

**Book Review** HPS/MAG Member, Stephanie Cohen

*"Herbaceous Perennial Plants- A Treatise on their Identification, Culture, and Garden Attributes" by Dr. Allan Armitage, Stipes Publishing 2020 Fourth Edition*

In the late seventies I was a student studying Horticulture and I had decided I wanted to make my specialty perennial plants. This was a true challenge as there was not one book that included everything and those that did were written by British authors. This was very disconcerting as many of the plants were not grown in our country, the cultivars were not available, and even the soil mixes and fertilizers were not available. Sometimes they would hire an American garden author to add our zones and, if we were lucky, change basic information to one size fits all. I was not a happy gardener!

Along came the first Armitage book and I was lucky enough to discover my new favorite garden author. Through the years Dr. Armitage kept adding, deleting and improving each edition. He comments how some plants have gained in popularity and others are barely sold in nurseries or advertised in catalogs. I like the fact, that he updates each edition. Another thing I love about this current revision and prior versions, is that he adds new species that may have become popular and when we begin to drown in cultivars, he separates them according to

color and size. For those genera that are overwhelming such as Hosta or Daylilies, he tells you to contact their societies for additional information, and he lists the award winners each year in each category. For those of you who follow trends it is plain to see how some plants that barely took up a page in the original edition have morphed into five or more pages.

The other change that is very evident is the variety of native plants that are now included, as well as all their cultivars. He has definitely added additional grasses. I like the fact that he tells you their defects, as well as their attributes. He ran the University of Georgia Trial Gardens until he retired. I always felt that he was able to present gardeners with better descriptions of the plants, info on growth habits, and other cultural information because he saw the plants growing and had data on lots of new cultivars right away before even professionals and home gardeners were aware of these plants.

It is a true reference book at 1,091 pages long and that is impressive. For those of you who don't do much exercising, just carry the book from room to room for a few days and it will certainly be the equivalent of a light workout. Last but not least, as you read the book you will notice Dr. Armitage's wry sense of humor. In between facts and comments, he interjects stories and really funny comments. For instance, in discussing,

the many new cultivars of lavender he writes about "the difficulty in telling them apart and it requires a degree in lavendology, and the descriptions require a degree in creativity". Comments like this will make gardeners truly chuckle!

This is bound to become one of your favorite references as it has become one of mine.

***Stephanie Cohen, "The Perennial Diva"  
Fellow and Hall of Fame Honoree, Garden  
Communicators of America***