

BOOK REVIEW – “KITCHEN GARDEN EXPERTS”

Author: Cinead McTernan, Photographer: Jason Ingram. Published by Frances Lincoln Ltd in 2014. ISBN: 978-0-7112-3496-3. Foreword by Raymond Blanc. Price: £12.11 on Amazon, including delivery.



This is a most amazing and delightful book which will appeal to two separate audiences. Twenty celebrated chefs divulge some of their secret recipes. Twenty head gardeners divulge some of their secrets of how to cultivate fruit and vegetables. The chefs are located in 20 top restaurants in England, Scotland and Wales. A quote from the book is: “it appears that these chefs have thrown away the rule book – with truly exciting results”. I have a bright idea – the next time you win the National Lottery go on a gastronomic tour of these 20 restaurants and sample their wares. It would be a once-in-a-lifetime unforgettable experience. Usually two recipes are given by each chef so be sure to ask for those as well as other gourmet dishes. Weigh yourself before and after the tour and blame the chefs for the increase in weight!

Whilst you are waiting to win the lottery you could try out the recipes in the safety of your own kitchen. Such as “Assiette Anne-Marie” from Raymond Blanc of “Le Manoir aux Quat’Saisons” who has also provided a foreword to the book. Each restaurant is described and the grower and chef are given a personal profile. The book has an author, Cinead McTernan, but equal prominence is given to the photographer Jason Ingram who has visited the 20 kitchen gardens and restaurants and taken the most delightful shots of gardens, restaurants, vegetables, the dish on the plate and more. Indeed, it is the photographs which make this a very good book for the coffee table.

But what I personally like the most about the book is the grower’s “Kitchen Garden Secrets”. I am always looking out for good ideas for growing fruit and vegetables, and this book has growing tips in spades. I carefully noted down no less than 52 tips to improve my gardening methods and gardening knowledge. Some of the vegetables were new to me, so I must try out Oca (a tuber from South America), Achocha (from South America), Cima di Rapa (a form of broccoli from Italy), Brakali Apollo (a Chinese broccoli), Broccolini (a hybrid of sprouting broccoli and Chinese Kai-lan broccoli), Telephone (an early summer pea from Italy), Cavalo Nero (a broccoli from Italy to be eaten after it has bolted and just before it flowers), Chervil root, Agretti (“beard of the monk” or “saltwort” which is like samphire), Red Orach, Akajiso and Shiso (Japanese varieties of Perilla), Golden Frills (a Chinese heritage mustard green) and many more. Several tips were new to me, such as: picking pears before they are ripe and leaving them in a cool dry store to develop; do not pre-water drills for radishes in order to encourage longer roots; wait until weed seeds germinate before sowing seeds outdoors; wild rocket is a perennial as are chillies; Fat Hen (a problem weed I have) is better than cultivated spinach; tie in the first side shoot of tomato plants to produce two productive plants and, finally, cut back parsley at the end of the season then grow it in pots in the greenhouse. What a wealth of advice! What a treasure of a book!

The author and the photographer have done very well and they have been greatly helped by the publisher who has provided excellent support. The book is highly recommended for food-lovers and growers. An ideal present for friends and family – and for yourself!

Mike Mason