

A book edited and introduced by Jim Archibald:

Rock Gardens by Wilhelm Schacht

Universe Books, New York, 1981 ISBN 10: 0906670195 / ISBN 13: 9780906670194

Wilhelm Schacht is known as the legendary director of the superb alpine garden of the botanical garden in Munich.

ROCK GARDENS

Wilhelm Schacht

Edited and with an Introduction by Jim Archibald

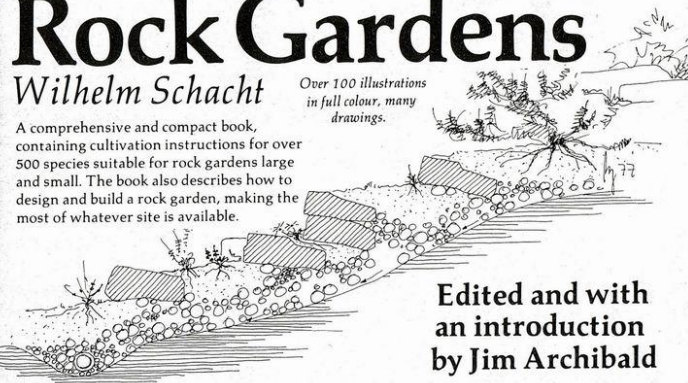


Rock Gardens

Wilhelm Schacht

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Introduction by Jim Archibald

Twenty years ago, in 1961, Wilhelm Schacht gave a superbly illustrated talk about rare alpine plants to the Third International Rock Garden Plant Conference in Edinburgh. I was then a student at Edinburgh and found it more to my inclination to detach myself from studies in English Literature and attend this and other lectures on rock garden plants—a course which I have adopted ever since. There were only a few overseas delegates at this conference but they included such great names of the past as Raymond Ruffier-Lanche from France, Carl Worth from the United States and Hubert Martin from Austria. Of these, Wilhelm Schacht alone still survives, like a truly indestructible alpine, enjoying his active retirement among the hills of Bavaria.

In 1981, I find myself speaking to the fifth international conference on a similar subject. In the intervening years, I have been able to see many of the world's alpine plants in their homes and have tried to cultivate some of them myself. These years have also seen the interest in these plants grow enormously. In 1981, there will be hundreds of delegates arriving in England from the rest of Europe, North America, Australia, New Zealand and Japan. This increasingly international aspect of rock gardening is singularly appropriate. The true alpine plants make a mockery of man's political boundaries. Their homes, the great mountain ranges of the world, have always created barriers to the movement of mankind and have often become adopted as the frontiers between nations. These

mountain plants not only transcend such boundaries but deride man's inability to conquer their stronghold. They are among the few successful colonists of some of the world's last wild places and have been virtually uninfluenced by the crimes, conquests and endeavours of humanity.

Apart from the obvious fact that these little plants are unrivalled in their suitability to the small garden of today, it may be their aura of hardy independence that fascinates so many modern gardeners, engulfed by the technology of mankind. More than any other form of gardening, growing alpinists brings us close to plants which have conquered these wild, inhospitable places and, by involving ourselves with them, perhaps we feel that we can make some atavistic association with nature at its most inimical. Whether it is because they appeal to the escapist in us or simply fit in with a practical, present-day attitude, they seem to be plants with a future in gardens. It is surprising, therefore, that, although many excellent specialist monographs have appeared recently, there is almost no sound, up-to-date, general book on the subject.

It is appropriate that the English edition of a book by such a respected alpine gardener as Wilhelm Schacht should appear in the year of an international conference on the subject. When I first read the new German edition, I was impressed both with the comprehensive scope of so small a book and with the effort and good judgement shown in the inclusion of the best

new garden varieties and such recent introductions as seem likely to establish themselves in gardens. Above all, great trouble had been taken in putting the names of the plants in line with modern taxonomy. It is, in these ways, a book of the next decade rather than of the past. In helping to prepare this English edition, I have tried to continue this responsible attitude. An enormous amount of recent botanical work has involved rock-garden plants. Even the two years since the publication of the German edition have seen the completion of the *Flora Europaea*, Bean's *Trees and Shrubs* and a revision of *Rhododendron*. As far as it seems relevant, while tempering all decisions with a degree of discretion, these and other significant botanical works have all been taken into account to produce what I believe is the most up-to-date publication available to rock gardeners. This is, in itself, by no means a virtue but, if someone is going to learn a new name, it may as well be the currently acceptable one, which is likely to be adopted for many years to come. This is especially important if the gardener is going to progress to reading the publications and seed-exchange lists of the alpine-gardening societies or the catalogues of informed, specialist nurserymen. I am all too aware, of course, that the use of these Latin names can be a great deterrent to those becoming interested in rock plants. There is no way to avoid this as they constitute the only international language. The use of botanical terms, however, has been avoided almost entirely. For example, 'variety' has been

used not only when referring to a correctly described botanical variety but also where 'cultivar' would be more accurate, and 'race' has been used instead of 'taxon'. Little is lost by this policy and much may be gained by not subjecting the new alpine gardener to what is all too often pretentious, pseudo-scientific jargon.

Wilhelm Schacht originally wrote this book for German-speaking gardeners in the continental climate of central Europe, whereas English-speaking gardeners range throughout the world. His treatment of the broad concepts and methods of rock gardening, in the earlier part of this book, is sufficiently general to stand unqualified. This covers most circumstances that the alpine-grower may garden in, provided that a measure of common-sense is used, such as providing more drainage in wetter climates, more shade in hotter summers and above all avoiding plants which are obviously unsuited to the climate and soil, when selecting material for general planting. His opinions, at the same time, can be individual enough to be stimulating. I read with some pleasure of the good, rich soil he recommends for many alpine. Some British enthusiasts, brought up on the starvation diet of Farrer's artificial moraines and screes, may regard this with horror, but I have always considered my success in cultivating such plants as *Corydalis cashmeriana* and *Calceolaria*

darwinii has been due to giving them a considerable amount of feeding. It is good to find such an authoritative ally as Herr Schacht.

In attempting to internationalize the English edition, I have added a great many plants, which are important to gardeners in such cool, wet climates as the north of Britain and the Pacific coast of North America as well as many for gardeners in more temperate areas, such as western Britain, the milder parts of the USA and much of New Zealand. To try to satisfy everyone is to court disaster. Any compact book claiming to deal with such a wide-ranging subject is inevitably an easy prey to critics, who can seize on its omissions, irrelevancies and unsuitabilities to their own particular gardening circumstances. I hope that most readers will regard it with a more positive attitude and see it not only as a small book, which can stand on its own as sufficiently sound, modern and reasonably comprehensive to be the only book about alpine plants which many gardeners may ever need, but also as a book which opens doors into the more consuming, specialist aspects of this subject. If its fault is that it tries to compress too much into a small space, this is the characteristic of alpine plants themselves, as well as being one of the more infuriating and pleasurable pitfalls of rock gardening as a whole.