specimen planting, ground-covers, rock gardens, shady areas, watersides and damp places. It also covers coastal gardens, natural or wild gardens, environmental plantings, containers, sculpture and roof gardens.

Book review archive
Alpines from Mountain to Garden, Richard Wilford. In stock. Quantity. £23.00. Add to cart. Description.

In this book, Richard Wilford offers a refreshing new perspective on the many stunning plants that have their home at high altitudes. Beautifully illustrated, this book is sure to interest gardeners, collectors, travellers and photographers alike.

Richard Wilford is collections manager in the Hardy Display Section at Kew and has a particular interest in alpines and bulbs. He writes regularly for Kew magazine and Curtis's Botanical Magazine. Betty Ford Alpine Gardens is an internationally acclaimed botanic gardens known for its alpine horticulture, education and conservation. Located in the small resort town of Vail, Colorado which attracts a global audience for its skiing and outdoor recreation, Betty Ford Alpine Gardens is the highest elevation botanical garden in the world situated at 8,200 feet (2,700 m) in the central Rocky Mountains. The Gardens attracts more than 100,000 visitors annually to see its unique collection of alpine and mountain plants collected from around the world. Shop The Gardens. Alpine Treasures Gift Shop is I Things to do near Smoky Mountain Alpine Coaster. Yesterdays Antiques & Collectibles. Wear Farm City Park. The Coaster at Goats on the Roof. Trapped Escape Game. Smoky Mountain Escape Games. Goats on the Roof. Conway Twitty Tribute by Travis James. The Escape Game Pigeon Forge. Ole Smoky Tennessee Moonshine. Brian Hoffman's Remembering Red - A Tribute to Red Skelton. Main Event Theater. Junction 35 Spirits. The Smoky Mountain Alpine Coaster is the LONGEST DOWNHILL TRACK IN THE UNITED STATES, with over 1 mile of track and the ORIGINAL ALPINE COASTER in the...more. Certificate of Excellence. Closed Now.