



Annual Review of New Books by Pacific Northwest Authors

BY BRIAN R. THOMPSON

Welcome to the annual review of new books by Pacific Northwest (Washington, Oregon, Idaho and British Columbia) authors. Like last year, we are blessed with so many new titles that this review will be divided into two halves. Be sure to find the second part in the Winter 2013 issue of the “Bulletin.”

Botany

Straying over our regional border a bit, the second edition of “The Jepson Manual” is just too important not to mention here, especially as many of the over 7000 vascular plant species of California it describes can also be found in the Pacific Northwest.

The name perhaps needs clarification. Willis Linn Jepson was an early 20th century botanist who published several books on California flora, including the first that was both comprehensive and statewide for vascular plants (“A Manual of the Flowering Plants of California”—1925). The 1993 first edition of “The Jepson Manual” honored his memory, and this new edition continues that honor while incorporating new discoveries and the many changes in botanical systematics of the last 20 years.

“Nonnative Invasive Plants of Pacific Coast Forests” is an unusual field guide that helps to identify plants you don’t want to find—but you probably will—especially in the forests of Washington, Oregon and California. In various ways, these plants are negatively affecting our native plants, animals and ecosystems. The intent of the authors is to make these recognizable to a larger audience beyond highly trained botanists. Many selections, such as purple loosestrife

(*Lythrum salicaria*) and herb-robert (*Geranium robertianum*), are all too familiar to gardeners and visitors to the Arboretum. Others will be less familiar, or you might not know they are a problem, such as some of our popular cotoneasters (*Cotoneaster franchetii* and *C. lacteus*).

Nature

“Wild in the City” is an invaluable guide for an exploration of the parks and trails in the Portland metropolitan area, but it’s quite readable even if you’re stuck somewhere else. Scattered amongst the trail maps and descriptions of various sites and walks are essays about wildlife, history—both natural and human—and the complexities of disturbed ecosystems, with a good dose of philosophy on the value of having nature in an urban setting. Over 100 writers and illustrators have contributed to this fine work.

When first picking up the fascinating “Life Histories of Cascadia Butterflies,” I expected lots of lovely close-up photographs of our native butterflies. While I wasn’t disappointed, the majority of the photos are of the early stages of their life histories, i.e. lots of caterpillars! The thoroughness for depicting each species is outstanding, with typically five or more photos of the different larval stages. How did authors David James and David Nunnallee do it? By rearing the butterflies from eggs and photographing each stage of their development.

Robert Michael Pyle wrote the Foreword, and he best describes the enormous scale of this work: “...this book is the apex of life history treatments to date. In the whole world, no other comparable region enjoys a work of this scale, ambit, and acuity for its butterfly fauna.”

Union Bay Natural Area

Any reader of Connie Sidles' first book ("In My Nature: A Birder's Year at the Montlake Fill"—2009) will be delighted to learn she has written and published a second collection ("Second Nature: Tales from The Montlake Fill") of her observations, insights, and quiet life lessons gleaned from her continuing visits to the landfill known officially as the Union Bay Natural Area (UBNA). The style of the second book is much like the first, but there are more great close-up photographs of birds, including rarities like a lazuli bunting or a western scrub-jay.

More photos of the UBNA can be found in "Seasons of Life in the Union Bay Sanctuary" by Marilyn Smith Layton. This photo essay includes not only birdlife, but also landscapes, flowers, trees, and the people who come to observe it all. Sales from the book—available at the Elisabeth C. Miller Library—contribute to the upkeep of UBNA.

Local Gardens

"Four Seasons on Bainbridge Island" is a photo essay by Paul Brians celebrating the flora of the island—some from his own garden—and accented with a few shots of people, animals and landscapes. Highly recommended for residents of Bainbridge, this book also captures the essence of semi-rural, island living anywhere around Puget Sound.

"Flowers of Volunteer Park Conservatory" is one of the best examples I've seen of a book capturing the spirit of a public garden. Photographer Sara L. Chapman has created monthly visual essays, using both close-ups and panoramas to bring you into the page and remind you of a real life visit. But this is more than just a picture book. The subjects of the photos are carefully captioned, making this a useful identification handbook to conservatory plants.

