

Books

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Urban Flowers

Carolyn Dunster 192pp, 2017, Frances Lincoln, ISBN 9780711238626, RRP £20 RHS price £16

My Tiny Flower Garden

Matt Collins 160pp, 2017, Pavilion Books, ISBN 9781910904732, RRP £14.99

Urban Flowers is likely to become the city gardener's bible. This is a book for every town or small-plot gardener, to guide them through everything from soil type to plant choices, design to preserving flowers.

It is an easy read; jam-packed with photos (mainly by award-winning Jason Ingram) and interesting tips, colour combinations and mini projects, covering what you need to create, maintain and enjoy your urban space.

With simple but practical instructions, this book shows how to evaluate your existing space and create a simple but stylish design. The author gives ideas for filling those nooks and crannies, as well as some fabulous pot-planting in a range of containers to suit all budgets. Careful thought has gone into how the city gardener can make the most of every bit of space, as well as cheap and cheerful ways to achieve the desired look.

Once you have designed your perfect garden she tells you how to plant it, what colours work together and provides some fun projects to get you out there enjoying your garden. Her final flourish is a selection of

floral edible treats. An ideal choice for city gardeners.

My Tiny Flower Garden is the next in the series of the 'My Tiny...' range. Its author writes eloquently about inspirational small garden spaces, focusing on the flowers and some quirky containers.

The content is engaging and the author's travels have obviously influenced his knowledge of garden styles. The stories feel more about the people than the gardens but I like this: the book could easily be entitled 'Garden Stories' and perhaps then a better fit.

Though I may have been a little unnerved by the images at first, fashion photographer Roo Lewis has created something a bit different, and quite special. There is a vintage look, a depth of shadow to the photos that illustrate the writing style with a rose-tinted view of some wonderfully eccentric flower gardens. The stories and the images work well together as a whole, but I feel that the captions could have been expanded to give more detail.

The projects to make at home were a little

tenuous and I'm not sure the book really needed them. I would rather have heard more about the interesting antics of more contributors, and would be inspired to create my own flowery versions by using details from the photos, especially if some plant names had been included.

The difficulty in writing as part of a series of books is that you are already constrained by the overall 'theme' of the strand. I would like to hear more of the author's garden stories from across the globe in his next publication.

Urban Flowers is a colourful, plant-packed read for those new to urban gardening, while *My Tiny Flower Garden* would better suit a more experienced gardener looking for new inspiration from around the globe. Happily there is a place for both in my garden library. **Natalie Ashbee** is a writer and specialist researcher for BBC gardening programmes



How to Make a Wildflower Meadow

James Hewetson-Brown 256pp, 2016, Filbert Press, ISBN 9780993389238, RRP £20

When there is a plethora of wildflower gardening books already available, is there a need for yet another one?

This book is different in its pragmatic approach to creating meadows in garden settings of all types and sizes, as well as larger-scale public landscapes.

The author presents practical and detailed advice on site preparation, establishment methods, and management, and contains a varied range of case studies and projects undertaken both by himself and other people, together with

his own commentary on what has or has not been successful.

This book is primarily for people who would like a meadow to look good and be successful - not just gardeners, but anyone who is creating meadows in visible and highly used spaces.

The crucial focus here is on success and aesthetics, and the author is not a purist in his approach - the relentless focus on ecological purity

has been the downfall of much wildflower meadow making. Gardeners need to recognise that 'garden meadows' can be different from 'nature

conservation' meadows in that they can be flower-rich - 'pepped up', if you like - and not necessarily contain only native species. This book discusses all of these issues.

The discussion, however, comes some way into the book and many of the preceding examples are not of traditional wildflower meadows, but of hybrid 'pictorial meadows' that include non-native species. To avoid confusion it would have been useful to have this discussion right up front.

Richly illustrated with meadows in their flowering peak, this is a most usable book that should encourage people to try their hand at creating successful wildflower meadows. **Nigel Dunn** is Professor of Planting Design at the University of Sheffield, and an RHS Greening Grey Britain Ambassador

