

**Book Review: *Growing Hardy Orchids*
Moira Tarrant**



Growing Hardy Orchids by Philip Seaton, Phillip Cribb, Margaret Ramsay & John Haggard

Paperback 978-1-84246-175-4 £10

128pp published by Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

Publication of this book has been long anticipated as three of the authors, all of whom are renowned for expertise in their respective fields, are members of the Hardy Orchid Society (HOS). A number of other members known to us all for their skill as growers are listed in the acknowledgements. Intended by Kew as a companion volume to *Growing Orchids from Seed* by Philip Seaton and Margaret Ramsay 2005 and as an update for *Hardy Orchids; orchids for the garden and frost-free greenhouse* by Phillip Cribb and Christopher Bailes 1989, the current book is attractively presented and easy to dip into.

Using the same mix of photos and clear bold line drawings as its companion, it takes the reader through general issues such as habitat and conservation and provides greater detail on propagation by division and seed, general cultivation and pests and diseases. Four genera are then used to demonstrate differences in horticultural approach by showing their growth from seed to flowering plant. The final section provides an alphabetical directory of the important genera to be found in cultivation.

Providing an array of mouth-watering photos of a rich array of hardy orchids from around the globe is an excellent way to encourage growers to explore beyond the better-known European species, particularly when a wider range of plants is now readily available through the trade. The book also cleverly emphasises the choice that is available to growers both in where and how to grow their orchids. Successful growers can only ever tell us what has worked for them and where possible explain why. The authors readily acknowledge the need for readers to look further for more detailed advice and in this they are outstandingly generous to the HOS in their recommendation of the Society as a source of information, equipment and seed. The HOS also gets a glowing mention in the section on conservation.

The book is not, however, without its drawbacks. I am not sure what level of readership was envisaged; the language is, for the most part, simple and chatty and there is a two page glossary - "orchid language" which defines terms such as parasite and CITES. Nevertheless, description of *Listera* as being "recently included in the for-

merly holomycotrophic genus *Neottia* ... to form a monophyletic clade” might be beyond beginner growers. The order in which information is presented can provide a challenge as some information such as deflasking appears in the general section on glasshouse techniques and then again in the detailed section of raising four specific genera from seed to flowering. The moral seems to be to read right to the end so as not to lose sight of the plot.

My final concern is about level of editorial attention to detail. Several typos seem surprising in a book from an authoritative source. More immediately obvious is control of photo quality. In one or two cases the photos seem completely pointless: what is the purpose of a photo of a row of zip-top plastic bags? (The caption tells us that they contain micro propagated *Cypripedium* seedlings in a fridge). Given the quality of most of the photos within the directory of recommended genera and of pictures submitted to HOS photographic shows, it should have been possible to obtain an image of *Orchis purpurea* which is in focus. Perhaps the most unforgiveable pictorial clanger is among the photos of the authors on the back cover where that of John Hagger is not John at all but is Samuel Sprunger, the Swiss *Cypripedium* expert.

This book then is highly recommended as it is packed full of information and wisdom as one would expect from such knowledgeable authors. It is not, however, a stand-alone volume for someone seriously wishing to grow from seed to flowering. Maybe Kew expected too much when they tried to capture in a superficially populist volume what the four expert authors can each tell us about hardy orchids.