

THE E-READER

by Randy Arnowitz

I'm all for technology. In fact, I just got a brand spankin' new MacBook Pro, and I love it so much that it stayed in the box for the first two days because I didn't want to use it and get a smudge on it. Every few minutes I would slink up to the box, open the lid, take a quick look and cover the box. It's like the border collie puppy I got in third grade: I just couldn't help myself from peeking at all her wonderfulness while she napped in her cardboard-box nest.

I do not own a Kindle, Nook or other e-reading device at the present time, but I can see a day when I might purchase another one. I can agree that they're handy and convenient, especially when flying or spending a lazy day at the beach. They're truly a wonder of technology all wrapped up in a package even smaller than, say, a brownie pan.

However, when it comes to reading or merely looking through a gardening book or a cookbook, it just has to be a "book-book"—the kind that's made out of paper and glue and ink.

My gardening books, especially my *Sunset Western Garden Book*, are often a combination horticultural resource, heirloom seed bank and petting zoo bound together into one weighty tome. They often absorb so much soil and mulch that when the weather warms up, so do the books. They've been known, on occasion, to emit the same earthy fragrance as a compost pile. I just don't know where in a Kindle you're supposed to stick the seeds you want to save, the leaves you want to press or the bugs you want to identify.

Recently while perusing my *Sunset Western Garden Book* it voluntarily flopped open to the chapter on diseases of roses. It seems that someone had bookmarked those pages with some now desiccated and parchment-like leaves that may have once belonged to a beloved but sadly afflicted Rosa 'Perfume Delight.' Aaahhhh, so intoxicatingly fragrant yet tragically disease prone.

Later, as I thumbed through my Pat Welsh's *Southern California Organic Gardening* book, I regretfully discovered between pages 44 and 45 what appeared to be the delicate remains of some squashed lacewings marking the chapter on beneficial insects. Pat writes "In my garden, I've found that releasing ladybugs, trichogramma wasps and lacewings several times beginning in early spring



reduces pest problems to such an extent that spraying is unnecessary." Whoops—sorry, guys!

A Kindle is not interactive. When using one as a cookbook there is no way to add essential comments, baking tips or other critical data to the pages—or rather to the screen. How am I to remember that my mom's latke recipe came from one Gladys Krumb, who played on her Tuesday night mahjong team? Again, my recipe for Ranger Cookies has so many notes and memos scrawled in the margins of the oily pages that you almost can't make out the actual recipe. "Hey Knucklehead, remember to mix the corn flakes in last or they'll get mushy." "Don't forget the vanilla this time. Geesh!" "Leave them in

longer for more crunch." "Make extra to allow for all the dough you're likely to consume."

Similarly, the last time I made my favorite gooey Katharine Hepburn brownies I had the recipe on my Kindle leaning up against the mixing bowl. Before long, my sloppiness and buttery fingerprints had collected and concealed the Kindle with enough flour and sugar for a second batch. It wasn't until after I put the pan in the oven and cleaned up that I realized that the peculiar smell coming from the oven was not just brownies baking.

For now I will not replace my hard-copy cookbooks with another Kindle or Nook. I will allow my books to remain in an irregular and messy lineup on my kitchen shelf where I can tell almost without looking which is which, by the smell, feel and quantity of *schmutz* on each of them.

Likewise, I can't imagine throwing an E-reader in the back of my truck with the tools, the orphaned cymbidiums, the dog food and the other junk that accumulates in my truck bed during a work-week. However, a *Sunset Western Garden Book* is almost certainly somewhere back there wedged between the irrigation supplies and my lunch cooler and is guaranteed to have more organic worm castings between its pages than anywhere else in my truck. ☺

Randy Arnowitz is a gardener, horticulturist and writer. He particularly enjoys working with roses, orchids and sharing the day with his golden retriever, Peaches, who faithfully accompanies him in the field. He has written for the *Santa Barbara Independent*, the *Santa Barbara News-Press* and is currently a garden columnist for *Montecito Journal* and *Montecito Journal Magazine*.