Plant nomenclature: 'the magic of a name'. A. W. Smith first published his dictionary of plant names in 1963 in the U.S.A. This much revised version,* prefaced by his widow, is in two parts, each with an introductory chapter by Dr W. T. Stearn: the first is devoted to botanical names, the second to vernacular.

By far the larger part of the book covers the 'origins and meanings of botanical names' and includes nearly 6000 generic names or specific epithets. Dr Stearn's introduction to this section deals briefly with the origin and composition of modern botanical nomenclature, notes on its pronunciation and grammar, and the basics of the rules governing its use. His fascinating essay on the history of many common plant names introduces the index of 3000 vernacular names and together they form the second part of the book.

Although originally intended for the practising gardener the work may well find its way on to the bookshelves of anyone concerned with plant names. Indeed many of the plants mentioned (e.g. *Pachyphragma, Anastatica*) can scarcely be thought commonly cultivated. The origins of generic names are not baldly stated but crammed with economic and biographical detail. We can learn that the wood of *Cedrela* is used for making cigar boxes, that Sterculius was the Roman god of privies and that the specific epithet '*mitejea*' is derived from an anagram of 'je t'aime'! One of the uses of botanical names becomes apparent when browsing in the vernacular names and finding that not only can 'bluebell' lead us to totally different genera depending on whether we are in Scotland, Virginia, England or Australia but likewise Mandrake, Sweet Bay or Mistletoe refer to various genera in different parts of the world. The index will be used as much for relaxation as for reference!

It may be that the practical gardener, at whom the book is aimed, will feel that the chapter on botanical nomenclature could have been somewhat simplified. Apart from this it would be presumptuous to quibble at any entry or point to any insignificant error in the index. The price for such a production is inevitably high and may seem a bit excessive for a book that must be classed as a stimulating 'extra' for either gardener or taxonomic worker. However its claim 'as a gardener's companion, a book always at hand to be read, or dipped into for pleasure and entertainment as well as instruction' will surely prove true to the delight of many.

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* A Gardener's Dictionary of Plant Names by A. W. Smith. Revised and enlarged by W. T. Stearn. pp. 391. London. Cassell. 1972. £3.25.