

Cullen, J. (ed.): **Handbook of North European Garden Plants. With Keys to Families and Genera.** – Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2001. ISBN 0 521 65183 2 or 0 521 00411 X (paperback). GBP 75.00, USD 130.00 (hard bound), GBP 29.95, USD 49.95 (paperback).

Among the immense amount of publications concerning garden plants for both indoor as well as for out-of-doors cultivation in Europe, the books accenting the botanical point of view are not common. In books written for amateur gardeners, the botanical data are, of course, always present in some degree, but a detailed, full botanical characteristic is rather scarce. Characteristics stressing the decorative qualities are preferred before those, which are significant for determination. Higher botanical units than a genus are fluently noted but almost never described in detail.

Mostly the texts of books about garden plants are based on the points, which are important for a current amateur gardener. The books are mostly organised with respect to the type of the main garden use (water plants, rock garden plants, park plants, ornamental plants, or vegetables) combined with their life form (annuals and biennials, perennials, bulbs, trees and shrubs). In all cases one of these points of view is preferred before the other one, whilst the botanical characteristic often serves rather for a common description than as a base for comparison or convincing determination.

These aspects are mostly complemented by numerous illustrations, best by colour photographs showing the general aspect of the plant in their most attractive form – according to the type of decorative value to their habitus or detail (or both). The botanic characteristic is in gardening books presented in various degrees. Very often the text concerning each genus consists of the botanical name followed by a short description of the genus, species and

rich choice of varieties; higher taxonomic units are, however, only mentioned but not always characterised exactly.

“Handbook of North European Garden Plants” consisting of 640 pages is an abridged version of *The European Garden Flora* (Cambridge University Press, six volumes, 1984-2000). The choice of more than 2 220 genera from over 190 families includes out-of-doors plants for growing in north-west Europe. The centre of gravity is not in species as in usual books concerning garden plants but in families and genera. This makes the book unique as a complement to many gardening books on the market.

The base of this book consists in keys, from plant Subclasses over Families leading to individual Genera. Each Family is characterized by a survey of diacritic characters, accompanied by an information about the count of included genera and species, and their basic occurrence. Corresponding with this, the basic characteristics of each genus are worked up. Each of them starts with an indication about the count of generally accepted species, and with a count of species distributed in culture. Also the basic geographic distribution belongs to basic information concerning every genus. Eventual notices about special features, such as specific problems in determination or in cultivation, are often added.

Representative collection of 136 figures depicting certain important diacritic characters as well as 24 pages of glossary with basic morphologic diagrams complete the text.

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