

Alpines: An Essential Guide by Michael Mitchell, published by The Crowood Press, £19.95. ISBN 9781847972958

Hands-on advice from the nursery

Michael Mitchell, the author of this book, will be known to many members of the Alpine Garden Society as the proprietor of Slack Top Alpine Nursery, which is perched 282m (925ft) above sea level on a north-facing slope near Hebden Bridge in the Yorkshire Pennines.

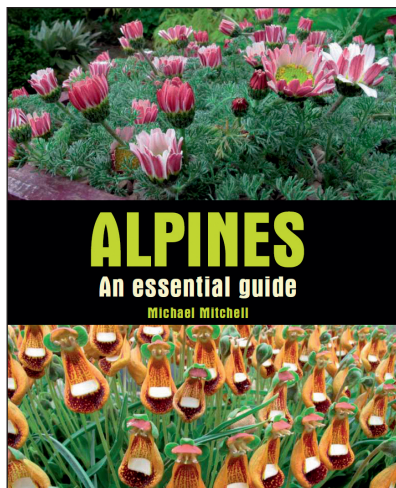
After studying horticulture at college, Michael started the nursery in 1986 at the age of just 21.

He was, at that time, an all too rare being: a young person with an enthusiasm for alpines who is prepared to make a significant contribution to promoting a wider interest in them.

In the intervening years he has amassed a great deal of experience in propagating and cultivating the alpine and woodland plants in which he specialises. The aim of this book is to pass on that experience and to convince gardeners that these plants are not difficult to grow.

It must be said that this isn't a book for the experienced grower of alpines, but that is not a criticism. Indeed the fact that it could be described as a 'beginner's guide' makes it very welcome.

The AGS relies on people with a new-found interest in alpines to provide a supply of new members, and any volume that makes this hobby appealing and accessible will inevitably play a part in this process. Experienced growers



of alpines can easily forget that at one point in the past, they too knew nothing about these wonderful plants.

The book can be divided into two sections. In the first, an opening chapter offers a basic introduction to alpines. It is followed by two chapters on the different ways in which they can be grown, split into traditional and contemporary settings. There are also chapters on planting and maintenance,



Michael Mitchell and his wife Allison at Slack Top Alpine Nursery

propagation, and pests and diseases. All of these are clearly written, well presented and packed with sound practical advice.

The second part of the book is dedicated to an A-Z guide covering around 180 species and varieties. While the cultivation advice is excellent, this section is let down by the quality of the photographs, many of which are too small to give any impression of a plant's habit or character or to assist in identification. Others are too dark and some are blurred.

The book ends with a table of flowering times for each plant, which takes up ten

pages but could so easily have been dealt with in three or four, freeing space to improve the photographic content in the plant guide. It would be worthwhile addressing this if the book goes into a second edition.

Having said that, I would recommend this book to anyone who is in the process of learning how to grow alpiners.

John Fitzpatrick

➔ *Alpiners: An Essential Guide* is available at an AGS members' discounted price of £14.99. To order please call 01386 554790 or visit the AGS bookshop at www.alpinegardensociety.net