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Book review :The Kew Plant Glossary, an illustrated dictionary of plant terms by Henk Beentje, with illustrations by Juliet Williamson . London : Royal Botanic Gardens Kew , 2010 . 160 pp. ISBN : 978-1842464229

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2010-11-19

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Christenhusz , M 2010 , ' Book review :The Kew Plant Glossary, an illustrated dictionary of plant terms by Henk Beentje, with illustrations by Juliet Williamson . London : Royal Botanic Gardens Kew , 2010 . 160 pp. ISBN : 978-1842464229 ' , Botanical Journal of the Linnean Society , vol. 164 , no. 4 , pp. 440-441 . <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1095-8339.2010.01099.x>

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<http://hdl.handle.net/10138/28048>

<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1095-8339.2010.01099.x>

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## Book Review

*The Kew Plant Glossary, an illustrated dictionary of plant terms* by Henk Beentje, with illustrations by Juliet Williamson. London: Royal Botanic Gardens Kew, 2010. 160 pp. ISBN: 978-1842464229. £18.

Glossaries of botany are numerous and the interpretations of many of the entries have changed over time. Many books and floras include a glossary section and some larger flora projects use glossaries to make descriptions more uniform in their meaning. Henk Beentje and Martin Cheek (2003) compiled a glossary for the *Flora of Tropical East Africa*, and *The Kew Plant Glossary* follows in this tradition. It is a natural extension of Beentje's work and builds upon his and other flora glossaries (e.g. *Flora Nordica*, *Flora of Iraq*, *Flora Zambesiaca*, *Flora Slovenska*, *Flora of West Tropical Africa*, *Flora of North America*, *Flora of Australia*, *Flora of Ethiopia and Eritrea*). It also used terms from older established glossaries such as Lindley (1848), Jackson (1916–1928), Rickett (1954a, b) and Swartz (1971). Terminology of plant groups with a taxon-unique terminology such as palms (Dransfield & Beentje, 1996), orchids (Dressler, 1993), succulents (Eggli, 1993), legumes (Verdcourt, 1979) and ferns (Lellinger, 2002) is also included, but not exhaustively. The author thus recommends the reader to consult these standard works to access a full set of terms. Unlike the glossary for the *Flora of Tropical East Africa*, Beentje excludes colloquial, regional terminology, many anatomical terms (fruit types, hair types etc.), ecological classifications and terms not in use in modern taxonomic literature, but for the researcher interested in these matters, Beentje provides a good bibliography.

Beentje does not recommend the usage of certain terms; in fact he states that it is not for him to decide, but he does indicate when he believes a term should not be used or when there are simpler synonyms. This will certainly aid the professional botanist or student who aims to describe a plant or wants to interpret existing descriptions.

The main difference that this glossary has from many previous glossaries is the fine illustrations by Juliet Williamson, that clearly show the structure discussed. I always believe a picture says more than a thousand words, and that is certainly the case for

a glossary. For illustrated terms I personally always used the 'descriptive terminology' in Stearn's *Botanical Latin* (1973), and I found that most terminology agrees with this work as well. However, the difference in the usage of the terms 'elliptic', 'lanceolate' and 'oblong' are somewhat different in Beentje's glossary. I am not sure what the correct term would be, but I have always called the shape labelled in this book 'lanceolate' 'ovate-lanceolate', to reflect it being widest below the middle. Stearn's definition is more mathematical ('narrowly elliptical, tapering [equally] to each end; as the leaf of *Plantago lanceolata* or *Daphne mezereum*, length : breadth = 6:1 to 3:1'), whereas Beentje's definition of 'lanceolate' is more intuitive. I agree that a 'forum of botanists from many countries' should draw up a list of recommended terms, and I think Beentje could be encouraged to initiate such a forum/committee. It certainly shows there is a need for a standard list of accepted terms and their meaning, so botanists do not solely have to depend on general dictionaries that may interpret terms in a more general than botanical sense.

After the alphabetic glossary, with 4144 terms, there is a section in which terms are grouped according to the structure to which they refer. This section is fully illustrated and useful when making descriptions of plants and comparing certain structures. This will provide consistency in terminology used throughout a revision, monograph or flora. Also very useful is the final page with 'colour terms', especially when making descriptions of living plants. Therefore, I also recommend this book for use in the field when descriptions of flowers and plants are made for herbarium specimen labels.

*The Kew Plant Glossary* is a great help to many flora and journal editors and writers who will agree with the attribution to Confucius on the first page: 'If language is incorrect, then what is said does not agree with what is meant'. This glossary will be a useful aid in interpreting the meaning of plant descriptions in a more uniform way. If authors and readers use a standard glossary like this, much confusion will be prevented.

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