

Book Reviews

The Garden Jungle, or Gardening to Save the Planet

Dave Goulson

2019, Jonathan Cape. ISBN 9781787331358
Hardback £16.99



I'm sure many of us harbour feelings of guilt for the beleaguered state of our beloved planet. I find myself leaving supermarkets with an empty bag, defeated by the threats posed by single-use plastics, air miles, palm oil. Even my faithful old cotton bags are now tainted by the whiff of unsustainable land and water use to produce them. It's ever more difficult to find activities covered by the phrase from the *I Ching* which was so soothing for the hippy life of the 1970s – 'no blame'.

I bought this book without paying attention to the subtitle, because I'd so enjoyed Dave Goulson's first book, *A Sting in the Tale* (2013). I was already well-disposed towards bumble bees, but found the book fascinating, the serious content presented in an accessible and delightful style. The writer is now professor of Biology at the University of Sussex, and an acknowledged expert in the life and status of invertebrates, as well as bees which are his speciality.

We underestimate the importance of insects to sustaining life and feeding the overwhelming number of humans now squeezed onto planet Earth. Gardeners, although theoretically in close touch with living and growing things, may be far from enlightened in this matter, because of their age-old definitions of Good and Bad. Flowers Good – weeds Bad. Bees

Good – 'pests' Bad. All too often our ways of dealing with pests involve using herbicides and pesticides, ignoring the ever-increasing pollution of soils and water. I'm not going to look at intensive farming here – it's too big a subject – but will keep my focus on the smaller theatre of our gardens, and the way they are discussed in this book.

It's a delightful read. I've heard Professor Goulson speak, and his lively voice comes off every page. Of course, some of the subject matter is serious and frightening, but he delivers the terrifying statistics in a clear, readable way; and his description of the world of 'inverts' is completely convincing. There's also much humour, and love for the creatures under our feet – readers of this book can't help but become the best friends of ants and earwigs. And the changes in behaviour he suggests for us are soundly practical; ways to feed ourselves better, and to see more flowers without destroying insect life. His explanation of breeding rates of

crop pests, and how this knowledge might be manipulated for more successful plant management, was a revelation to me. And just in case the scary messages are too scary at any moment, each chapter has a nice recipe using common garden produce. Enjoyment and enlightenment are certainly qualities found in this modestly presented book, but it's my Book of the Year for 2019 because it contains HOPE. Given the despair which haunts the airwaves, this quality is rare – priceless really – and the message in *The Garden Jungle* is that we CAN achieve something meaningful. Whether we

garden in lavish acreage, or have just a couple of pots in the back yard, within our patches we can make things right. There has to be a commitment – NO pesticides or herbicides – but there are good hints on how to manage this with more tolerance, indeed without too much pain! We may not be able to control the wider world, but within our own gardens we can support and sustain our threatened biodiversity, and this book gives us an appealing understanding of what that can mean.

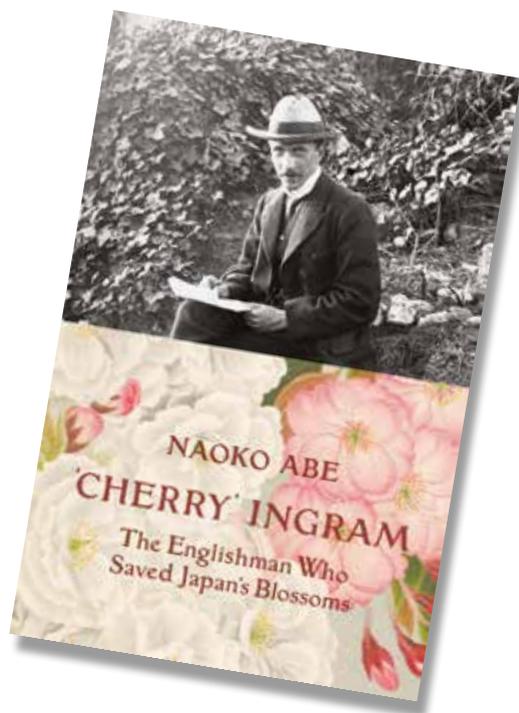
Rosemary FitzGerald

'Cherry' Ingram, The Englishman Who Saved Japan's Blossoms

Naoko Abe

2019, Chatto & Windus. ISBN 9781784742027
Hardback £18.99

This is not intended as a proper review – the book came out in March 2019 and received wide notice in the garden press, so many HPS members will already be well aware of it – but I believe that there's always room for another appreciation of something good. So this is more of a fan letter about the amazing networks within the botanical and horticultural worlds, and the way they touch us all. Plants are after all not only the basis of life, but have a universal language. Whatever we think of Latin names (and I admit to experiencing my share of stress from recent changes), they can be understood within the United Kingdom, Ireland and indeed world-wide.



