

BOTANY

620 Wild Plants of North America

By Tom Reaume. 2009. Canadian Plains Research Centre, University of Regina, 3737 Wascana Parkway, Regina, Saskatchewan S4S 0A2 Canada. 784 pages, 80.00 CAD.

"An old fertile ditch replete with wildflowers is a wonderful place to spend a summery morning." This introductory remark, which will resonate with many field botanists, clearly reflects Tom Reaume's dedication to his subject matter. Focusing on the three prairie provinces and the US Midwest, this attractive book provides detailed studies of 620 vascular plant species representing 89 families.

Not intended as a regional flora (Manitoba alone has 1640 plant species) or as a field guide (because of size), the book has significant features which will endear it to readers. Each plant family is given a thorough introduction along with copious sketches. For example, the introduction to Asteraceae, a large and complex family, is two pages of text and 25 illustrations. Very few botany books dedicate a whole page to each species, but this one does. Variety is provided by having illustrations follow the shape of the plant, then moulding the text to fit the sketches. The most endearing features are the countless exquisite drawings. All accounts of species, even weeds, are accompanied by excellent range maps covering the northern Great Plains. Accounts include two interesting indices, new to this reviewer but clearly of value:

1. Native Prairie Restoration Priority, mainly applicable to the prairie provinces
2. Wildlife Use of Birds and Mammals—the degree of importance to wildlife.

Most of the plants are drawn from life, at sites in Manitoba and Saskatchewan. Often plants were visited several times in the field until the fruit was ripe. The author reports that his favourite object to sketch is the fruit (i.e., the seed) of any plant, particularly one with some texture. Plant descriptions rely mainly on common-use words, a pleasant contrast to certain botanical manuals with a seemingly perverse preference for technical terms. The taxonomy seems up to date or at least as up to date as possible, given the rapid changes we are now experiencing.

The book is graced by a very extensive list of references, suggested websites, and excellent indices to both common and scientific names. As well, the extensive glossary has many terms cross-referenced to illustrations. Odd and intriguing words such as "laddering", "verticillaster" and "anther head" are clarified.

Although not formally trained in botany or illustration, the author states that his interest in both has

expanded during this 12-year project, clearly a labour of love (he has donated all original drawings and royalties to Nature Manitoba). My enjoyment was increased by the addition of poetic quotes and non-botanic decorative drawings. I agree with Reaume's suggestion that this is a wintertime book to be enjoyed as much for the beauty as the science. Best use would be as an illustrated companion to existing floras and wildflower guides.

The author determined the boundaries on the range maps, a daunting task considering the huge territory involved and the number of naturalized plants. In doing this he discovered a "surprising glumey floral secret"—there are only a few Canadian and American herbaria with current dot-distribution maps on file for all species found in their province or state. Botanists and collectors associated with herbaria, except for a precious few, apparently lack the will, money, or genes for mapping. In defence of his own province, he notes that the two largest herbaria in Manitoba do have these maps. Certainly in this reviewer's opinion, the biggest hurdle to the study of botany in Ontario is the lack of publicly available range maps for all species. The author also suggests that current mapping should now segregate year 2000 and subsequent records from those prior, as he fears a large number of plant species will disappear during this century.

As minor criticisms one could note the book provides very complete species descriptions but no general remarks (e.g., readers are left in the dark as to the intriguing etymology of Garden Atriplex (*Atriplex hortensis*), a widespread native species). Species accounts could have been improved with global ranking or degree of invasiveness. Some readers may decry the lack of an identification key; however, keys work well only when most species within the book's territory are covered, not the case here.

Designed for both professional and amateur botanists, this book will be valuable both as a botanical text and as a reference. The superb illustrations, the very legible print, and the excellent maps render this a lovely book, a pleasure to hold and read. Even to an Ontarian, it represents an important addition to a botanical library.

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