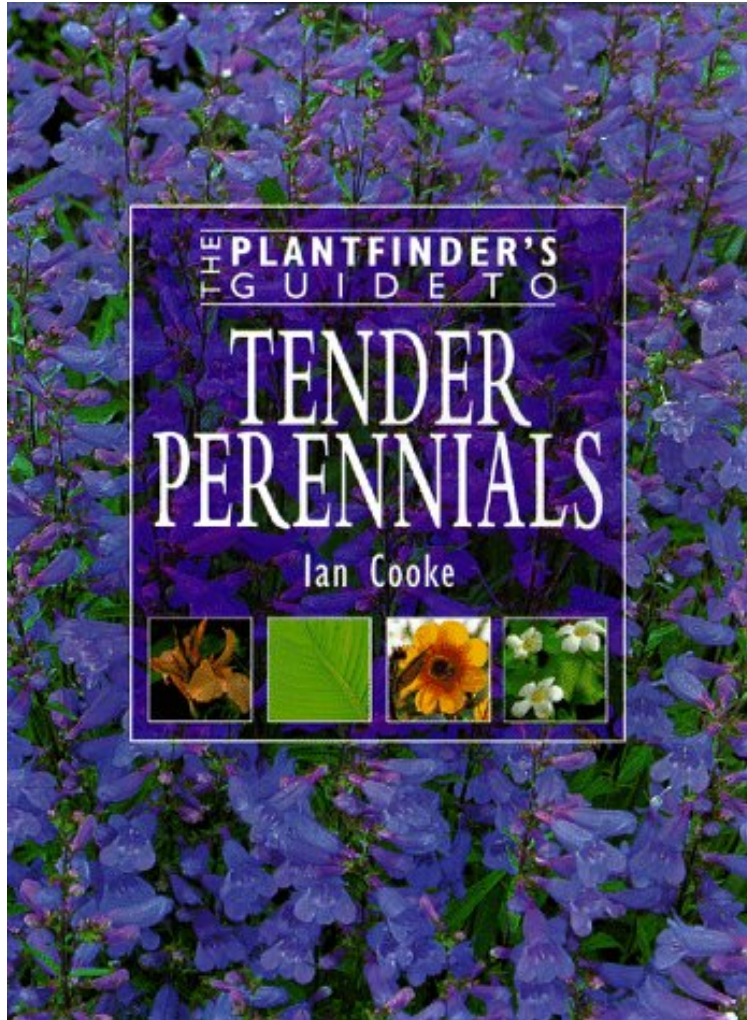


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Plantfinder's Guide to Tender Perennials

Ian Cooke

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#11722861 in Books Timber Press, Incorporated 1998-07-01 Original language: English PDF # 1 7.50 x .75 x 10.251, #File Name: 0881924504192 pages | File size: 78.Mb

Ian Cooke : Plantfinder's Guide to Tender Perennials before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Plantfinder's Guide to Tender Perennials:

10 of 12 people found the following review helpful. thinly Americanized, moderately useful specialty garden book By A Customer The second title in a new series of subject-oriented garden books, Tender Perennials is essentially a thinly "Americanized" British book. It includes a few paragraphs on U.S. Zones and conditions, 'translates' our Zone system into a ranking of tender perennials from "fully hardy" to "tender," and equates those ratings to our Zones 7 to 11 minimum temperatures, all without taking into account the effects of summer heat, humidity, and sunshine. I found the resulting hardiness translations uncomfortable: For example, Agastache 'Firebird' is rated as "almost hardy," making it supposedly hardy only to Zone 10, contrary to the experience of many Zone 6 gardeners! The text also does not reflect the much wider range of tender perennials already available in this country. Tender Perennials is, however, well laid

out and divided thoughtfully into four parts. After explaining the term "tender perennials" and providing some historical background, the author tackles plants in A-to-Z order with descriptions in short, concise language. This section occupies the bulk of the book - 90+ pages - and includes propagation information if techniques other than tip cuttings are required, plus a hardiness rating. Several genera are featured in detailed entries that include descriptions of individual cultivars: *Abutilon*, *Argyranthemum*, *Canna*, *Coleus*, *Diascia*, *Heliotropium*, *Osteospermum*, *Penstemon*, *Pelargonium*, *Salvia*, and *Verbena*. Part Three, Planting Schemes, includes chapters on using tender perennials in beds and borders, containers, conservatories, and so forth. Tropical plants are mainly consigned to Chapter 5, "The Exotic Look:" while Chapter 7 covers "The Mediterranean Garden:" which emphasizes foliage plants and gives closer attention to tree ferns and large palms. In this section of the book the photographs are outstanding. They include pictures of stunning mixed container plantings and examples of the type of bedding out with tender plants that has become so popular in our area in recent years. Color plans for various bedding out schemes are less successful: the undifferentiated blobs of color, while keyed to named plants, give no clue as to soil, lighting requirements, or physical attributes of the various plans. None of them is translated into an actual picture of a planting. Part Four covers propagation and cultivation, general care, and persistent problems in a nicely understandable fashion. The uneven quality of the photographs in this book was a disappointment, as was the choice of which genera to illustrate at all. Unfamiliar genera are only briefly discussed and not illustrated, while two-page spreads show unobtainable cultivars of *Argyranthemum*, *Heliotropium*, and *Diascia*. Many photos make it seem as if the plants shown will grow only in shade in the UK, and therefore are hopelessly out of sync with conditions on this continent. Not so! *Plectranthus* spp. are all shown in shady situations, but *P. argenteus* was used stunningly last summer in full sun next to concrete and macadam roads just a mile west of my house. I did enjoy using this book as a quick course on where to see tender perennials in the UK. After browsing the appendices, photo credits, and guides to gardens lists, which give primarily British sources and collections, I made up a plan for a trip. The author holds National Collections of both *Coleus* and *Canna*, and last September I visited his canna display garden, located in a warm corner of an enclosed, brick-walled garden at Nottingham University. It was immediately clear that a wealth of cannas have become available since the book was photographed and written. His collection included many new and interesting forms. The *coleus* collection, under glass and held privately by the Cookes, was chiefly wife Joy's occupation and consisted of beautiful, wellgrown specimens. It was impossible to see even half of the sites mentioned, but that only leaves those delights for next year.

These tender and half-hardy plants offer stunning colors and exuberant foliage for the adventurous gardener.

From Publishers Weekly British horticulturist Cooke defines his subject as "any perennial plant that will grow outside successfully in temperate climates during the summer months, but requires some winter protection." In America we call many of these plants annuals except in such warm areas as Florida or Southern California where they survive the winter naturally. Cooke writes briefly of how these plants, including *argyranthemums* (marguerite daisies), *coleus*, dahlias and *impatiens*, were introduced to European gardens in the 19th century when the elaborate designs composed of bedding plants were popular. An alphabetical directory provides an extensive compilation of tender perennials with descriptions, growth characteristics, native habitat and hardiness. Cooke rejects the common zone designations of plant hardiness in favor of his own, which classifies plants in five categories from fully hardy to tender. The chapter offering advice on planting schemes with suggestions for combining specific plants and colors will be useful for all gardeners, but only readers in warmer climates will be able to apply his approaches to exotic, tropical or Mediterranean gardens. Public gardens and nursery source listings are mainly English, with a smattering of U.S. sources. Many of the listed plants are not readily available in this country, further reducing the practicality of this handsomely illustrated volume for U.S. readers. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc. From the Author Ian Cooke has worked in professional horticulture for 28 years holding positions at Reading University, The National Trust and now Nottingham University as Manager of the Grounds.