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**Review of Field Guide to Wildflowers of Nebraska and the Great Plains, Roadside Wildflowers of the Southern Great Plains, Wildflowers of the Northern Great Plains, and Wildflowers of the TaUgrass Prairie: The Upper Midwest.**

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## BOOK REVIEWS

*Field Guide to Wildflowers of Nebraska and the Great Plains.* By J. Farrar. Lincoln: Nebraska Game and Parks Commission, 1990. Illustrations, color photographs, maps, glossary, bibliography, indexes. 215 pp. \$24.95 cloth, \$17.95 paper.

*Roadside Wildflowers of the Southern Great Plains.* By Craig C. Freeman and Eileen K. Schofield. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991. Illustrations, keys, color photographs, glossary, references, index. 280 pp. \$29.95 cloth, \$17.95 paper.

*Wildflowers of the Northern Great Plains.* By F.R. Vance, J.R. Jowsey, and J.S. McLean. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984. Key to plant families, illustrations, color photographs, glossary, bibliography, indexes. 336 pp. \$29.50 cloth, \$14.95 paper.

*Wildflowers of the Tallgrass Prairie: The Upper Midwest.* By S.T. Runkel and D.M. Roosa. Foreword by John Madson. Ames: Iowa State University Press, 1989. Color photographs, glossary, bibliography, indexes. 279 pp. \$24.95 paper.

These four flower books represent a blossoming of attractive popular books describing prairie plants. Each of these four books has a slightly different goal. In terms of area covered, Farrar focuses on Nebraska, Vance, Jowsey and McLean consider plants of the northern Great Plains, Freeman and Schofield aim at roadside wildflowers of the southern Plains, and Runkel and Roosa on wildflowers of the northern tallgrass prairie. The types of plants included vary also. Farrar includes both common and rare Nebraska wildflowers but no shrubs or trees, Vance et al. include common native wildflowers, visible introduced species, and some woody plants. Freeman and Schofield stick to showy herbs. Runkel

and Roosa include flowering herbs, but also grasses. All four include conspicuous introduced plants such as poison hemlock and mullein.

It was an intriguing exercise to compare these four books. I should state at the outset that all four are excellent and make a definite contribution to the ease with which plants of the Great Plains region can be recognized and appreciated. Each is a piece of art in itself. Any of the four will make a useful addition to a home library or a grand gift. Below I contrast the books showing the different approaches taken by the authors.

These are reasonably sized, popularly priced books filled with beautiful photographs. The result is that not all plants could be included, so all four books provide very selective collections. Generally only one, although sometimes as many as three, of the species of a group of plants, for example asters or ground cherries, are illustrated. None of the books attempts even to name all the species similar to those pictured that are found within their region. Consequently these books will not help much with detailed identification. Because they picture common species, they will generally assist identification of common species, but if the plant does not exactly match the picture and description, these books are not suited for resolving the problem.

On the other hand, 128 to 400 plants are described and pictured, in outstanding photographs. Farrar and Freeman and Schofield present the species by flower color. This is a common approach for wildflower books, but one that bothers me because of the plants which vary in color—yellow to deep orange for butterfly milkweed, pale pink to deep blue for dayflower, to name two. And of course it means that one must know the flowers in order to know where in the book to look for the plant. It generally works well, however, because color is the characteristic with which most people begin

when trying to identify a plant. Vance et al., on the other hand, arrange the plants by plant family. People not familiar with plant classification will find this simply an arbitrary arrangement, but it has the advantage that if you know a little bit about plants, finding things is easier because all the relatives are together. For example, milkweeds, whatever color their flowers, are grouped together, as are cacti, another easily-recognized group with flowers of various colors. As a nice touch, Vance et al. provide a key that allows finding the family of the plants using flower color. Runkel and Roosa take the unusual approach of arranging the plants chronologically. They begin with the pasque flower, earliest of spring flowers in the prairie, and end on closed gentians and asters as the last flowers of fall. I find it an attractive idea, although, since many species have long flowering periods, it is not a particularly easy arrangement for finding a specific plant. Because they are so conspicuous in tallgrass prairies, Runkel and Roosa include pictures of grasses, something I feel is very important for this region, while the addition of Nebraska's rare species is a benefit of Farrar's book.

