

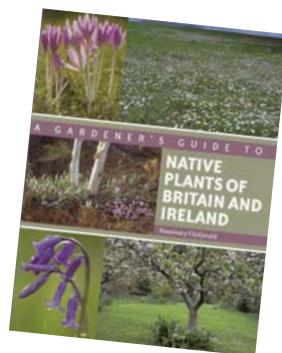
Book Review

A Gardener's Guide to Native Plants of Britain and Ireland

Rosemary Fitzgerald

The Crowood Press 192 pp £14.99

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In this engaging book, Rosemary FitzGerald reassesses 'some of our British and Irish wildings, and see[s] how some can make a positive contribution to modern gardens'. This is not the same as 'wildflower' or 'wildlife' gardening. I do the latter, yet found a lot of new, pertinent information in her unfussy prose. In a section headed 'What is a Native Plant?'

she says that our island isolation leaves us with a low native flora count, and that some of our best-known wildflowers, including fritillaries and snowdrops, 'have been here so long, and settled in so well, they are now in a botanical category that acknowledges their respected status'. These are the archeophytes – familiar to those who, like me, are apt to think themselves aboriginal because they live in the place where they were born. Recent immigrants are known as neophytes, among them Japanese Knotweed. 'Wildflowers and the Law' is discussed, as is 'The Peat Question', without, sadly, giving us the peat answer. There are good photographs throughout.

The main body of the book comes in seasonal sections. In 'Spring' the bugle (*Ajuga reptans*), 'sturdy and attractive', goes like a train, shooting runners across damp ground in conditions that mimic deciduous woodland. She offers planting ideas that complement it, such as the rich dark 'Catlin's Giant' paired with the paler brighter blue of *Anemone blanda*. The cuckoo flower (*Cardamine pratensis*) is described as 'tricky to establish'. Here on the Lincolnshire Marsh it does well on dyke sides, but we are cautious in our weeding as its first rosette of leaves is horribly reminiscent of bittercress.

'Summer' brings, among others, mallows and teasels. The marshmallow (*Althaea officinalis*), thrives in my super-heavy three-horse ings¹ land. The wild teasel (*Dipsacus fullonum*) is a food source for insects and birds and has all-year architectural appeal. She quotes Walter Ingwerson on 'the jagged cups ... which often hold water'. You bet. Never go among teasels without your wellies.

'Autumn and Winter' bring the glorious spindle (*Euonymus europaeus*), the guelder rose (*Viburnum lantana*) with its 'spectacular drooping bunches of translucent scarlet autumn berries', and the marvellously useful and almost constantly flowering gorse (*Ulex europaeus*).

This book suggests more-thoughtful ways to use wildflowers than 'Pictorial Meadows', which, while magnificent in industrial landscapes, are like an explosion in a confetti factory when confined. 🐣

Twink Addison

¹Too heavy for a team of two horses to plough, ings is low-lying meadow land by water – not meadow any more of course.