

“Natural Companions The Garden Lover’s Guide to Plant Combinations” by Ken Druse

I was first introduced to Ken Druse through a book I bought of his called *The Natural Garden*. I was very impressed by his plant knowledge and the selections of plants and planting schemes that he chose for the photographs he included in his books. He continued on with the same expertise in producing *The Natural Shade Garden* and *The Natural Habitat Garden*, which I own. There are three other books he has written but I have not read these. In his newest book he has used an artist named Ellen Hoverkamp who scans groupings of plants against a black background to give us a stunning visual experience reminiscent of the historical botanical illustrations. Ken picked out the plants he wanted to be grouped together for each composition and Ellen arranged them artistically to show them at their best. There are 200 pictures in total. Along with each photo there is a caption and a brief description of how the plants in that particular grouping are related, be it by colour palette, plant family, fragrance, butterfly attractor, etc. The captions that go along with each grouping have very catchy names like 'It's All Greek to Me' for a section on botanical Latin, 'Made in the Shade' for a section on shade-tolerant plants, 'It Ain't Over 'Til It's Over' for a section on fall colour and fruit, 'Hue Do You Love?' for a section on colour and 'Good Vibrations' for a section on hummingbirds with facts about them including what plants they are attracted to. The book helps inspire you to come up with some great ideas of your own for putting together planting schemes. One hint he gives is to gather flowers and foliage from around your garden in a bouquet to visualize a future planting. This will help when you want to move plants around and give you an idea about what to buy to finish off a composition. Scattered throughout are also hints on propagation, colour theory, invasive species, taxonomy, hardiness regions and much more.

The last part of the book contains an appendix with an extensive list of edible flowers describing their flavour and what uses they may have in your kitchen. There is also a short list of some flowers and what they have historically signified, mostly some type of love. Enjoy!

Sharon Lawson

PS: Just a note that in this book there is the very odd mistake as to the labelling of plants in a picture. But 99.9% of it is correct. Also at one point "pesticides or herbicides" is mentioned. I find this is a very common mistake. ALL HERBICIDES ARE PESTICIDES, so only the term pesticides is needed.