Garden Design/Cut Flowers

"When Debra and David began interviewing and photographing people who grow and arrange fresh, seasonal flowers for local markets, I knew they were documenting a new

movement... You could call it the slow flower movement." This quote, by Amy Stewart from the Foreword of "The 50 Mile Bouquet," well summarizes this forward-looking book by Debra Prinzing and David Perry, which leaves you with a wider perspective and appreciation of fresh cut flowers and other greenery. This is in sharp contrast to the international florist industry, making Stewart's 2007 book about that industry, "Flower Confidential," a good companion reading. (Stewart—who lives in Eureka, California—almost qualifies as a local author.)

Another excellent companion book is Valerie Easton's "Petal & Twig," which tells how to find an even closer source of material for flower arranging—your own garden. If—like me—you've ever struggled with getting your home arrangements just right, Easton will loosen you up and give you permission to just go for it, and open your eyes to more possibilities than you ever imagined a few feet from your back door. "After all, you're crafting performance art that changes hour by hour, day by day, as buds open, petals drop, and flowers droop. Imperfection engages us in the creative process."

To create a setting for this creative process, look to "Landscaping for Privacy" by Marty Wingate. Relatively few gardening books address fences and hedges in any depth, but for Wingate "screening hedges become more than shrubs planted in a line; they create a green, living wall, incorporating the design elements of sequence and repetition to pull together the landscape." The writing is very practical and addresses annoying issues like siting the recycle bins, and how to embrace wildlife or pets without letting them run amok, while empowering you to create a space that is very distinctly your own.

To complement these ideas, consider "The Intimate Garden" for very detailed examples of highly individualized garden spaces, with an emphasis on hardscape and ornaments. While both author Brian Coleman and photographer William Wright are from Seattle, and the gardens are mostly on the West coast, examples from the East coast and even England are included,



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General Gardening

Gardeners east of the Cascades will be pleased to have this addition to the limited collection of garden books for their region. “Native Plant User Guide” is published by the nursery Rugged Country Plants in Milton-Freewater, Oregon and, while self-promoting, there is far more descriptive detail and cultural help than you’d expect from a nursery catalog. With careful reading, gardeners west of the Cascades will pick up useful ideas, too.

The grandparent of all gardening books for the Pacific Northwest and rest of the west remains the “Sunset Western Garden Book.” Now in its new, ninth edition, the proven encyclopedic formula, along with essays, extensive plant selection lists for specific needs, and the much-valued “Sunset” climate zones (all updated) continue to make this a must on any western gardener’s shelf. The main addition since the last edition of 2007 is photographs in the encyclopedia—a nice update!

Bonsai/Small Conifers

“Gnarly Branches, Ancient Trees” is a biography of Dan Robinson, a bonsai gardener noted for his naturalistic style. While one could learn much from the examples, this is not a how-to book but rather a celebration of one man’s enthusiasm and perseverance for his art. This led to his establishing Elandan Gardens near Bremerton. His story is well told by the photography and writing of several of his admirers in the local world of bonsai.

It’s very unusual to have two newer bonsai books, especially from regional authors. George Bingham is based in Olympia and had been engaged in bonsai for about nine years when “What I’ve Learned from Bonsai” was published in 2008. This very personal book shares his observation about both the art of bonsai and the life lessons he has gained while working with his plants and living with multiple sclerosis.

Another local garden and nursery that's not well known is Coenosium Gardens in Eatonville. Owner Robert Fincham has traveled widely in his quest for dwarf conifers, and the book "Small Conifers for Small Gardens" catalogs the many fine dwarf firs, spruce, pines, hemlocks and assorted other species he has collected and grown. If you have considered adding conifers that won't outgrow your garden, this introduction to the merits of over 200 choices, along with anecdotes about each, is a must read.

Biography/Exhibits

Hulda Klager (1863-1960) was a Pacific Northwest pioneer. This Woodland, Washington farm wife survived numerous hardships but is best remembered for the wonderful collection of lilacs she hybridized and introduced in the first half of the 20th century—and the garden now open to the public that displays those lilacs. The historical novel "Where Lilacs Still Bloom" by Jane Kirkpatrick is largely an accurate biography, with only minor liberties taken to amalgamate some of the real-life personalities in Klager's life.

Another strong woman from the early 20th century was Elizabeth Colborne (1885-1948), who grew up in Bellingham. She was an artist that worked in several media with various subjects but is best remembered for her color woodcuts of Northwest forest scenes, with detailed and accurate renditions of our native trees and other plants. "Evergreen Muse" by David Martin is a catalog of her works displayed in an exhibit at the Whatcom Museum in Bellingham during the summer of 2011.

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