

Reference: Farjon, A. (1984). *Pines – drawings and descriptions of the genus Pinus*. E.J. Brill, Leiden.

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Stearn's Dictionary of Plant Names for Gardeners – a handbook on the origin and meaning of the botanical names of some cultivated plants. W.T. Stearn. Cassell Publishers Limited, London. Pp 363. ISBN 0-304-34149-5. £16.99.

To the enthusiastic gardener Latin plant names are often a source of confusion and irritation but, once the system and its rules have been explained, many derive a sense of satisfaction from learning and using the words. However, understanding the principles of the system in one thing, knowing the meaning and derivation of the words is another. While *albus*, *japonicus* and *foetidus* may be obvious, what do *macranthus* and *amplexicaulae* mean, what is the origin of the generic name *Corydalis* and who is being commemorated in *Elsholtzia*? The answer to these and 6,000 similar questions about plant names may be found in Stearn's recently published *Dictionary of Plant Names for Gardeners*.

The original idea for the book came from Archibald William Smith (1899–1962), to whom the present work is dedicated. Smith was not a botanist nor even a gardener originally, but started his working life in the Army where he had a remarkable career. He served on the Western Front, rode with the Cossacks and fought on the North-West Frontier. After the First World War he worked for his uncle's firm in Burma extracting teak by means of elephants. During the Second World War he was employed by MI5, after which he returned to the USA where he had settled in 1934. Here he devoted his life to gardening and to charitable work, but he also had time to return to his life-long fascination with the meaning and derivation of plant names. Originally this work was undertaken to satisfy his own curiosity, but later he hoped that it might become a source of reference for like-minded gardeners. He was encouraged to publish the work by Peter Green (then of the Arnold Arboretum, later of Kew) and his book *A Gardener's Book of Plant Names* was published posthumously in 1963.

Smith's fascination was obviously shared by many gardeners for his book proved so popular that a second edition was soon needed. In revising the original work Stearn found that it contained many errors, not so much the fault of Smith, but more through the accumulation and repetition of past errors. The second edition of the work entitled *A Gardener's Dictionary of Plant Names* was published in 1972, in which two chapters on botanical and vernacular names were added. The present edition includes more entries and an expansion of some existing entries, whereas some material considered irrelevant has been omitted. The book is packed with a wealth of fascinating material and is scholarly yet written in an entertaining way; as such it bridges the gap between botany and horticulture and will be an invaluable companion to gardeners, students, writers and historians.

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