

western or more mechanistic understanding of reefs. A quote in the preface by Ian McCalman makes this point early on: ‘coral reefs are also products of human perception that have been imagined into existence down the millennia’. By bringing in perspectives of Aboriginal people and Traditional Owners, the book encourages us to think differently about reefs, much like Philip E. Steinberg’s *The Social Construction of the Ocean* prompted natural scientists to rethink their characterization of the sea and contemplate the cognitive and cultural biases that influence how we assess, communicate about and relate to nature. Several entries speak to The Dreaming as a process of relatedness, whereby reefs are associated with certain clans, and patrilineal clans ‘hold’ the country. It is hard to imagine a more solid foundation for effective stewardship of reefs.

These reflections on the different relationships people have with reefs (and reefs have with people) sit in stark contrast to a later section of the book entitled *Scientists as Advocates for Australia’s Coral Reefs*. Giving a history of scientist-led study and management of reefs in Australia, including the ontogeny of the Australian Coral Reef Society and the Great Barrier Reef Committee, the chapter notes the advice given by coral reef scientists in development projects and the role Australian scientists have played in shaping our understanding of reefs worldwide. Surprisingly—especially given the book’s title—there is no mention of social scientists, nor any other ways of knowing that have equal value in improving our understanding of and driving advocacy for protecting reefs.

The subsequent section on Conservation and Protection of Australia’s Coral Reefs is filled with colorful storytelling, fitting for a history of conservation that is neither linear nor conventional. This section is honest and revealing, exposing not only good intentions but also the unintended consequences of conservation advocacy and government policy. This then sets up the final section of the book entitled *A Changing Climate for Australian Reefs*, which, although supported by data and citations of scientific publications,

begs the question whether planners and managers are being realistic and honest about the uncertainties that lie ahead. It also left me wondering whether in Australia—although this applies equally anywhere else—we are capable of learning from past mistakes and creating a more sustainable future.

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The Good Garden: How to Nurture Pollinators, Soil, Native Wildlife, and Healthy Food—All in Your Own Backyard by Chris McLaughlin (2023)

312 pp., Island Press, Washington, DC, USA. ISBN 978-1-64283-215-0 (pbk), USD 34.99.

The first thing to say about this gardening book is that it is firmly planted in a North American context. It speaks of the plants, insects, animals, growing zones and frost dates for the 50 states of the Union (yes, it covers Hawaii and Alaska, too). But even for readers outside the USA who, like me, love not only gardening but also soaking up new knowledge about horticulture from anywhere in the world, learning from Chris McLaughlin in *The Good Garden* will be a great pleasure. Wherever you are in the world, this book has something for you—so vast is its catalogue of facts and suggestions.

Written in response to the surge of interest in back gardens that occurred under lockdown during the Covid-19 pandemic, the book aims to provide a practical guide to making the most of whatever outdoor space you have—with a focus on doing so in a planet-friendly way. Despite this focus, McLaughlin is not preachy; her advice is balanced and evidence-based, and she explains in practical terms why a sustainable approach to gardening makes for sound horticultural practice as well as providing healthy food for the body and soul.

I lingered on the chapter about pollinators and wildlife with fascination as I read, from my wintry surroundings in the UK, about praying mantises and hummingbirds, and

how to create habitats supporting the life cycle of the migratory monarch butterfly. My list of notes with ideas to take to my own garden in the springtime grew as I read: construct vertical growing structures, buy self-pollinating dwarf fruit tree, convert old bucket into mini pond, avoid histoplasmosis. McLaughlin also reminded me that, although I can get lost in the garden being ‘mine’ because I think about it and work with it so much, gardens and gardening are so much better when shared; community features highly in the book.

Reading the chapter about healthy soil, I was struck by how little mention there is of the use of peat. In the UK, peat is frequently referenced in horticultural discussions; however, this is not something that McLaughlin covers to any great extent. Perhaps it is sufficient that her focus is on regenerative techniques, leaving little need for bagged compost, peat-free or not.

Chris McLaughlin has been gardening for over 40 years, and is the author of nine books on nature, gardening, small livestock and her family farm in the foothills of Northern California. It is clear that she knows her stuff. I particularly admired how she cleverly packs in so much practical theory, plenty of which I recognized from the textbooks of my years training as a horticulturalist, yet she conveys it in the manner of a friend strolling with you through your garden, sharing thoughts and ideas. She trusts the reader will be interested and follow along when she refers to aspects of gardening that may seem academic or complex, such as international conventions, or chemical equations relating to the soil. McLaughlin presents these topics skilfully and gently. Nothing in her writing style is lofty, making this a friendly, accessible book, from which readers can broaden their knowledge and learn valuable skills to put into practice. And as it is full of beautiful pictures, too, it makes a great companion for whiling away rainy days, planning for when you next get back out there with your hands in the soil (or dirt, as the author might say).

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