

Regional Reading

Sasquatch publishes good ideas for Northwest gardeners.

Gardeners, more than most people, appreciate a regional literature. While it's true that the best writing in any genre should transcend geography, place and climate do exert an exceptionally powerful influence on gardening. There's something cozy and relaxing about settling down with a book without being obliged to mentally substitute one plant for another, or make allowances for differences in environment.

We lucky gardeners in the Pacific Northwest have an extensive home-grown reading list, thanks in large part to a Seattle-based publisher, Sasquatch Books. Founded in 1986 to put out *Northwest Best Places*, Sasquatch has grown to publish a wealth of children's books, travel guides to the West, and volumes on food, wine, nature, regional history and gardening.

The gardening list got off to a strong start with Ann Lovejoy's *The Year in Bloom*, followed by more from Lovejoy and two classics on growing vegetables. Sasquatch has gone on to produce a full range of gardening books, in paperback volumes that have gained steadily in polish and sophistication. In the last two years alone, Sasquatch has published titles that span the field from design to nuts-and-bolts. Here are three that demonstrate that range. Production values are good for all of them: sound construction, plentiful pictures, imaginative layout and well-spaced, readable print.

Plant life: Growing a Garden in the Pacific Northwest by Valerie Easton (2002) \$19.95. These essays are based on columns that appeared in the *Seattle Times*. Easton is the traditional kind of garden columnist who writes almost exclusively about her own garden, and the fine photos by Richard Hartlage were all taken there, so this is a highly personal volume.

Easton's writing is graceful and unaffected, and her opinions are liberating. Having grown up in a garden too huge to be fussy or manicured, she has adopted a relaxed gardening style that many readers will relate to. "I don't care which bug is notched in the leaves of the rhododendron," she says, "and don't care to know how to kill it. I am interested in which rose is most fragrant and in all the shades of delphinium blue."

I have long believed that gardeners ready to move beyond the basics learn more from reading good essays rooted in real-life experience than from any more conventional "how-to" book. Real, opinionated prose is entertaining, vivid and, therefore, memorable.

Big Ideas for Northwest Small Gardens by Marty Wingate (2003) \$21.95. This little volume is packed with good ideas for gardeners whose enthusiasm exceeds their space. I particularly like the chapter titled "Can I Do That?" which raises questions such as "Can I have a wildlife garden/chickens/water feature?" and "Is there room for a greenhouse?" (and, of course, answers yes to all of them). The photographs are excellent and well captioned, providing a mine of information in



Big Ideas for Northwest Small Gardens



themselves. The gardens pictured are unpretentious, genuinely small and vary widely in style, affirming that the space-challenged gardener has no shortage of options.

Sections on front gardens, side gardens and screening strategies (especially hedges) are imaginative. The treatment of path and surfacing choices is appropriately thorough, considering that both assume a larger role in a small yard. Vines and arbors, shade, pruning, roof gardens, balconies, even disputes between neighbors are dealt with thoughtfully.

The book isn't perfect. The plant lists at the back seem (with the exception of one on ornamental grasses) too short to be worth including, and I don't always agree with the Wingate's advice (outlining a small lawn with rocks or edging strips seems to me not only unnecessary but actually counter-productive). But these are minor quibbles. To find this much sound, detailed advice in such a compact and inexpensive form is remarkable. And it's all Northwest-appropriate.

Gardening with Ed Hume: Northwest Gardening Made Easy (2003) \$24.95. Radio and TV shows have made Ed Hume a household name for many. A comprehensive guide to general gardening in our region is long overdue, and Hume's straightforward, homey style combines with helpful paragraph headings, sidebars and many lists to make this one both useful and thoroughly readable. It's too bad the only illustrations are photographs of rather uneven quality that seem to serve little purpose beyond adding color to the pages. In some instances, drawings would have been more helpful.

Pics aside, this makes a perfectly sound manual for beginners interested in all aspects of gardening, with just one reservation: The author does not stress organic methods as much as I would like. The good news is that Sasquatch Books will, this very month, release the one we've all been waiting for. The title is *Ann Lovejoy's Handbook of Northwest Gardening: Natural, Sustainable and Organic*. I'm looking forward to 425 more pages of wisdom from this terrific writer. **EW**

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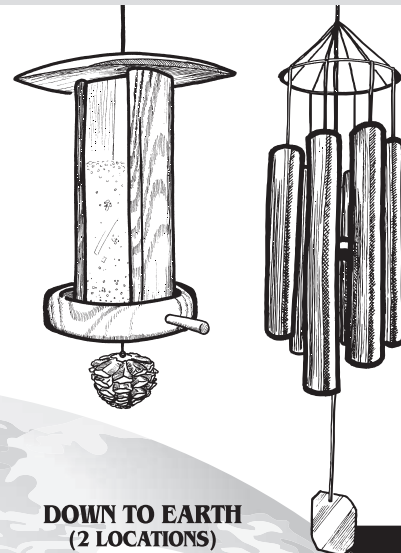
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