



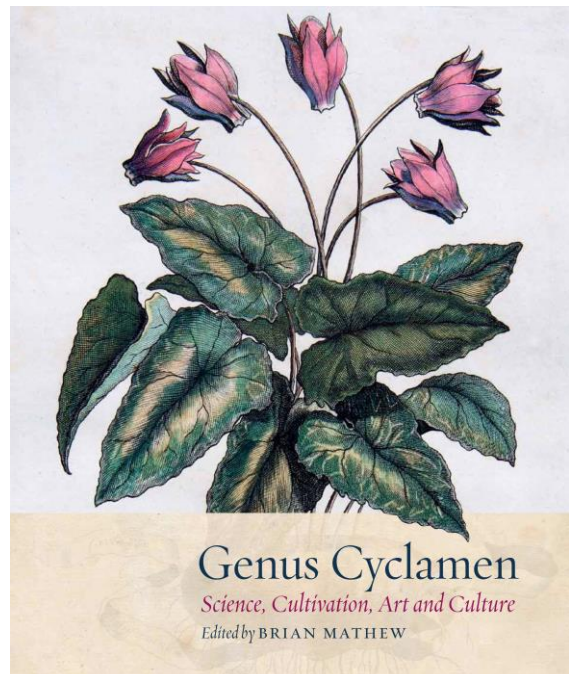
## Book review

Published on line: 30 April 2014

**GENUS CYCLAMEN: Science, Cultivation, Art and Culture by Brian Mathew (ed.). 600 pp. 2013, Kew Publishing ISBN: 9781842464724, RRP £90**

My fascination with the genus *Cyclamen* started when I received a tuber from my Cypriot boyfriend's mother. It is the national flower of Cyprus, but I had no idea what the turnip shaped, dirt encrusted thing would be. To my surprise I was able to grow it into full flower in a pot, and keep it flowering for months. When I saw the book 'Genus *Cyclamen*' on display, I knew I would have to pick it up and read it.

The book is divided into nine chapters, covering the standard monograph topics: botany and history; distribution; research and fieldwork; cultivation; cultivars, as well as items of more general interest: botanical illustration; art; pop culture; and a bibliography. The text is interspersed with grey boxes containing amusing anecdotes and stories about *Cyclamen*. Some of these notes are contributions from members of the *Cyclamen* Society, including accounts of plant hunting and important figures in *Cyclamen* history. Not only do these stories make the photographs come to life, they give the reader the feeling of being an honorary member of the club. The genus has a fairly specific distribution but despite this the book covers cyclamen cultivation in America, Australia, Japan and New Zealand. Those who grow *Cyclamens* for their beautiful flowers may be interested to read the section on cooking with the leaves and tubers. The section on the scents extracted from cyclamen was a pleasant surprise as they are not the first flowers that come to mind when I think of perfume.



Great detail is given in the section for each species with photographs of localities, *Cyclamen* in the snow, and beautiful watercolors specially commissioned from Pandora Sellers and Christabel King. These watercolors are worth hunting for throughout the book as they are done in eye-popping color and detail. For art lovers, there are three chapters on *Cyclamen* in art

covering techniques, notable images and pop culture. My favorite piece of art is a medieval engraving of a plant, complete with a tuber, roots and flowers, floating above a landscape of a castle by the sea in a composition worthy of Dali. There are plenty of beautiful illustrations in the illuminated manuscripts from medieval herbals. They might not resemble cyclamen in the technical way we are used to today, but the images and text offer fascinating insights into early botany and medicine. In the section on *Cyclamen* and popular culture, the most notable reference is to the annual Cyclamen Rally organized by the Cyprus Mercedes Benz Club.

I recommend having a look through the book if only for the lush imagery. Once you get your fill of eye candy you can enjoy the text which is well written with a good blend of scientific, technical information and plenty of historical and cultural content.

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