

REFERENCE BOOKS ON CROPS

Book reviews by Michael Pilarski, Friends of the Trees Society.
Here are a few of my favorite reference books on crops.
Prepared for the 1000 Crops for Northwest Growers workshop series
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Around the World in 80 Plants.

Stephen Barstow, Permanent Publications. 2014. Available in the US through Chelsea Green. 284 pages. Another world class book written by a permaculturist. This immediately became my favorite book on hardy perennial vegetables. There are a number of reasons for my high assessment: Barstow gives a keen description of the 80 plant species he covers and an assessment of their edibility from personal experience. He also draws on ethnobotanical studies from across the northern hemisphere and traces back each plant's history of human use. This is a great example of plant detective work! He searches for (and sometimes finds) lost varieties of plants.

Stephen is coming to the US West Coast in the summer of 2015. He is doing plant exploring and giving talks. Stephen contacted me in February about permaculture contacts in Oregon and Washington. He offered to send me a review copy of his new book, which I shortly received and read. I learned that Barstow lives in northern Norway, close to the Arctic Circle. In spite of the harsh climate, he has over 2,000 species of plants growing on his property. This guy knows about hardy edible plants! Perhaps best of all, the author has managed to express the personality of the plants. This isn't a dry list at all, but a very human account. Every plant in the world needs such an eloquent presenter. Stephen Barstow helps set the bar for the burgeoning generation of books devoted to designing productive ecosystems in a permaculture context. If you are interested in learning more about his West Coast tour contact:

Asian Vegetables. A guide to growing fruit, vegetables and spices from the Indian Subcontinent. Sally Cunningham. 2009. Eco-Logic Books. 130 pages. Written for England.

Cornucopia II: A Source Book of Edible Plants. Stephen Facciola, 1998. Kampong Books. 712 pages. Large format. Listed are over 3,000 species and the nursery and/or seed sources in the United States. Most of the cultivars and varieties for 110 of the most common crops (especially fruits) are listed. Fantastic resource and many of us wish that Facciola would make an updated copy. Still useful, nonetheless. Used copies on Amazon start at \$65.

Cultivation of Medicinal and Aromatic Crops. A.A. Farooqi and B.S. Sreeramu. 2001. Universities Press, Hyderabad, India. 518 pages. 36 of India's most important herb crops and 27 crops for essential oils. History, Importance, Present Status and Future Prospects of Medicinal Crops. Based on commercial herb farming in India. Subtropical to temperate species. Practical info on soil, climate, land preparation, cultivation, planting, manuring, irrigation, interculture, mulching, pests and disease control (mostly chemical pesticides), harvesting, drying and yield. Helpful book for farmers.

Food Plants of the World. Ben-Erik van Wyk. 2005, Timber Press. 480 pages. Tropical to temperate. A huge compendium of species. Color photos of all species. Description, origin, history, parts used, cultivation and handling (very brief info on this category), uses and properties, nutritional value and notes. It gives the common names in Chinese, English, French, German, Spanish, Italian and Portuguese. One of my major references on the subject.

Fruits & Nuts: A comprehensive guide to the cultivation, uses and health benefits of over 300 food-producing plants. Susanna Lyle. Tropical to temperate but weighted to the temperate. 2006. Timber Press. 480 pages, large format. A real coffee-table book. Particularly exciting is that they give the health benefits of each plant species. A major reference on fruits.

Growing Unusual Vegetables. Simon Hickmott. 2003. Eco-Logic Books. 266 pages. Written by an adventurous gardener in England. Most of the species can be grown in the Maritime Northwest and more than half in the Inland Northwest. He covers a lot of crops I knew little about, or not at all. Lives up to its name. Very good propagation, planting and growing information.

Homegrown Whole Grains. Sara Pitzer, 2009. Storey Publishing. 167 pages. How to grow grains in your back yard and small scale with hand tools.

How to Grow Perennial Vegetables. Martin Crawford. 2012. Green Books. 224 pages. Written by one England's masters of forest gardening. Another great book on the topic. Low-maintenance, low-impact vegetable gardening. Covers culinary uses, cultivation. The maintenance and potential problems data is especially helpful. Gardeners should be cautious about new perennial vegetables in terms of their weediness.

Knott's Handbook for Vegetable Growers. Donald Maynard, et al. I have the 2nd edition in my library. Used copies start at \$63 on Amazon. Lots of facts, figures and tables.

Medicinal and Aromatic Crops: Harvesting, Drying and Processing. Serdar Oztekin and Milan Martinov. 2007, Haworth Press, New York. 318 pages. The authors are speaking from Turkey and Serbian experience. This is mostly about machinery for commercial scale operations. Not much information on individual plant species.

