

Our top 10 gardening books for Christmas

The garden shelves in the bookstores are heaving with books about allotment and kitchen gardening this Christmas but horticultural heavyweights from home and abroad are the pick of the crop, says Tim Richardson.

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A Genius for Place: American Landscapes of the Country Place Era by Robin Karson (University of Massachusetts Press, £46.95)

The most important book on American gardens for a decade at least, this giant tome spans the first 40 years of the 20th century. This was the so-called "country place" era, when magnates such as FA Seiberling, founder of the Goodyear tyre company, commissioned magnificent Italianate or Tudor Revival



The Gardens at Kew by Allen Paterson (Frances Lincoln, £25)

houses. In Seiberling's case it was Stan Hywet, outside Akron in Ohio, where he and his wife hosted "Shakespearean" evenings (Mrs Seiberling usually came as Cleopatra). The book focuses on seven gardens – including Dumbarton Oaks, Naumkeag and Winterthur – with chapters that tell us as much about their exacting clients as about the designers and their style. Names such as Warren Manning and Charles Platt may be unfamiliar in Britain, but one is left in no doubt as to their talent and importance, while Ellen Biddle Shipman emerges as the nearest America had to a Gertrude Jekyll. There is a rewarding section on the ecological, prairie style of Danish-born Chicagoan Jens Jensen from the Twenties, who specialised in wild flower meadows. Superlative black-and-white photographs by Carol Betsch, taken in the 1990s, already have a classic look about them.

The Bedside Book of the Garden by Dr D. G. Hessayon (Expert Books, £12.99)

Every gardener will find things of interest in this packed, varied compendium of garden history, lore and little-known facts – the latest offering from the mysterious yet prolific Dr Hessayon, who hardly ever appears in public. The publishers claim that "one in every two families in Britain has at least one" of the good doctor's books on their shelves, which seems extraordinary, even if 50 million have been sold – but nevertheless this would be a good starting point if you are a member of the population currently Dr Hessayon-free. And if you know someone who is, at £12.99 this is the keenest-priced garden gift book out there this Christmas.