



Washington Park Arboretum

# BULLETIN

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# New Books for Pacific Northwest Gardeners

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## Japanese Gardens in North America

“Quiet Beauty: The Japanese Gardens of North America” is itself a book of quiet beauty, and an excellent introduction to Japanese-style gardens throughout Canada and the United States. Photographer David Cobb, from Mosier (near Hood River, Oregon), is particularly adept at emphasizing the contrasts between light and shadow, the subtle reflections in still waters, and the energy of moving water in his subjects. I have visited many of the 26 featured gardens, and he captures the spirit of these very well.

Text author Kendall Brown is an Asian art historian at California State University, Long Beach. His introductory essay places these gardens in the context of what he sees as five distinctive historical periods beginning at the end of the 19th century. The Seattle Japanese Garden—along with gardens in Portland, at the University of British Columbia, and at the Bloedel Reserve on Bainbridge Island—are all placed in the second of these periods, a time of “Building Bridges” following World War II.

Feeling regional pride, I read the chapter on this period first, and I wasn’t disappointed. Brown is good at telling (what are often) convoluted histories. He underscores the importance of our local gardens in the development of the Japanese style in North America: “The Seattle Japanese Garden also set a new standard as the earliest major permanent garden built in North America by well-established designers from Japan.” He further

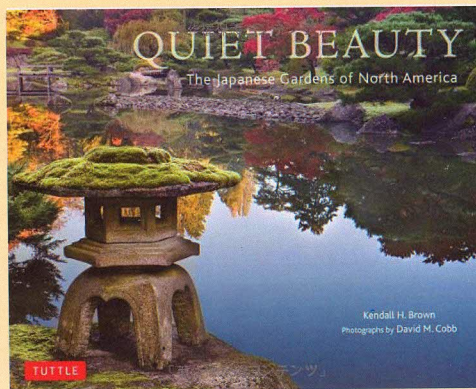
compliments it as being “...arguably one of the finest in North America.”

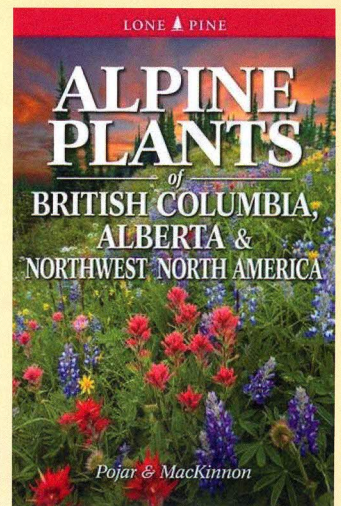
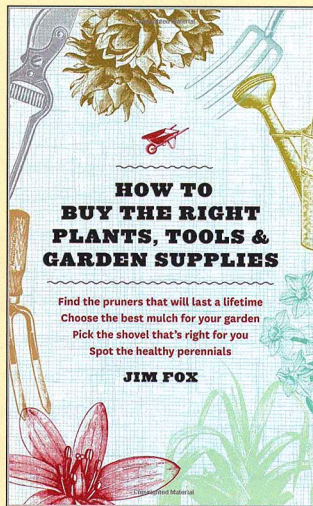
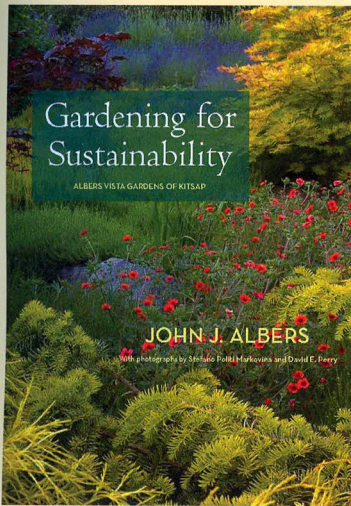
Featured in a later chapter is Spokane’s Nishinomiya Garden in Manito Park, while another 10 gardens from throughout Washington (including the Kubota Garden) and British Columbia are briefly described in the appendices, making this an important garden book for the Pacific Northwest. Brown’s earlier (1999) book, “Japanese-Style Gardens of the Pacific West Coast,” is also worth reading for a more in-depth general history of this style.

## New Garden on the Kitsap Peninsula

“Gardening for Sustainability” is almost two books in one. The first part takes you on an intimate tour of the Albers Vista Gardens near Bremerton, Washington—approximately four acres lovingly crafted by author John Albers and his wife Santica Marcovina over the last 15 years. I kept a post-it note on the garden map for frequent reference as I walked page-by-page through the 14 garden rooms; the history, purpose and plantings of each room were made very real by the considerable descriptive detail and excellent photographs.

“As visitors stand among the Three Islands dreaming of distant lands, they have the choice of proceeding through the open sea of crushed granite or continuing up Madrona Lane.” Transitions like this hold your interest as you continue your tour, picking up ideas to use for your own garden, such as “...the underutilized chaste tree [*Vitex agnus-castus*]...is an





ideal substitute for the [invasive] butterfly bush [*Buddleia davidii*].”

The author’s enthusiasm is especially apparent in a chapter on special collections, including dwarf conifers, striped-bark and Japanese maples and viburnums. Much of his interest in the latter genus was sparked by the collection at the Washington Park Arboretum, which he studied and described while taking classes through the Center for Urban Horticulture in the 1990s.

The second part of the book is a concise essay on landscape sustainability—excellent reading for any gardener. These principles and practices are the basis for the design and maintenance of the Albers Vista Gardens. But despite best intentions, the author freely admits that errors do happen. A section titled “Planting Too Many Unusual Specimens” warns against creating a garden with visual overload, an example of an error that most gardeners have experienced. He concludes that it is best to “...learn from your mistake and move on to the next joyful garden project.”

The garden is open to visitors by appointment or for special events. More information is available at [www.albersvistagardens.org](http://www.albersvistagardens.org).

### How to be a Shrewd Plant Shopper

Jim Fox is a consumer advocate. More specifically, a gardening consumer advocate. His goal is “...to educate you to be a savvy consumer so you can be confident that your gardening dollars are

well spent.” To achieve this goal, he has written a shopping guide: “How to Buy the Right Plants, Tools & Garden Supplies.”

Many general gardening books touch on plant buying or tool selection, but typically include the information at the back of the book or in a brief introduction that the reader hastily skims over to get to the real excitement—an encyclopedia of plants in glorious color. Fox recognizes how critical this basic information is for all gardeners, experienced or not, and uses clarity, broad experience and considerable wit to engage the reader, leaving the colorful photos and plant bios to the several other books that he recommends.

I found the author’s insights into the process of buying and selling plants particularly engaging, demonstrating his perspectives as both an avid collector of specialty plants and as a long-time nursery worker. “To get good service, you need to be a good customer,” he strongly recommends. For example, spouting your own expertise is a quick way to shut down any helpful advice you might receive from the true expert.

After reading this book, I have a much better appreciation for the dedicated men and women who own and run nurseries and must be skilled at managing both plants and people. All so that we can have the cool plants we really, really want.

### Field Guide to Alpine Plants

Jim Pojar and Andy MacKinnon became household names, at least among those households