

Home/Garden

Gift books make good friends for gardeners

Although I keep them in the house, and not in the shed, books are as important to me and my gardening success and pleasure as any spade, cart or hose that I use. There are books that I refer to when I put in a new plant or when some problem arises, books that broaden my garden horizons by introducing me to new plants and new ideas for design, and books that I turn to for an entertaining read when foul weather confines me to my sitting room and fireside.

For years two of the most heavily used reference books in my library were The Encyclopedia of Organic Gardening published by the Rodale Press and America's Garden Book by James and Louise Bush-Brown of the New York Botanical Garden, both of which continue to provide me with a mine of easily accessible information.

This year I invested in Wyman's Gardening Encyclopedia (Macmillan) - and at \$50 it is an investment! But this 1200 page volume, newly revised by its author, Donald Wyman, Horticulturist Emeritus of the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University is a wonderful

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Between
The Rows

ly complete reference. It gives specific information about over 9,000 different plants like rhododendrons, and individual varieties. There is also valuable information about the use of pesticides, insecticides and herbicides, a subject that is more and more confusing because of the proliferation of chemicals and new information about their dangers.

On a different scale and on a much more limited topic, but also helpful is the paperback volume, Arranging Cut Flowers (Ortho Books, \$6.95). After a brief section on the pleasure of bringing cut flowers indoors, is an extensive list of flowers that are particu-

larly suited to cutting and arranging, including notes about their season, color, and fragrance. This is especially valuable when you plan your garden and at seed and plant buying time if you like the idea of flower arrangements, but are a novice gardener.

There are also sections on how to handle your cut flowers, dried flowers, useful tools and simple design principles. My own visual sense is lacking, but I found the beautiful color photographs instructive and inspiring.

Recently I have become more interested in houseplants and to help me manage my ignorance I have turned to two paperbacks, the Time-Life Book of Foliage Houseplants and the Time-Life Book of Flowering Houseplants, handsome reissues of books by the late James Underwood Crockett first published in 1972. Both are \$12.95 and both discuss ways to use houseplants attractively as decorating elements, general directions on caring for houseplants, specific cultural information on many varieties and charts to help you diagnose problems and care them.

Allen Lacy writes a very different type of

book. He is instructive by the way, but his intent is to chat about his own experience, share his enthusiasms - and his prejudices. This year I added his newest volume, Farther Afield: A Gardener's Excursions (Farther Straus Giroux, \$17.95) to Home Ground: A Gardener's Miscellany which had already found a home on my shelves. These short essays will lead you into his own garden, his delight in plants as different as the evening primrose and the yucca, brief tours of gardens that are open to the public, and visits with other gardeners. He is a knowledgeable man with a clear eye, charm, humor and grace of expression. His books tempt me to set and read awhile - even when the weather isn't foul.

Not only does Allen Lacy garden and read his own books, for the past few years he has been working his way through boxes of writings left by Elizabeth Lawrence who is known for her books, Southern Gardens and The Little Bulbs, a favorite of mine. The result of his sifting and editing is Gardening

for Love: The Market Bulletins (Duke University Press, \$15.95). Elizabeth Lawrence lived in the South and was introduced to the market bulletins, publications distributed by state agricultural departments to farmers by Eudora Welty in the 1940's. For the next 30 years and more she subscribed to these state bulletins and other private newsletters. She corresponded with the women who advertised their extra seeds and plants and became a part of an extended neighborhood and a member of a friendly society, the Brothers of the Spade.

Gardening For Love is her account of her dealings with the bulletins, the people and the plants. She learned how to care for many flowers, resigned herself to curious successes and failures and wrote about the poetry she found in their common names. Miss Lawrence is gone and most of the bulletins have disappeared but the friendly society has not and if we are fortunate we will be able to enjoy it and enlarge it before we lay down our own trowel.