

University of Nebraska - Lincoln

DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Great Plains Quarterly

Great Plains Studies, Center for

1990

Review of Wildflowers of the Tallgrass Prairie: The Upper Midwest

Richard K. Sutton

University of Nebraska-Lincoln, rsutton1@unl.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly>



Part of the [Other International and Area Studies Commons](#)

Sutton, Richard K., "Review of Wildflowers of the Tallgrass Prairie: The Upper Midwest" (1990). *Great Plains Quarterly*. 497.

<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/greatplainsquarterly/497>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Great Plains Studies, Center for at DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln. It has been accepted for inclusion in Great Plains Quarterly by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@University of Nebraska - Lincoln.

Wildflowers of the Tallgrass Prairie: The Upper Midwest. By Sylvan T. Runkel and Dean M. Roosa. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1989. Preface, color photographs, glossary, selected references, index. xii + 279 pp. \$19.95.

Popularized books on wildflowers are not hard to find, though it seems the prairie has been nearly ignored. This is perhaps because there is less of that original biome left than any other and the particular comeliness of the individual wildflower is diluted by a matrix of grass. Runkel and Roosa have produced an excellent picture book, with readable text, in which they cover derivation of Latin names, ecological and botanical descriptions, and anecdotal information on plant use by Native Americans. Its interesting organization follows the bloom sequence of more than 130 dicots and monocots throughout the year, though the plant-identifying novice using this approach may be foiled by changes in local latitude and microclimate. Inclusion of grasses in a "wildflower" book may seem anomalous, but grasses are flowering plants too and they dominate the visual, taxonomic, and ecological character of the prairie. They are a welcome addition to the book.

Two somewhat irritating features of the book are its lack of geographical logic and its physical dimension and durability. The "Upper Midwest" is loosely defined if at all. Some plants included, such as buffalo grass, scarlet globe

mallow, and yucca, are rarely found east of the 98° meridian and then only in habitat quite unlike the tallgrass prairie. References to the geographical distribution of the plants are inconsistent, imprecise, and often lacking. The white space appearing on the page below the descriptions could have been utilized by inclusion of a map of the plant's range. These are minor quibbles. The biggest fault lies in the book's physical structure and dimension. The paper cover and binding are poorly secured (the pages quickly become deciduous leaves) and the wide 5³/₄ by 9 inch format is clumsy for field use. While one page is devoted to a quite excellent photograph of each plant, more judicious cropping could have helped reduce the format to a less ungainly proportion without loss of information. One wonders how much input the authors really have on such publishing and production matters. At any rate, I would buy the book and have it cropped and rebound in a hard cover.

RICHARD K. SUTTON
Department of Horticulture
University of Nebraska-Lincoln