



Notes and Caveats about the “Wildflower Field Guides” Lists

I do not have personal experience with all the field guides on these lists. Therefore, when I searched for appropriate field guides to include, I considered whether the book (as described by its publisher or other reviewer) might be useful for someone who is a beginner—as well as the somewhat experienced person. My desire was to find books (internationally) which might be useful to a student in this course.

I avoided books which would be classified as “coffee table” books. They may be beautiful. However, they are not intended to serve as a guide to wildflower identification. Of course you might just find that unknown wildflower (serendipitously) in a coffee table book!

I also avoided books which were obviously geared toward botanists. Here’s one attempt to define the difference between a “field guide” and a “flora” (which is more for botanists): <http://herbaria.plants.ox.ac.uk/vfh/references/field-guide-definition/>

What Information Is Included

When I added a book (or Internet site) to a list, I copied whatever information I could find about it from a publisher. I then removed the “fluff” and highly descriptive words such as “only,” “first,” “engaging,” “delightful,” etc. So the book descriptions are simpler and hopefully provide the essential information you need to narrow your search to a field guide that works for you and your region.

When the information was given, I made note of the type of key—or plant organization method—used in the field guide. It might be by flower color, plant family, flower shape, or perhaps the guide includes a dichotomous key.

Some books are on a list without a publisher’s description. That simply means I could not find one. The book may be an excellent resource. You’ll have to do a bit more digging to find some reviews of the book to determine if it’s one you’d like to consider using.

I included a few resources which focus on “weeds.” My experience has been that weeds (which are a judgment about a plant) are also “wildflowers.” Sometimes I can figure out a wildflower’s name by looking at a guide to weeds. These guides tend to have more photos of a plant in varying stages of growth—which really helps with identification.

How the “Wildflower Field Guides” Lists Are Organized

There’s a list for each continent for which I could find some field guides (in English). For the North American continent, I divided the field guides into three lists:

1. By geographic region
2. By state within the U.S.
3. By province within Canada

If a field guide indicates that it covers more than one state in the U.S., I placed it in the “by region” list. If the field guide is specific to a state or province, I placed it in one of those lists.

There are a few lists for field guides which focus on a specific type of habitat. These include:

1. Desert
2. Tropical
3. Wetlands and aquatic

When you are looking for a field guide, broaden your search to more than the state in which you live. Surrounding states and larger bioregions are likely to have field guides with similar (or the same) wildflowers. For example, someone living in the state of Washington would do well to look for field guides within the Pacific Northwest (U.S.) as well as some nearby states and Canadian provinces (British Columbia). And vice versa.

Another consideration is to look for field guides from other countries which have a similar climate (for example, India has alpine, temperate, sub-temperate and tropical regions). Species on a continent may vary from similar-looking species on another continent. However, the family and genus will probably be the same.

Although the lists are extensive (at least for the North American continent), I make no claim that they are fully comprehensive. I’m sure there are many fine field guides out there which did not make it to one of these lists. If you have a favorite one that you’d like to see added to a list, please contact me at Angelyn@identifythatplant.com.

Another Extensive Resource

And lastly, I want to mention another fine resource -- available as a free download from <http://www.spk.usace.army.mil/Portals/12/documents/regulatory/pdf/Flora-and-Field-Guide-References-Supporting-all-Regional-Supplements.pdf> — called Flora and Field Guide References supporting all U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Wetland Regional Supplements. Published in November 2011, the 126 page book includes lists of floras and field guides for

the United States. This book's lists are more extensive than what I compiled. It includes an introduction explaining how the authors gathered the references, the difference between a flora and a field guide, and where they see these types of materials headed (to electronic versions). And, yes, the book includes materials dealing with more than just wildflowers. Here's a portion of the summary given for the book:

“Over the past few years, a series of Regional Supplements to the 1987 U.S. Army Corp of Engineers (USACE) Wetland Delineation Manual have been published, and currently the National Wetland Plant List is being updated. To support these efforts, we generated a list of floras and field guides for each USACE region: Alaska, Arid West, Atlantic and Gulf Coastal Plain, Caribbean, Eastern Mountains and Piedmont, Great Plains, Midwest, Northcentral and Northeast, Pacific Islands, and Western Mountains, Valleys and Coast. Each list includes regional floras, state floras, local floras, regional field guides, state field guides, and local field guides. We also prepared a list of floras and field guides that cover the entire U.S. This list is divided into the following categories: forbs, shrubs, trees, grasses and sedges, ferns, orchids, cacti and agave, and references and help guides.”