

Throughout the years, there have been those that stand out as achievers in their fields of study. We are very fortunate to have two horticulture greats during our time - Dr. Allan M. Armitage and Dr. Michael Dirr. Both of them are professors at University of Georgia Athens. Dr. Dirr has recently retired from teaching but continues to provide some of the most highly regarded information on trees and shrubs available throughout the world. In addition to writing, he works at new plant development, in many genera, and if you are fortunate – you may find yourself listening to one of his great talks about the world of trees and shrubs. Dr. Armitage remains an honored professor of horticulture at the University of Georgia Athens, is a well published author, a world renowned plantsman, an interesting speaker, and on top of it all – an amusing and decent human being. While both of these gentlemen of horticulture have provided a high quality education to those attending the University of Georgia Athens - those of us who are not enrolled in that school can learn from the materials published, the talks given, and the gardens tended. So what makes these plantsmen worthy of our time and dollar investments? The extent of research, the ease in reading the findings, and the voiced opinions make the books and articles worthwhile. Not every plant is a good one, and I love the fact that both of them will tell you just that. Please - always make your own decisions on what to buy and plant. But having quality information laid out for you, is one great decision making tool in the garden bucket. Having it within easily accessible resources is invaluable. Let's get to the nitty-gritty. What are the resources gardeners should take advantage of?

If you are a learner that gleans more from listening or doing rather than reading, take advantage of offered classes and talks. We are fortunate to have very high quality garden centers that take education seriously. They know that the more gardeners learn, the greater the options available. Check out the class listings. If your favorite center doesn't have a website, be sure to get on the mailing list to have the information sent right to your door. Don't be afraid to ask for specific speakers that make you happy in your plant endeavors. And don't miss the great opportunities when they arise. One speaker in particular that was requested and will be brought in this year is Dr. Armitage. He will be in our area on May 17th to lead a garden walk at Northwind Perennial Farm and on May 18th at Hawk's View Golf Club

to present his ever lively view of the plant world. (Both of these establishments are just outside of Lake Geneva, WI - registration information can be found at the end of this article.) Having Dr. Armitage as a speaker in this area really points to the high level horticulture we practice. Don't wait to sign up for this, or any other presentation, or you will miss out - take advantage of all of the local offerings.

Frequently I am asked for a listing of books that are worthwhile to have in the home library, especially for the average gardener. Fortunately, or unfortunately, there is no such thing as an average gardener. It makes life in the world of horticulture very interesting. We all have very different spaces to work with and desires to achieve with plant choices bound only by our imaginations, plant availability, and of course - size of our disposable dollars. And when all of the constraints are put in their proper order we are, more often than not, left with more choices than space. So what does that do to our individual and collective needs for quality information? What information resources are the most valuable? Well, to start with it depends on what you are shopping for - trees, shrubs, annuals, or perennials. There are many books out there that contain great information, many with lovely pictures to delight the eyes. Although it is easy to find many used books, inexpensively, on-line or at book stores, be wary. If you are after historical information, the age of a book is only as important as you make it. If you are after the most current information on new cultivars and varieties, or on plant health recommendations, it is important to get the newest published version.

For printed materials on trees and shrubs, you can't go wrong with Manual of Woody Landscape Plants by Michael A. Dirr. There are other books that offer pretty pictures but often with less information. In fact Dirr has some really nice books out with lots of photos if you are really interested in the visual image rather than the information. Personally, I prefer the "Manual" as a guide in deciding what to grow. This book travels in the car with me for most of the year - I'm on my second copy which is falling apart from constant use. The information is presented in an easy to follow format, alphabetically organized by scientific name. And if you are unsure of the scientific name, there is a common name guide in the back to help you get where

you need to go. He also has specialized smaller books out on Hydrangeas and Viburnums for those of you with an undying and unfulfilled need to delve more deeply into those two plant genera. Both of them are great books with a good mix of photos and high quality info.

When looking at information on perennials, the book by Armitage, *Herbaceous Perennial Plants*, is a general perennial book that also lives in the car with me for most of the year. It is a substantial tome, quite worthy of riding shotgun, and will tell you how, where, when to grow most perennials found today. The presentation of information includes desirable sites, situations, and interesting growing quirks - often including plant origins as well as any amusing stories associated with it. When planning for the landscape, especially if you are using unfamiliar plant material, take a look at Armitage's *Garden Perennials – A Color Encyclopedia*. This volume doesn't discuss quite as many plants as the *Herbaceous* book but there are lots of photos offering an opportunity to see them in all of their full color glory. If you are looking for a book on native plants, Armitage has a lovely and informative book called *Armitage's Native Plants*. And guess what? If I have questions on nonperennials, I begin my search with *Armitage's Manual of Annuals, Biennials, and Half-Hardy Perennials*. For the annual realm, he has put together *Armitage's Garden Annuals – A Color Encyclopedia*. For those who love the color and textural interest annuals can bring to any landscape or garden, this book is an excellent planning tool.

Do any of these books have the market cornered on info? Not by any means. But I have found them to be the most extensive in plant information for growing conditions, propagation tips, and background information. I do not limit my information to these few books – where would be the fun in that? But, every year I look at which books will do the ride with me during the growing season and these are consistently at the top of the list. Yes – they are heavier than many, but worth the “uplifting” effort. There are some with more photos, there are some with longer write-ups per plant. But these give the most bang for the buck. Yes, both of the plantsmen/authors are currently from the south but in the scheme of the plant world, it doesn't matter. Their experience and extensive travels in the quest for horticulture knowledge has led them to areas well beyond their home territory. The plants they have researched are found from the coldest regions of the world to the hottest.

Don't miss out on the local events featuring Allan M. Armitage. Space is limited, call Northwind Perennial Farm at 262-248 8229 for more information or to register.