

New Plant Books for Hawaii Gardeners

Tropical plant growers have many opportunities to find books of interest on Hawaii Island. We have more bookstores than the rest of the state put together, and our libraries serve us well, including the extensive botanical library at the Kona Outdoor Circle.

The Kailua-Kona Library was where I spotted the spectacular “Bamboo” by Susanne Lucas. It’s not large, but it would still be a great coffee table book because it’s so beautiful. Almost every page has exquisite color photography and many of the pictures are full page. The selection of illustrations is amazingly varied and well chosen, from vintage photography to mouth-watering pictures of bamboo-shoot meals. The book is unique in many ways. It integrates horticultural and botanical writing with a broader account of the cultural and social impact of bamboo. The appealing design of the book goes beyond the cover and pictures; the text is well written, providing plenty for everyone to learn, including many uncommon aspects of bamboo. There’s a fascinating section on the history of books about bamboo in English, beginning in London in 1868. Every important book is noted and placed in context. This incredibly useful information is not presented in any other book. The invasive potential of bamboo is duly noted, ending with this: “Neglected bamboo will certainly become problematic and in such circumstances, the appeal and merits of the plant will be lost.”

Another book with unique design and content is “The Hawaiian Survival Handbook” by Brother Noland. It has so much useful information that everyone will find something to benefit from. There are over 40 chapters in three main sections: Ocean Skills, Land Skills, and General Skills & Safety. The chapters include: How to Survive a Riptide or Undertow, How to Treat a Blister, How to Read the Island Weather, How to Be Safe on the Lava Fields, How to Guard Against Leptospirosis. The design of the book makes it feel like an old friend; it’s a small hardback with a cover that has the look and feel of strong canvas. Wild pigs are a scourge to agriculture and native plants, and we are their only predator

here. This book gets down to the nitty gritty of pig hunting, including the advice: "It's best to have at least three or four guys when you go out." Another bit of great safety advice is in the opihi section: "If you gotta watch waves, you shouldn't be picking opihi."

"Practical Folk Medicine of Hawaii" by Likeke McBride has been reprinted after being unavailable for many years. Petroglyph Press of Hilo originally published the book in 1975, and now they've reissued it with color photographs of the plants, an inspiring new forward by Kumu Dane Silva, and a wonderful updated Suggested Reading List. The book has two large sections: the plants and the ailments. The plants are common, such as shampoo ginger, coconut, sugar cane, aloe vera, and moa; and likewise the ailments are common: warts, sea urchin sting, headache, insomnia, colds, and diabetes. There are careful, well-illustrated directions for preparing the plants as medicine. Nothing about the book is intimidating and practicality is emphasized. Even the ubiquitous weed Spanish Needle is listed as a treatment for nine different ailments.

The University Press of Florida can be a great resource for Hawaii plant lovers because their plant suggestions are usually very applicable here. We may never get a book devoted to conifers in Hawaii, but we've now got the next best thing in "Landscaping with Conifers and Ginko in the Southeast" by Tom Cox and John Ruter. This book will make growing conifers in Hawaii much more interesting and fun. It's a great thing to have the heat-tolerant conifers pre-selected and presented in one attractive book.

The heart of the book is 215 pages of heat-tolerant conifers. The section on ginko is a wonderful bonus, since ginko isn't a true conifer. Although they are often seen in Asian-style gardens, conifers can enrich any kind of garden. The low-growing, prostrate conifers bring an unexpected and very eye-catching element. *Juniperus horizontalis* is a creeping juniper which is only eighteen inches tall, but spreads to twenty feet. There are several cultivars of this species, some with yellowish foliage and some with bluish foliage. Bluish foliage can be difficult to find in tropical plants, and it accents nicely the warmer foliage colors of plants like ti or croton.

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