

BOOK REVIEWS

A Tropical Garden Flora: Plants Cultivated in the Hawaiian Islands and Other Tropical Places. George W. Staples & Derral R. Herbst. Bishop Museum, Honolulu, Hawai'i: Bishop Museum Press. 2005. 918 pp. ISBN 1 58178 039 7. \$59.95 (hardback).

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The authors and all involved in this beautifully produced book are to be warmly congratulated; it is a truly impressive not to say monumental work. As the name suggests, it will be of far wider use than just in Hawai'i, as many of the 2100 species of vascular plants covered are widely grown throughout the tropics. The format is that of a traditional Flora, the plants being arranged in family or higher group order with plenty of clear, well-constructed keys to help in identification. The language is mostly attractively simple with minimal use of technical terms, though some of the chattier sections are a bit wordy.

A comprehensive Introduction covers the rationale and background to the work and elucidates the format of the main text and keys. This is followed by 24 pages on the practical aspects of propagation and planting in Hawai'i, which, given the vast size of this book, might have been left out. Such details are easily gleaned from numerous other books covering this subject in much greater depth; these could simply have been referred to. Before the main text there is a short section of colour photographs; while these are useful there is some imbalance as only five monocots are portrayed against 67 dicots and 15 ferns.

The meat of the book systematically covers the vascular plants, starting with pteridophytes and gymnosperms followed by dicots and monocots. The information is generally well presented and is a useful combination of keys, technical (though not too technical) descriptions and masses of interesting information including such details as the introduction to Hawai'i not just of *Ficus* species but of their associated fig wasps. However, the formal descriptions are marred by clumsy and unnecessary abbreviations such as flower to 'flw', usually to 'usu', petals to 'pet' (possible confusion with petiole?), fruit to 'frt' and even branch to 'bran'. The last looks particularly odd in the diagram on p. 406 where we have 'non-climbing bran' and 'climbing bran', without the required full-stops. The choice of words to abbreviate seems arbitrary. Why not also contract symmetrical to 'sym' and alternate to 'alt'? I suspect that the space saved was less than that taken up by the unnecessary 24 pages mentioned above. Other quibbles are few, though the *Asteraceae* account doesn't distinguish between ray-flowers and the ligulate flowers of subfamily *Cichorioideae*. These two forms of flower are morphologically and ontogenetically distinct, and this confusion results in the cichorioid genera *Taraxacum* and *Lactuca* being described as 'ray-flowered' (p. 149), which is incorrect. It is also odd that when the rest of the

world has gone thankfully back to *Chrysanthemum*, this work still espouses *Dendranthema*, and the technicalities of gynoecium position in the *Rosaceae* seem to have been skimmed over without employing the usual terms epi-, peri- and hypogynous. It is clear that many sections were written by acknowledged authorities and the local gymnosperm expert at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh was very impressed by the accuracy and detail of that account, even for quite unfamiliar species. The entries for many families and genera are supplemented by brief accounts of taxa less commonly encountered, making this work very comprehensive.

Following the systematic section there is an excellent and very thorough glossary with some useful illustrations, mercifully free from the awkward abbreviations noted above. Some of the entries would have benefited from examples, such as those for 'specific epithet', 'subspecies' and 'variety', which might be a bit abstruse for the newcomer. The definition of 'cultivar' is rather weak as it makes no mention of the essential criteria of a cultivar (distinctness, uniformity and stability) and employs the nomenclaturally vague terms 'race' and 'strain'; also the abbreviation 'cv' is no longer sanctioned under the *International Code of Nomenclature for Cultivated Plants* (2004). There is a useful diagrammatic 'locator-guide' directing the reader to the appropriate illustrations, among which were one or two inaccuracies such as the fruits of the rose-hip (p. 796) being labelled 'seeds', a common pit-fall for the unwary student.

The section giving derivations of specific names (more correctly epithets) is very useful and will provide much interest and enlightenment. This is followed by a mind-boggling list of references, no fewer than 1641 having been consulted!

At 4.5 kg this book is a substantial weight to lift, let alone carry about, and dropping it could be disastrous, not just for the book! If a second edition were ever contemplated, the publisher might consider splitting it into two volumes as was done for the *RHS A-Z Encyclopaedia of Garden Plants* (2003). It is an unusual pleasure to say that the price is very reasonable indeed; at just short of \$60 (about £31.50), it is astonishingly good value and well within reach of the private bookshelf. Make sure it is on yours.

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Rubiaceae of Thailand: A Pictorial Guide to Indigenous and Cultivated Genera.

Christian Puff, Kongkanda Chayamarit & Voradol Chamchumroon. Bangkok: The Forest Herbarium, Department of National Parks, Wildlife and Conservation. 2005. viii + 245 pp. ISBN 974 436 142 2. €40.00 or US\$50.00 (hardback).

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Learning the plants in a new regional flora is always a challenge. Learning the plants in a tropical flora where no one knows them is Extreme Plant Taxonomy. This problem has been approached in various ways over the years: through general, manual-style floras (e.g. *Flora of Bhutan*); detailed floras of particular small sites within the larger region (e.g. *The Flora of Barro Colorado Island*); and detailed floras for the entire region covering selected, carefully studied groups but presenting no information at all about the rest of