

Guide to Cultivated Plants

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Guide to Cultivated Plants, 496 pp, £ 95.00/US \$ 190.00/€ 150.00 edited by A.T.G. Elzebroek and K. Wind (CAB International, Wallingford, Oxfordshire, UK), is intended as a standard reference text for students, extension workers, horticulturists, (university) teachers, and even farmers, as indicated by the publisher. However, it will also be useful for anyone interested in plants that have been used for long time periods in agriculture. It will serve as a great source for details on the 346 crop species described in the book. Of these, 180 are described in more detail (Fig. 1).

Instead of alphabetical order, the crops are presented in chapters that bring together plants by crop use, that is, beverages, edible fruits and nuts, elastomers, fibers, forages, oil crops, protein crops, spices, starch crops, sugar crops, and vegetables. The range of crops covered includes temperate, Mediterranean, and tropical climates. As noted in the foreword, this is not the first book on this subject and will not be the last, but the way in which the contents have been outlined is very useful to readers and has some unique features. It is not a simple description but combines various aspects about a plant species or group of plants. Also, it has great pictures and drawings of the described crops. Very often not only is a detail of the crop species pictured, but the plant in its “agricultural environment” is also shown.

One highlight is the description of the historical aspects of a crop, including its origin and spread. This information is very valuable, especially for teaching, because it helps to put the development of crop use into historical perspective. The historical paragraph is then followed by a botanical description, the use, ecology, and agronomy described in a

more general way. In the more detailed part, the descriptions of the individual plants within the particular group follow. The way in which the contents are presented makes it easy for the reader to find the interesting parts in each

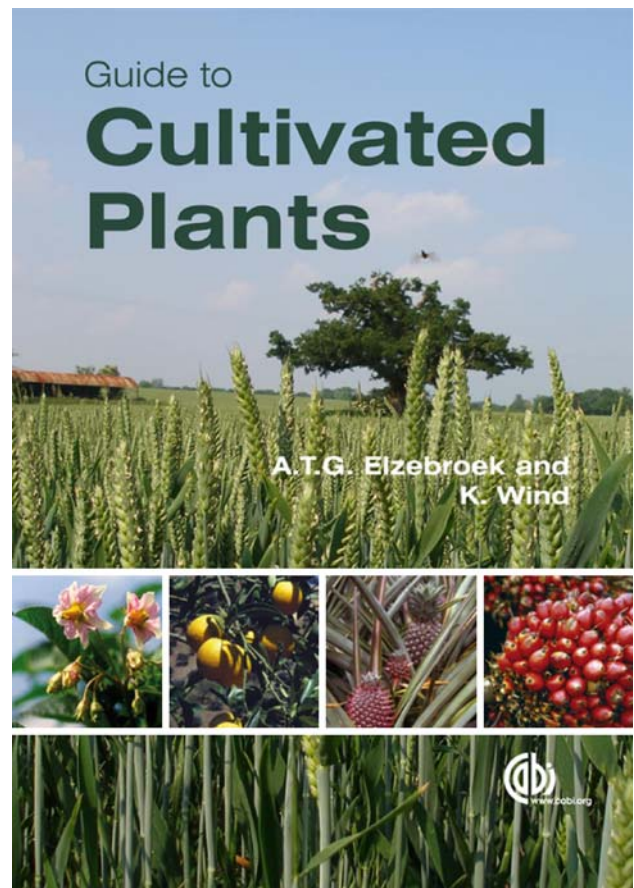


Fig. 1 Cover of *Guide to Cultivate Plants*

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chapter. For each smaller group of plants, the common and scientific names are listed at the beginning of the chapter, followed by the description of the individual crop.

One thing I found a bit out of place is the chapter on mushrooms. The authors point out correctly that although mushrooms cannot be classified as “cultivated plants,” they are nevertheless important enough to mention. However, I would have placed them separately at the end and not within the chapter on vegetables.

In the index I found it very helpful that there are two alphabetical lists of plant names, one with the scientific name first and one with the common name first. This is extremely helpful for finding specific plant species.

Overall, the book is highly recommended if one is willing to pay its price. The quality is very good and the approximately 500 pages are worth purchasing for one’s bookshelf because browsing through the book is very interesting.