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Book reviews

Plant Names: A Guide to Botanical Nomenclature (3rd edition), 2007, R. Spencer., R. Cross and P. Lumley, CABI Publishing Oxfordshire, UK, Price: £17.05, Soft cover, 162 pages including colour photographs, Website: www.amazon.co.uk

The naming of plant names, to borrow Anna Pavord's term for botanical nomenclature, is a complex business. Like the law, its foundations rest on simple principles but its application can be mind-bogglingly complex. This little book might more simply have been called *An Idiot's Guide to Plant Names* but it should be required reading for every practicing botanist and plantsman. Since this is now its third edition after first appearing in 1990, I am clearly not alone in feeling this way. Have you ever wondered who controls the origin and use of botanical names, and whether there is a correct way to write and pronounce them? Why are they in Latin anyway, and what is wrong with common names? Where can you find an up-to-date list of plant names, and what exactly are cultivars and hybrids? How should they be written? This book will help you with all of these questions and many more.

Part 1 looks at the naming of wild plants. It kicks off with the vexing issue of common versus scientific names, negotiating a skillful defense of their relative merits in different situations. Needless to say, both have their place. Then follows an introduction to the International Code of Botanical Nomenclature, which governs the formation and application of scientific names. There is a neat summary of the salient aspects of classification and its hierarchies, from kingdom to subspecies, variety and form, along with the rules for writing them all. How and by whom plants are named, why their names change, and which one you should use are all clearly explained.

Part 2 turns to cultivated plants, which fall under the International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants. This determines the methodology for naming cultivars, forms, varieties, selections, hybrids, graft chimaeras, and all the other products of our ingenuity and artifice. For sellers of plants comes practical advice from professional nurserymen, on what information to have on your labels, and how to structure and present it. Oh that my local nursery would be able to offer all this information on the plants that they sell to me!

Part 3 is a short summary of the way in which all the different types of botanical names should be written and Part 4 provides contact information for a vast range of plant name resources, both wild species and garden forms.

Attractively laid out and clearly organized, with dozens of beautiful photographs illustrating everything from type specimens to nursery labels, this is the book to keep on your desk or side table where it can be looked into at any time.

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Flowering Plant Families of the World, 2007, V.H. Heywood, R.K. Brummitt, A. Culhan, O. Seberg, Kew Publishing, Price: £27.95 Hard cover; 424 pages; ISBN 13: 978-1-84246-165-5 / ISBN 10: 1-84246-165-6; Website: www.kew.org

'Flowering Plants of the World' has been an outstanding companion throughout my career so it was with great expectation that I awaited the release of the new edition 'Flowering Plant Families of the World'. The new book was authored by Heywood, Brummitt, Culhan and Seberg with contributions from 30 other experts. As expected it provides excellent overviews of each family outlining their distribution, describing their characteristics, contextualizing their classification, outlining their economic importance and providing pivotal references. Many of the families are accompanied by excellent drawings and I like the new layout where the plates are inserted intimately within the text allowing convenient comparison with the descriptions. The updated maps provide a new refinement to the taxonomy and retain the useful synoptic legends introduced in its predecessor.

The task of compiling information spanning such a range of organisms, and then collating it into a user-friendly tome, was never going to be easy and any pioneer system is likely to have its detractors. For me a weakness in the new edition is simultaneously its utilitarian strength. Yes it is easy to find families that are arranged alphabetically but this is not a telephone directory! Admittedly the ambiguity of phylogenies is difficult to represent despite the 'general agreement in the basic framework of a phylogenetic system of classification'. There are excellent classification overviews for of each family in the text but the casual reader does not imbibe the underlying classification. The classifications provided by APG II and Soltis et al. (2005) are referred to in a brief tabulated preface but the opportunity to collate the book upon this skeleton was sadly missed. Its predecessor (*Flowering Plants of the World*) aimed 'to bring the layman closer to the specialist' and it achieved that goal admirably. The authors have once again attempted to make 'Flowering Plant Families of the World' digestible for a broader