There is a need for a reference guide to readily available landscape plants for gardens in Hawai‘i. This publication provides a photographic guide with brief descriptions of over five hundred tropical plants useful for home landscaping. Basic information relative to cultural requirements and physical characteristics is included. It is hoped that this guide will also be helpful to the student, professional members of the “Green Industry,” those in other tropical areas outside of Hawai‘i, and to all those interested in tropical plants.

Plant Names

The nomenclature of many tropical plant groups is under constant taxonomic study, resulting in corrective name changes. Scientific names used in this publication are primarily those appearing in the Bishop Museum’s *In Gardens of Hawai‘i* project. Other taxonomic authority was provided by *Hortus Third*, 1976 (Macmillan Publishing Co.), *The Plant Book*, by Mabberley, 1990 (Cambridge University Press) and, for native Hawaiian plants, the *Manual of the Flowering Plants of Hawai‘i* by Wagner, Herbst, and Sohmer, 1990 (Bishop Museum Press). Every effort has been made to obtain the most current plant name information. Any errors are the sole responsibility of the authors.

Plants often have many common names throughout the world, which can lead to confusion. An attempt was made to select those most commonly used in Hawai‘i and to indicate Hawaiian names where available. For a few species, no common names were found in the literature. We have taken the liberty of suggesting names in these cases.

Plant Selection

Here are some helpful guidelines for the selection of the best plants for your home landscape:

1. Determine the function of the desired plant in your garden, such as a screen, shade tree, or focal point (specimen).
2. Determine the desired characteristics the plant or plants should have, such as height, shape, or flower color.
3. Determine your garden’s environmental characteristics, such as rainfall, amount of sunshine, wind exposure, salt air exposure, and soil type.
4. Using this plant guide, match the environmental characteristics with the plant requirements. This will allow you to select and group your plants to create a successful low-maintenance garden tailored to your needs and taste.

Plant Size and Use

The plants in this guide have been grouped by type (such as trees and shrubs) and size for the convenience of the reader. The suggested plant heights are our best estimates of useful sizes under average local conditions and within the life expectancy of the garden. Keep in mind, however, that the growth rate and size of a specific plant can vary with location (owing to variations in rainfall, temperature, soil type, etc.) and, especially, the care provided. Appendices at the end of this guide summarize seven groups of plants of special interest to the gardener. There is also a list of suggested supplemental reading that will enhance the gardener’s knowledge of tropical plants. Three groups of plants have been omitted due to space constraints and the fact that ample written information is available from other sources. These are orchids, plants for water gardens, and turf grasses. Publications dealing with these subjects are in the suggested supplemental reading list.

A Word to the Wise Gardener

Plants contain a great variety of chemical and physical properties that may affect their selection for garden use. Many of these have been refined by man to make medicines, dyes, fabrics, and a host of familiar useful products. But some have thorns or irritating hairs, while others produce substances that may cause skin irritations, illness, or fatal poisoning if touched, inhaled, or ingested. Some are more virulent than others.

Susceptibility and reactions vary from one person to another and in accordance with exposure. They are significantly greater in children. All are rendered harmless if recognized and treated with respect and intelligence much as one would, for example, avoid contact with sharp knives, a hot stove, or the claws of an angry cat. A practical rule of thumb is: If you don’t know what it is, don’t smell it, don’t pick it, and above all, don’t chew or eat it. Watch the kids. They have been known to chew—even swallow—flowers, leaves, or fruits while playing house or having a tea party, with disastrous results. The list of recommended reading includes sources of information on this subject.

Those plants in the text that may involve one or
more potential problems are given a letter to the right of the common name to indicate the following: (T) plants with thorns or irritating hairs; (S) plants that are known to have caused skin, mouth, throat, or eye irritations; (P) plants with toxic sap or bearing flowers, leaves, or seeds containing toxins. Plants deserving extra care when handling are marked with a plus (+) sign.

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John C. Eveland: Alyxia oliviformis, Heliotropium anomalum var. argenteum, Lipochaeta integrifolia, Odontosoria chinensis, Psilotum nudum
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