

Further Reading

1) Naturalistic Planting

This covers approaches to planting which aim at evoking nature, supporting biodiversity and involving some level of ecological functioning. Older first.

The Wild Garden

William Robinson, with new chapters by Rick Darke in Timber Press edition

The book that started us all off! In 1871. Unfortunately, Robinson had very little idea of what he was doing, and wrote this book as a journalistic polemic more than a practical how-to guide. So it is really only of historical interest (a polite way of saying it is actually pretty useless), but this reprint includes an essay by Rick Darke which is worth reading.

Perennials and Their Garden Habitats

Richard Hansen and Friedrich Stahl

Translated from the Germany, this outlines the approach used for planting design in Germany which was developed in Bavaria from the 1950s onwards. It is conceptually very different to the way things are done in the English-speaking world. Essential reading for anyone wanting to get their head around the plant community based approach for different habitats which has been fundamentally important in Germany. Even if you live in a totally different climate zone with a different flora, this should be something you look at if you are at all interested in developing functioning plant mixtures. 1993.

The New Perennial Garden

Noel Kingsbury

A pioneering book, looking at creating communities of plants for different habitats, it has been much used on college design courses. Its approach has been much emulated and the book has perhaps long since served its purpose. The tables in the back were always admired though – lots of information on a wide range of perennials in just a few pages, so probably still worth grabbing if you see it second-hand. One day I will have to update it!
1996

Some Branch against the Sky

Geoffrey Dutton

This is an exceptional book about a garden on the edge – high up in the Scottish Highlands. Fantastically informative, poetically written, this is a unique book as much about managing and sculpting a wild landscape as conventional 'garden making'. I fear not enough people know it.
1997

On the Wild Side

Keith Wiley

Keith, one of Britain's most distinctive, indeed idiosyncratic, garden makers, outlines his philosophy. It's not about ecological planting as such, but how to look at wild plant communities and take that artistic vision and develop something which evokes it. Very much about high levels of contrast and exuberant colour. A genuinely unique vision.
2004

The Dynamic Landscape, Design, Ecology and Management of Naturalistic Urban Planting

Edited by Nigel Dunnett and James Hitchmough

As you may gather from the title, this is an academic collection of essays, published in 2004, which feels like a long time ago now. Many of the essays are still relevant though, and this is

certainly a useful book for professionals or those involved with urban issues. Given that messrs. Dunnett and Hitchmough have such a high profile, yet have written very little (too damn busy!) this is an important insight into their philosophy.

Plant-driven Design, Creating gardens that honour plants, place and spirit

Scott Ogden and Lauren Springer Ogden

A clarion call for more use of plants in garden and landscape design, as well as being a very practical guide. Written from Colorado, its emphasis is very different to that of most garden books written in moister climates. Much useful material on climate and the forms plants take in drier habitats. The authors have a massive combined knowledge. Some very useful lists. 2008

Staudenmischpflanzungen

Axel Heinrich and Uwe Messer

I have avoided anything else in German, but this at least has so many plant lists that you can probably make sense of it, with little language. It covers the incredibly important area of mixed plantings which the Germans, and the Swiss and the Czechs and others are developing apace, but which have not made any headway in the English-speaking world yet.

This the full-blown book, from Ulmer Verlag, but there is a little booklet, consisting mostly of plant lists, with the same title, costing only €6.50, which you can get from aid: www.aid.de/inhalt/staudenmischpflanzungen-1409.html

The Living Landscape, Designing for beauty and biodiversity in the home garden.

Rick Darke and Doug Tallamy

Aimed at readers in the North American east and Midwest. A clear articulation of the different habitats a garden has for wildlife. Another way of describing what this book does is to answer the question "how do I use American natives?". Its very well-illustrated, perhaps at the expense of the kind of diagrams and infographics that might do a better job of explaining the subject matter. A plant directory covers the ecological functioning of a wide range of species, i.e. what's going to come and eat it. 2014

Cultivating Chaos, How to enrich landscapes with self-seeding plants

Reif, J., Kress, C. & Becker, J.

How to make use of the spontaneous self-seeding of shorter-lived species. Very much an introduction to the topic, and does not take on board just how problematic this can be if things go too well! Pretty much the only book on the subject at the moment. 2015

Planting in a Post-Wild World

Thomas Rainer and Claudia West

This looks at wild plant communities and how to emulate them, very much from the perspective of the landscape designer, for which profession this has been a genuinely ground-breaking book. Particularly good at analysing the visual structure of natural plant communities, which those brought up on conventional planting always find hard to read. Not so much on plants and actually building plant communities, so the home gardener might find some of this hard to relate to. 2015

Garden Revolution, How our landscapes can be a source of environmental change

Larry Weaner and Thomas Chistopher

A perfect match for the above, as it functions as a working out of much of its more theoretical thinking. Feels like a lifetime's experience has gone into this book. Full of insight into site analysis, design and managing semi-natural plant communities. Very much focussed on north-east USA, but the principles would be the same anywhere. 2016

Planting – A New Perspective

Kingsbury and Oudolf

Here we look at the various, more complex, and in many ways, more naturalistic, ways in which Piet has combined plants since around 2000. Also included is work that came out of my doctoral research, on long-term plant performance. A very detailed tabulated plant directory at the back provides information on performance as well as other data – a lot of information you won't find elsewhere. 2013

Naturalistic Planting Design The Essential Guide: How to Design High-Impact, Low-Input Gardens

Nigel Dunnett

A comprehensive overview for gardeners at all scales from the leading practitioner! Probably the best one out there currently.

2019

Sowing Beauty: Designing Flowering Meadows from Seed

James Hitchmough

2017

Although aimed primarily at those working with seed mixes, it includes much good general discussion of horticultural ecology.

2) Plant Ecology

Plant Strategies, Vegetation Processes, and Ecosystem Properties

J. Philip Grime

An invaluable guide to plant survival strategies in nature, and the key source for understanding the very useful Competitor, Stress-tolerant, Ruderal (CSR) theory. Surprisingly readable. A key text for understanding plants. Unfortunately out of print and very expensive second-hand.