

# The New England Wild Flower Society Guide to Growing and Propagating Wildflowers of the United States and Canada

WILLIAM CULLINA

Houghton Mifflin Company, 222 Berkeley Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02116. Telephone: (617) 351-5000. xi, 322 p, color illustrations and maps; hardcover cloth, 2000, ISBN 0-395-96609-4, US\$ 40.00

In this well-written book, William “Bill” Cullina thoroughly addresses this topic in a style that he describes as “a mix of science and poetry, fact and intuition.” Nearly 1000 species and 200 genera are covered, with an extensive accounting of more than 150 genera and 500+ species. This book is as valuable to the professional as it to the hobbyist. And it’s one that would be just as “at home” on the office bookshelf as it would be on the coffee table. Dimensions of the book are 28 X 23 X 2.5 cm (11 X 9 X 1 in).

In the first part of the book, many pages are devoted to background information that is not only educational but gives the reader insight into the author’s consciousness. The author talks about the New England Wild Flower Society (NEWFS), tells the reader how to use the book, points out the negative impact of “wild collecting,” and describes in detail Ecological Gardening and Floristic Provinces (including a full-page map). I am especially impressed with his commentary on “What Is a Native Plant?” Given the mission of the NEWFS and the author’s position within that society, I am impressed (and wholeheartedly agree) with the author’s pragmatic views.

The main part of the book is the well-designed and easy-to-follow Encyclopedia of Plants. Each of the 150+ highlighted genera are described in general (accompanied by a color photograph and suggested pronunciation of the Latin name), with the author often providing interesting anecdotal information. For each genus, specifics are provided about cultural practices and uses, and a brief statement is included about the ease with which plants within the

genus are propagated. One to many species within a genus are then described in terms of hardiness zone, nativity, range, height under cultivation, width of a clumping species or spread of a running species after 3 y, flower color, blooming season, and general culture notes. Scattered throughout the encyclopedia are several sidebars dealing with interesting topics, including “Contractile Roots,” “Polyploidy,” and “Ants and Seed Dispersal.” Unfortunately these topics are not listed in the Table of Contents so those using this text primarily as a reference could miss out on these topics.

Preceding the Encyclopedia of Plants, the author addresses propagation methods. I am quite pleased with his coverage of seed propagation. Seeds are classified into one or more categories based on germination requirements, and each of these categories is described in detail. I applaud the author for the lengths to which he went to point out these dormancy issues. Of equal accolade is the well-designed 22-page reference table, which is cross-referenced with the Encyclopedia of Plants.

There is plenty of supplementary information in the appendices, all of which is indispensable and adequately covered. What I find particularly valuable are 2 lists—“Wildflowers That Can Tolerate Moderately Dry Soils and Shade in Summer,” and the timely “Wildflowers That Are Less Palatable to Deer and Other Herbivores.”

The strengths of this book are many—the weaknesses but few. It is written in such a manner so as to be valuable to the professional and amateur alike—a difficult task but one at which he succeeds. The Encyclopedia of Plants and the section on propagation are reason enough to purchase this text because of the level of detail applied to such a large number of genera and species. But the author provides enough supplementary information to ensure that the topic of propagation and culture of wildflowers is thoroughly

addressed. Last, but certainly not least, the quality of the color photographs throughout the text is superior.

The main criticism I have of this text, and it is only of slight consequence, is that many of the paragraphs are quite lengthy, although the author’s writing style makes the long paragraphs a little easier to digest. There are 2 other minor issues. One is the omission of *Phlox drummondii*, a commonly available species that occurs in many states from Texas and eastward. Secondly, a number of species whose range extends into Florida are not noted as such. The native range of many temperate wildflower species extends into the northern part of Florida.

In conclusion, Bill Cullina thoroughly covers the propagation and culture of a wide range of temperate wildflower species in a manner that can be appreciated by both professionals and hobbyists.

—Jeff Norcini

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