

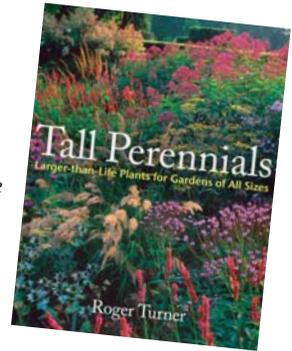
# Book Reviews

## Tall Perennials

Roger Turner

Timber Press 260pp £25.00

ISBN 978-0-88192-889-1



This useful and attractive book is subtitled *Larger than Life Perennials for Gardens of all Sizes*, and as I read the preface I felt like giving a hearty cheer, in much the same way that I talk back to the TV or radio, especially when gardening programmes are being aired. I could not agree more with the author that tall hardy perennials should be used by all plant lovers, whether they garden in a country estate or a housing estate. How much more interesting would be the average pocket-handkerchief garden with a few well chosen ‘biggies’ rather than the often-spotted selection of dwarf or ground-hugging rockery plants.

This book persuades us all to choose plants for impact, to delight us and our neighbours, and sets about giving us the necessary know how. It is written in two parts: part one offers a simple explanation of herbaceous plants, annuals and biennials. This is followed by a section on plant associations and the grouping together of plants with similar cultural requirements, and practical tips on using colour. A chapter on design includes sections on differing spaces and types of sites; the author advocates planting architectural plants first, using them as a frame to plant around, and discusses the need for contrasting shapes and foliage forms. The third chapter contains practical advice on cultivation, ways of dealing with different soil types and the thorny topic of staking – the author, like me, favouring the ‘pea stick’ method.

Part two of the book will probably be the most well thumbed, as it contains a plant directory. To qualify for inclusion plants must be over five feet tall. They are listed not by botanic families, but grouped by their impact, beginning with architectural heavyweights and continuing with twelve sections in all, including foliage plants, umbellifers, grasses, and early- and late-flowerers. Each entry gives the plant’s origin, a general description, flowering time and colour, and the hardiness zone it thrives in. At the end of the book are useful lists of plants to help the reader choose plants for specific traits or uses.

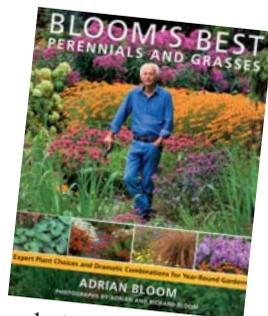
The overall layout is clear and inviting, fully illustrated with excellent photographs; the book could therefore sit on the reference shelf or the coffee table.

**Janet Beakes**

## **Bloom's Best Perennials and Grasses Adrian Bloom**

**Timber Press 208pp £20.00**

**ISBN 978-0-88192-931-7**



Few Hardy Planters will fail to recognise the name of Adrian Bloom, along with the wealth of knowledge of herbaceous perennials and grasses that he brings to his subject. Here we are in the hands of an expert. However, he is not out to dazzle us with new varieties, or tempt us with the latest trends in breeding, but rather to use his years of experience to recommend reliable and garden-worthy varieties from the huge range now on offer.

The first three chapters are primarily pictorial, to enthuse us with growing perennials. Each starts with a brief introduction, and then an abundance of pictures with extensive captions to illustrate the points being made. First are stunning displays at Bressingham, showing how perennials make an impact at all seasons. The next looks more specifically at design, with several styles of garden where perennials are centre stage. While some are on a grander scale than most of us could accommodate, there are also instances of smaller plantings, and individual plants, which would be more easily translated to a modest plot.

Then Adrian selects his 'top dozen' plants which should be in every garden. As I grow eight of them I can hardly disagree! This is when the themes come to the fore. He is keen that we select plants with a proven track record of a long season of interest, a robust constitution and an ability to assort well with other plants, and the pictures in this section show his chosen twelve doing exactly that.

The next two chapters cover, of necessity somewhat summarily, the practical aspects of growing perennials, including plant choice and preparation, planting and ongoing maintenance.

The final and most extensive section of the book is a list of the perennials and grasses he feels are most useful to the modern gardener. Each is photographed and described, along with details of cultivation, hardiness, season and size, their history and place of origin, and suggestions for garden use. With around 80 plants in the main list, this is not comprehensive, but to some extent that is where its strength lies. It is not a reference book to use when looking up unfamiliar plants in a catalogue. However, for an inexperienced gardener, faced with a new bed to plan or rejuvenate, it would provide an excellent source of information.

Overall then, the book provides both a stimulating visual demonstration of the uses of perennials and a summary of a variety of good plants to make that picture a reality. It provides some useful ideas for the experienced gardener, but would be particularly suited to someone starting out with perennials, and wanting inspiration and a knowledgeable guide.

**Sue Dockerill**