

Wildflowers and Ferns of Kentucky

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2004, hardcover US\$ 30 (ISBN 0-8131-2319-4), 352 p,
512 color photographs, 150 illustrations, 2 maps,
14 cm x 22 cm (5.5 x 8.5 in).



The stated goals of the book are to “...spark an interest in, and an awareness of, the incredible beauty and diversity of Kentucky’s ferns and wildflowers, ...[to] lend assistance to the future conservation of our native flora and wildlands in general, ...[and to be about] enjoying the things you find in the fields and forests and delighting in finding those flowers.” As there is a fairly recent (1973) book on the trees and shrubs of Kentucky, a more recent (1991) book on the weeds of Kentucky and adjacent states, and because identifying grasses, sedges, and rushes “can be quite difficult for the nonbotanist,” the authors have chosen to omit plants of those groups. Significantly, the authors do not state “aid in plant identification” as a goal.

What, then, is this book about? It is a collection of pretty pictures of fronds of ferns and the flowers of 500 species of herbaceous plants native to Kentucky, supplemented by a few exquisite line drawings by Dan Dourson of species closely related to those depicted photographically. There is a useful and interesting section on the physiography and plant geogra-

phy of Kentucky that is, however, a poor second to an equivalent section about Tennessee in Margie Hunter’s *Gardening with the Native Plants of Tennessee: The Spirit of Place* (2004). The sequence of presentation is: ferns and fern allies, spring flowers (grouped by flower color), summer flowers, and fall flowers, again grouped by flower color. Each color is tabbed at the page margin. The section on family descriptions is introduced by “a word about plant names,” a paragraph about ferns and fern allies, and information about fern families, which includes lists of the species included in the book. Introductory information about flowering plants, “the seed producers,” follows, including a section on vegetative and floral morphology. The technical terms for morphological features in this section are avoided in the body of the book, down to and including a substitution of leaf stalk for petiole. The bibliography (of what, we’re not told) is followed by an index of mixed common and scientific names.

Most of the photographs in the book were made by the senior author. They are pretty—even artistic—but only a few dis-

play diagnostic features that would aid in identification of the featured plant. (The authors could take a lesson from Jack B Carman's *Wildflowers of Tennessee* [2001].) The text for those flowers with stunning butterflies makes no mention of the insects in the accompanying descriptions. Color rendition in several photos is so poor that one wonders if the proof plates were carefully scrutinized. For example, *Iris virginica*, *Scutellaria elliptica*, *Vernonia gigantea*, *Eupatorium coelestinum*, *Campanula divaricata*, *Lobelia siphilitica*, *Gentiana quinquefolia*, and several species of aster with blue ray flowers (among many other species!) are all a glowing pink. Classification of flower color for some plants is puzzling; for example, both species of *Typha* are in a section on yellow flowers; *Heuchera parviflora* is in a section on green/brown flowers; two species of *Penstemon*, which I see as pink flowered, are in a section on white flowers; *Impatiens capensis* is in a section on red/pink flowers.

The writing of popular (as opposed to scholarly) botanical literature involves a delicate intersection of stylistic license, effective communication, and factual fidelity. The University Press of Kentucky, claiming to be the "Scholarly publisher for the Commonwealth..." thus assumes responsibility for judging scholarly contribution, factual accuracy, and quality of presentation. By publishing this book, the Press has failed to fulfill its responsibility. This is not a scholarly book. The style would make a grammarian wince. The quality (for example, flower color and usefulness of the photographs in plant identification) falls below standards represented in competing books. Was the manuscript reviewed prior to publication? One wonders. At \$29.95, it is no bargain. It is pretty!

— Edward EC Clebsch

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