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Book Review

The European Garden Flora*. This new work, sponsored by the Royal Horticultural Society, of which the first volume of a projected series of six has appeared, promises to become for gardeners and botanists concerned with the identification of plants one of the most important additions to horticultural literature in this century. It is particularly designed to assist the informed gardener, landscape architect and professional botanist though the initial volume—Vol. II of the whole work—does not give full scope for a critical review to determine whether in fact the needs of these groups will be adequately met.

Until now the convenient reference sources usually consulted by discriminating botanists and others to identify garden plants have been Bailey's *Manual of Cultivated Plants* and Rehder's *Manual of Cultivated Trees and Shrubs*. These authoritative works with keys to family, genera and species, though somewhat outdated and primarily for use in North America, were extremely helpful in determining plants grown in Europe. Supplementary aids to identification were the more recent encyclopaedic R.H.S. *Dictionary of Gardening* which for most large genera has keys to species and this remains a most important tool. Inevitably the recently revised edition of W. J. Bean's *Trees and Shrubs Hardy in the British Isles* must be consulted for these groups though, alas, the work lacks keys, and generic rank must be known before the process of elimination can begin through the species arranged in alphabetical order. In the case of larger genera such as *Rhododendron* this can be an exhausting exercise though much knowledge can be gleaned on the way to a definite determination. The advent of the *European Garden Flora* augurs well in meeting some of the inadequacies of previous works and in being up-to-date on the thorny matter of nomenclature.

It is styled as a manual for the identification of plants cultivated in Europe, both out-of-doors and under glass—a daunting specification. A most impressive group of editors and international contributors with the resources of the great botanical gardens and herbaria at their services have made a most worthy start to this challenging and well-planned enterprise.

In the presentation the various authors have been at pains to avoid recondite terminology which usually discourages many from using keys or understanding descriptions. Alas the opportunity of the normal gardener to test the keys in this single volume is severely limited as the groups dealt with are not widely grown in ordinary gardens. In the 280 odd pages covering the Monocotyledons from the rushes to the orchids, 153 pages deal with the latter family, which admittedly is probably the largest and most variable of flowering plant families but not of wide appeal to average gardeners. These comments are not condemnatory but are made to emphasize the difficulty of reviewing this particular volume.

The team of collaborators has at times overlooked plants either in cultivation or described in current literature which all certainly deserve mention. For example among the grasses commonly cultivated there are significant omissions such as *Cortaderia fulvida, Phleum phleoides, Stipa arundinacea, S. capillata, Sorghum halepense* and no mention is made of the variegated forms of *Hakonechloa macra, Molinia caerulea* and *Glyceria maxima*. All these grasses are dealt with in the main volumes of the R.H.S. *Dictionary of Gardening* (1956) and its *Supplement* (1969).

Furthermore there are significant omissions from the family *Araceae* and particularly in the genus *Arisaema* where some six plants in cultivation are not treated and *Eminium* is entirely ignored. In the *Orchidaceae* several ground orchids have escaped the scrutiny of the contributors; for example the genera *Herminium, Pogonia, Cremastra* and *Tipularia,* while *Serapias lingua* is in the text but not in the index. On the other hand the inclusion of the minute free-floating *Lemnaceae* is debatable in the context of cultivated plants.

There is no doubt this garden flora on completion will be an indispensible and practical reference source for all who enjoy the zest of identifying plants by their own effort.

Sir George Taylor

*Walters, S. M. et al. *The European Garden Flora. A manual for the identification of plants cultivated in Europe, both out-of-doors and under glass.* Vol. II: *Monocotyledons* (Part II). Pp. x, 318; 25 figs, 1 map. Cambridge University Press. 1984. ISBN 0 521 25864 2. £30. (Vol. I expected in early 1986).