Book Review

Willows. The genus *Salix*. Christopher Newsholme. Paperback edition 2002 by Timber Press, Inc. 133 S.W. Second Avenue, Suite 450, Portland, OR 97204. \$19.95. 256 p., 65 color photos. ISBN 0-88192-565-9.

While the horticultural book market is inundated with spectacularly illustrated plant books on almost any topic, information on willows is hard to find. *Salix* is among the largest genera of woody plants, comprising some 400 species and more than 200 hybrids. Willows are also widely grown in many temperate landscapes, but most woody plant manuals offer no more than a casual glance at five to 10 species. The need is long overdue to address the genus with comprehensive information.

This reprint of the 1992 hardcover volume on the genus *Salix* represents the most complete horticultural book about willows. The book breaks with traditional limited use of *Salix* in the landscape—weeping willows along streams—and presents a unique insight into willows' life and their diversity, raising greater awareness and the possibility of utilization of many new species. It is notable that Mr. Newsholme had a first-hand exposure to a great selection of *Salix* species involving 12 years of fieldwork. It is apparent that the author spent many years searching the literature as the bibliography includes many of the original studies on *Salix* from the 19th and 20th centuries, bringing together information that had been widely scattered.

Introductory chapters focus on the history of *Salix* uses, its biology, and cultural requirements. These are followed by a few chapters covering species descriptions, arranged according to utilitarian principles, such as species for large parks and estates, for small gardens, rock gardens, and sink gardens. Details are given for the description of botanical characters of each species along with line drawings, species' origin, and evaluation of ornamental qualities. The index provides easy links to about 450 taxa arranged in alphabetical order.

While representing a comprehensive willow species reference, this book should be considered a compilation of descriptions from many sources, representing a collection of articles, rather than a critical treatment of the information. Here we would like to express some concerns.

NOMENCLATURE. Plant entry headings are rather confusing when both a cultivar name and a common name commence with capital letters and single quotation marks. Not all botanical synonyms throughout the text are bracketed as noted in the preface, creating some confusion. Taxonomical discrepancies occur throughout the book. Some names used here are now considered obsolete (for example, *Salix glaucophylloides* is the old synonym for *Salix myricoides* and should no longer be used). The existence of some taxa (for example, *Salix* 'Myricoides Hastata') is questionable. Misspelling of names (for example, *Salix apennina* is spelled here as *Salix appennina*, the species described by A. Skvortsov—this despite the author's reference to Skvortsov's original work, as noted in the bibliography). The author mentions that *Salix pierotii* (incorrectly spelled in the book as *Salix pierotti*) is

closely related to *Salix miyabeana*, which is not accurate; the two species are considered quite distant in scientific literature. The identification of some taxa is not correct as we have concluded from the descriptions and color plates (for example, *Salix chaenomeloides* is rather *Salix gracilistyla*). These are just a few examples.

While questionable and conflicting information occurs in this reference, the book is still much better than previous horticultural editions dedicated to *Salix*, such as *The Willows* by Warren-Wren (1972), where taxonomical confusion is even worse.

PHOTOGRAPHY. The identification of *Salix* has always been difficult due to morphological polymorphism, dioecy, and geographical variation. While this edition does not include a simplified key for species identification, color pictures to complement each description would be of greater practical assistance to horticulturists, rather than line drawings reflecting minute flower details of more importance to taxonomists. The image library here presents 55 species. Some color plates are inaccurate and depict other species than stated (for example, plate 37, *Salix humilis*).

CULTURAL INFORMATION. Written by an Englishman and based on the author's observations of willows in the specific climatic conditions of the U.K., cultural information and recommendations of plant selection may not be appropriate to many regions of North America and should be used with caution. No information is presented about plant hardiness that would help in areas other than the British Isles.

ORNAMENTAL QUALITIES. While the author's enthusiasm is inspirational, we would rather see a more critical and unbiased view of willows' ornamental characteristics. While describing many species as the "most spectacular," "extremely elegant," "exceptionally beautiful," it is difficult to discriminate among them, and a more conservative rating would be very helpful for plant selection. On the other hand, some of the author's comments are misleading. For example, *Salix fragilis* var. *bullata*, to our knowledge the most ornamental cultivar of crack willow with a globular shape, is recognized here as a "variety of no special merit," while *Salix fragilis* var. *decipiens*, common crack willow, quite a trivial plant, the author refers to as "distinctive... and deserving a place in parks or large gardens."

Newsholme's book is not an authoritative reference for professional botanists and growers, but could be useful as an inspiration for amateur gardeners and enthusiasts to appreciate the vast range of willow species. For *HortTechnology* readers, the nomenclatural information as presented is outdated and sometimes inaccurate. Due to the taxonomical difficulty of the genus *Salix*, such a study should be approached from a basis of scientific knowledge and vigorous critical research. The need remains for a scientific yet practical reference that presents not only a collection of descriptions, but a synthesis of information to help to stabilize *Salix*'s confusing nomenclature. Timber Press's effort to cover this group of plants by reprinting the old edition is appreciated. However, it may close the door of opportunity for significant new publications on *Salix* for many years, as the horticultural book market would probably not be able to accommodate more books on such a specialized topic.

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