In 2006 I spent a few months researching some of the great gardeners who have lived in West Porlock, notably Norman Hadden, and EB Anderson who

wrote of his years there in *Seven Gardens* (1974). I was lucky enough to have access to the amazing accessions ledger kept by Norman Hadden for 60 years, with every plant he bought entered in his beautiful handwriting, and where he had obtained it from – it's like a catalogue of prominent nurserymen and gardens throughout most of the last century.

I live only 25 miles from Porlock, and the gardens I was interested in were well within recall for many locals. Indeed, the late Joan Lorraine of Greencombe, herself one of the Porlock greats, was still living at the time I did my research, and another, Keith Lister, was looking after one of Haddon's woodland plots at this time. I was able to spend many days following clues and rumours, and fate was helpful with chance encounters: one led me to the son of Norman Hadden's gardener, who had some priceless photographs, and another neighbour led me to someone who was still growing a number of Hadden's plants.

One of these chance encounters put me in touch with Lady Anne Berry (formerly Palmer) who famously gifted her Rosemoor garden to the RHS. She proved to be the most generous and active correspondent by email, writing from Hackfalls Arboretum in New Zealand where she lived with her second husband Bob Berry. As a young woman, learning her gardening, she sometimes served as driver for some of the great old boys of the gardening world, including Norman Hadden, and Collingwood 'Cherry' Ingram. They could apparently be 'grumpy oldies' at times, but most trips included wonderful gardens and equally wonderful cream teas!

I realise this is a thin thread connecting me to the great flowering-cherry collector, but it was enough to make him one of the icons in my mental picture gallery of great gardeners. When I ran a small nursery, on exposed limestone, I was naturally very keen on cistus, and

one can't look into the naming and hybridisation of these without coming across him. I've never had the kind of garden in which I could grow cherries for either fruit or blossom, but Ingram's name was enough to draw me to this book. It is most prettily produced with the title on a loose cherry-printed 'belt' round the hard cover, so I bought it as an early birthday present for myself.

Biographies of great gardeners often seem to be written by people who are professional writers but not gardeners, and as a result can contain annoying misunderstandings and mistakes. Naoko Abe, a Japanese journalist now living in London, initially sounded to me as though she might be in such a category, but this book is one of the finest works of research I've come across for years. It tells the story of the Japanese cherry trees themselves; Ingram's interest in them; his realisation that the historic varieties collected and treasured during centuries of Japanese gardening were being allowed to die out, as the easily propagated *Prunus x yedoensis* 'Somei-Yoshino' became the street tree of choice (like the familiar pink double cherry *Prunus* 'Kanzan' in the UK); his searches for wild varieties, and Japanese collectors who still revered the old selections; and his own cultivation efforts at home in Kent. There are too many elements of this rich story to mention here, and these are just the personal elements comprising the story of a most interesting man and his thrilling botanical adventures.

One of these concerns the 'great white' cherry *Prunus* 'Tai-haku' (fig. 1), which had long been famous in Japan. Ingram was horrified to discover that it had apparently become extinct there, and he began a passionate quest to find it again and return it to its birthplace. He managed to find a tree which had been imported to Sussex in 1900, got material growing in his own collection, and tried many times to send cuttings to Japan.



Fig. 1 *Prunus* 'Tai-haku'

Before air travel, sending plants by the slow sea or land routes was always difficult, and many times these scions died *en route*, but in 1932 he succeeded, and considered this the highlight of his life! Happily for us, this glorious variety is now widely available.

The book also examines in detail the extraordinary power of cherry blossom as an icon in Japanese culture. I'm not generally a fan of books on world politics or wars, but Abe had me completely gripped with her explanation of how a nation's love of a flower could have such a tragic outcome: during the second world war, hundreds of young men were led to sacrifice their lives as kamikaze pilots, falling to a beautiful death, like the petals scattered over *hanami* picnics held each year during cherry blossom season.

So this note is not just in praise of a good gardening book, but a tribute to an outstanding biography. It has sweet and sad stories, detailed information about wild *Prunus* species and their habitats, and stories which make Collingwood and his long-suffering wife Florence come alive. It's also a deep and heart-felt examination of a major crisis affecting the Japanese nation in the 20th century, and includes a collection of wonderfully evocative archive illustrations, featuring some of Ingram's own watercolours. If you have not read it yet, I hope this little rave might persuade you!

Rosemary FitzGerald