The photographs are of a high standard of quality in all four books. Only Vance et al. have even a few bad photos. The distance at which the pictures were taken vary. Farrar and Freeman and Schofield took most of their pictures close up to show the details of the flowers. Runkel and Roosa have many pictures at a distance, so the shape of the leaves and the plant as a whole are included. Vance et al. do something I particularly like: often they present two pictures, one of the whole plant and one a flower close-up. Sometimes, however, they show a close picture of one species, e.g. American milk-vetch, and then a distance shot of a related but different plant, e.g. Canadian milk-vetch. Despite the fact that they carefully label each picture, this can be confusing. Similarly, Farrar, for reasons of layout, occasionally arranges the pictures in some position rather than immediately over the text, and that can be confusing. Farrar, Freeman and Schofield, and Vance et

al. include line drawings and occasionally a second photograph to clarify plant features.

The text is good in all cases. Vance et al. keep the text brief and nontechnical, including some description of the plant and its habitat and occasional comments on poisonous properties or uses. The others provide botanical descriptions of the plants that are a little harder to read but more useful for plant identification. Farrar and Runkel and Roosa give alternate common names. Runkel and Roosa always explain the meaning of the Latin name and often the common names; Farrar often explains the Latin name. Farrar and Runkel and Roosa generally describe uses of the plants by Plains tribes and others. All the books often indicate other species that are similar but not pictured. I particularly liked the degree of detail and interesting facts provided by Runkel and Roosa.

We are in a period of energetic research on prairies, with the result that plant names are frequently being revised. Consequently the authors had to contend with nomenclatural problems. Vance et al., with the earliest book, wrote before the more recent problems. The others however, all get low marks from me for picking one of a set of alternate scientific names and not informing the reader about other names. White and purple prairie clovers, for example, were recently moved from being called *Petalostemon purpurea* and *P. candida* to *Dalea purpurea* and *D. candida*. Roose and Runkel have both plants still as *Petalostemon* with no explanation, while Farrar and Freeman and Schofield have them under *Dalea* with no indication that they were ever called anything else. A note about name changes would have been very helpful in both cases.

All four books have indexes of scientific and common names combined, and glossaries of botanical terms. Farrar and Vance et al. include sketches to help explain terms like "saggitate" and "divided"; Farrar's are particularly good.

Runkel and Roosa devote four pages to an introduction to tallgrass prairies and comments on conservation. Farrar discusses the ecosystems of Nebraska in relation to wildflowers. Freeman

and Schofield and Vance et al. have keys for identifying plants to family—these are very useful for people seriously wanting to know which plant they have found.

All four books have maps: Farrar of Nebraska and the Great Plains, in color, Runkel and Roosa of the tallgrass prairie, Vance et al. of the area where the included plants are found, and Freeman and Schofield have both a map of the region covered by the book and of the habitat types in that region.

I liked the layout of Runkel and Roosa: big pictures all arranged on the left page in the center, making it very easy to flip through the pages looking for a photo of the plant in your hand. However, the weight and binding of the paperback of Runkel and Roosa does not seem very sturdy, it may not take much flipping before it falls apart.

All four of the books are about 6" x 9" in paperback, not quite pocket-sized, but quite portable.

In short, I liked all four books. They have complementary strengths. I cannot say "if you only can buy one, buy \_\_\_\_." The one you should buy depends on whether you live in the northern or southern plains, whether you like your book arranged by color, and whether you want a key to the families or want to be able to identify common shrubs or common grasses. They present a lovely array of choices and individually and collectively demonstrate the beauty of the wildflowers of the Great Plains.

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