

Volume 28: Number 4 > Fall/Winter 2011

The Quarterly Journal of the Florida Native Plant Society

Palmetto



Notes on *Harrisia fragrans* • Native Container Gardening • *Helenium amarum*

Wildflowers of Florida and the Southeast

By David W. Hall and William J. Weber

Hardbound, 819 pages

Publisher: DW Hall Consulting (2011)

\$40

ISBN: 0615395023

Review by Chuck McCartney

When it comes to photographic guides for identifying wildflowers, I say the more the merrier. For us amateur field botanists and wildflower enthusiasts, more books mean more photographs and descriptions to help us identify the species we see during our forays into nature. And although these books tend to cover many of the same species, each usually includes some wildflowers not illustrated in other such publications.

There are certainly good field guides that cover specific regions of Florida (such as Roger Hammer's excellent pair on the wildflowers of the Everglades and the Florida Keys) and others extending to the whole state (such as the two volumes by Walter Kingsley Taylor). Some excellent ones also cover specific plant types (such as Gil Nelson's book on Florida trees or Walter Taylor's one on grasses). Now comes a weighty volume by botanist David Hall and photographer William Weber that aims to be as comprehensive as possible regarding the wildflowers of Florida and, by extension, the Southeastern Coastal Plain of the United States. The book describes and illustrates 768 plants, mostly natives, with a few common naturalized exotics thrown in. It is an ambitious undertaking that mostly succeeds.

But be forewarned: *Wildflowers of Florida and the Southeast* is not a field guide in the usual sense. For one thing, it weighs in at a hefty 4.65 pounds, not exactly something most people would relish lugging around in their backpack all day with their other gear. Also, the binding doesn't seem as though it would be very durable. It is of a rather delicate cloth over thick cardboard and probably would not hold up after many uses in the field, especially under adverse weather conditions. Instead, this is a volume for the library shelf, perhaps best consulted at home after a rigorous day of observing plants outdoors.

"*Wildflowers of Florida and the Southeast* would be a good addition to the library of any wildflower lover, most especially for the vast number of species it includes."

The success of books such as this rises and falls on the quality of its illustrations. In this new volume, some of the photos are good, some adequate, and some less so (the latter being not very useful for identification purposes). A few photos are misidentified. For example, the one included with the description of *Tillandsia setacea* is the very different *Tillandsia fasciculata*; a yellow *Pentalinon*-like flower is included with the description of *Echites umbellata* at one point (there is a second, correctly identified, shot of this species elsewhere in the book); the photo of *Lindernia anagallidea* appears to be *Mecardonia acuminata*; and, oddly, the illustration of *Mecardonia acuminata* appears to be *Capraria biflora*. Another bugaboo of printing flower photos crops up here, too, with a few of them appearing to be upside down, most noticeably the shot of *Habenaria quinqueseta*. And in a book this voluminous, it's almost inevitable that an occasional misspelling should creep in, such as "Chatahoochie" for Chattahoochee, "Aguilegia" for *Aquilegia*, "*Senecia glabellus*" for *Senecio glabellus*, or "St. John's River" rather than the currently accepted St. Johns River (no apostrophe).

On a purely technical/editorial note, the book persists with the outdated academic style of lowercasing widely recognized geographic regions of Florida, most egregiously Panhandle, but also the directional designations in South Florida, Central Florida, North Florida, etc. Also, style usages are not consistent throughout. For example, in some places, Coastal Plain is capitalized and in others not, and there are places where the older spelling of savannah (with the final "h") is used and others where it's spelled as the currently accepted savanna (no final "h").

As with most wildflower guides nowadays, the species are presented in color groupings. This approach is said to be helpful to the amateur in ascertaining the identity of a flower. But the drawback is that it arbitrarily separates closely related species, making comparisons of family characteristics more difficult. Thus, the milkweeds, for example, are scattered among the red, pink, blue, orange, white and green color sections (with a second illustration of the normally orange *Asclepias tuberosa* included in the yellow section for good measure).

Within each color grouping, the species are presented alphabetically by botanical name, including the author of the currently accepted name (although in *Epidendrum conopseum*, for example, the author is listed as Nikolas Jacquin, rather than the correct Robert Brown).

Each entry also includes, where appropriate, a very brief synonymy of better-known previous botanical names and the botanical and common designation for the plant family to which the wildflower belongs. There are some places, though, where a slightly expanded synonymy could have been used, for instance including *Smallanthus uvedalius* as a synonym under *Polymnia uvedalia* or *Packera anonyma* under *Senecio anonymus*. Oddly, the synonym under *Hedyotis procumbens* is shown as *Hedyotis procumbens*, where it should be *Houstonia procumbens*.

Besides showing one or more of the common names for the wildflower under consideration, the discussion of the species covers these categories: plant habit (perennial versus

annual, tree versus vine, etc.); leaves; inflorescences; flowers; habitat and distribution; and additional comments (including flowering season, conservation status, etc.). One distributional error is found under *Encyclia tampensis*, where the authors list its range outside Florida as “south into and through the West Indies.” As now understood, this orchid species is known only from Florida and the Bahamas.

Of the 20 pages of introductory material, 18 are devoted to a useful discussion of the ecological communities found in the areas covered by the book, including a list of plant species characteristic of each community. Equally helpful at the back of the book is a fairly detailed glossary and an index printed in type large enough not to cause eyestrain (a failing of some other similar wildflower books).

Despite some of its shortcomings, *Wildflowers of Florida and the Southeast* would be a good addition to the library of any wildflower lover, most especially for the vast number of species it includes.



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The Palmetto

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Editorial Content

We welcome articles on native plant species and related conservation topics, as well as high-quality botanical illustrations and photographs. Contact the editor for guidelines, deadlines and other information.

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The purpose of the Florida Native Plant Society is to conserve, preserve, and restore the native plants and native plant communities of Florida.

Official definition of native plant:

For most purposes, the phrase Florida native plant refers to those species occurring within the state boundaries prior to European contact, according to the best available scientific and historical documentation. More specifically, it includes those species understood as indigenous, occurring in natural associations in habitats that existed prior to significant human impacts and alterations of the landscape.

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