Medicinal Herbs in the Garden, Field and Marketplace. Lee Sturdivant and Tim Blakley. 1999. San Juan Naturals, Friday Harbor, Washington. 323 pages. Small farm and business opportunities for herb growers in North America. Gives growing information, yields and prices. The price information is outdated but there is lots of good info for herb growers. Holy Toledo! They are selling on Amazon starting at \$200! Glad I got mine.

Medicinal Plants of the World. Ben-Erik van Wyk and Michael Wink. 2004. Timber Press. 480 pages. Tropical to temperate. A huge compendium of species. Color photos of all species. Description, origin, parts used, uses and properties, preparation and dosage, active ingredients, pharmacological effects, and notes. It gives the common names in Chinese, English, French, German, Spanish, and Italian.

Native American Ethnobotany. Daniel Moerman. 1998. Timber Press. The largest of its kind. It has a particularly large list of dye plants. indexed by tribe, species and by plant use. One of the largest books in my library. Moerman lists 1,649 species having been used by the indigenous species out of the 20,000 native species in North America.

Organic Production and Use of Alternative Crops. Franc Bavec and Martina Bavec. 2007. CRC press. 241 pages. The authors and farming experience are from Slovenia. Relatively few crops are covered. But they each get good attention. Grains, legumes, hemp, flax, Jerusalem artichoke, sweet potato, millets, buckwheat, amaranth. Oil crops include pumpkins, camelina, safflower, white mustard and poppy.

Perennial Vegetables. Eric Toensmeier, 2007. Chelsea Green Press. The first permaculture book to focus on the topic. Another great book on perennial vegetables. Eric's main personal experience is in New England.

Plants for a Future: Edible & Useful Plants for a Healthier World. Ken Fern. 2nd edition, 2000. 300 pages. Chelsea Green Press. 300 pages. A wide array of woody-stemmed and herbaceous species. The author's experience is in England. Especially useful in the Maritime PNW.

Small-Scale Grain Raising. Gene Logsdon. 2009. Chelsea Green press. 308 pages. An organic guide for home gardeners and local farmers.

Specialty and Minor Crops Handbook. Univ of Calif. 1998, 2nd ed. 184 pages. Quick rundowns on lots of crops.

Sturtevant's Edible Plants of the World. Edited by U.P. Hedrick. Dover, 1972. First published in 1917. 684 pages. One of the classics on the topic. A lifetime work which has comments on 2,897 species gathered from 560 ancient and modern texts.

The Chinese Medicinal Herb Farm. A Cultivator's Guide to Small-Scale Organic Herb Production. Peg Schafer. 2011. Chelsea Green Press. 312 pages. One of the only books on the topic written from an organic, US perspective from a California farmer. Valuable.

The Drunken Botanist. Amy Stewart. 2013. Algonquin Books of Chapel Hill. 331 pages. Fascinating book for anyone who likes herbal alcoholic beverages. It gives lots of ideas of plants to grow for this market.

The Encyclopedia of Herbs & Their Uses. Deni Bown. Dorling Kindersley, London. Revised edition 2001. 389 pages, large format. This is my main herb reference. Over 1,000 herbs covered, worldwide. 1500 photos. The info is relatively abbreviated but for each species she covers cultivation, propagation, harvest times (hard info to come by), hardiness, parts used, properties and medicinal uses. Very good information. I've rarely, if ever, found any of her information that was suspect. This book has been published under a number of titles.

The Forager's Harvest. Samuel Thayer. 2006. Foragers Harvest Publishing.

Nature's Garden. Samuel Thayer. 2010.

Thayer's two books are my favorite books on wild edibles and I own dozens of books on the topic. Thayer's books are outstanding because of their detail and all written from first hand experience.

The Plant Locator: Western Region. Susan Hill and Susan Narizny. 2004. Timber Press. 741 pages. More than 50,000 plants and where to find them. Sourced from 336 nurseries. Mostly oriented to ornamentals. Great resource when looking for rare plants.

Vegetables. Roger Phillips and Martyn Rix. Macmillan. 1993. 270 pages. Large format. Large amounts of color plates. Photos taken from around the world. A lot about the history. Fascinating reading. Gives lots of new crop ideas. Not so much about cultivation/growing. Phillips and Rix have a whole series of books put out by Macmillan. They have also written separate volumes for trees, shrubs, herbs, perennials, bulbs, and indoor & green house plants. The 6 books together are a huge compendium of species.

Books on dye plants:

Lichen Dyes, The New Sourcebook. Karen Diadick Casselman

Vegetable Dyes: Being a book of Recipes and other information useful to the Dyer
Mar 11, 2013, by Ethel M Mairet.

The Rainbow Beneath My Feet: A Mushroom Dyer's Field Guide. 2001. Arleen R. Bessette.

Craft of the Dyer: Colour from Plants and Lichens. Karen Leigh Casselman, 2013.

John Kallas' Book on Northwest wild edible plants.