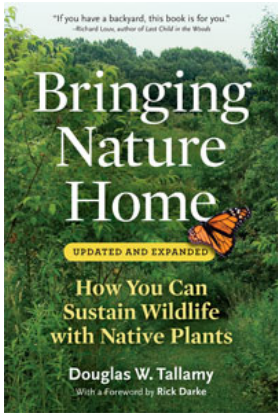


Book Review: *Bringing Nature Home: How You Can Sustain Wildlife with Native Plants (Updated and Expanded)* by Douglas W. Tallamy



If you want a lush, vibrant, healthy garden with minimum work and the best biodiversity and life, here is the guide for you.

If your landscape is plagued by insect pests, it is because you have too FEW, not too many,

according to Tallamy. The typical monoculture yard with an expanse of lawn and a few trees and shrubs as foundation planting cannot sustain the biodiversity nature needs to balance itself. The result is that one type of pest breeds out of control without its natural predators to keep it restrained. We, as gardeners, are forced to supply all the roles and work that a diverse ecosystem needs to reach balance naturally.

Tallamy looks at our urban and suburban gardens through an entomologist's eyes and sees the term "pest free" as death of the ecosystem. Our 40 million acres of pristine, perfect lawns is as sterile as an asphalt parking lot. If ever there was a solid, reasoned, scientific argument why we need to give up imported plants and return to our native species, Tallamy has hit on it.

His main premise is based on his study of how the web of life is all interconnected. As an entomologist, he documented the insects' role as the crucial second trophic level – plants turn sunlight into energy as the first trophic level, and insects eating plants are by far the largest group of herbivores of the second trophic level. Without insects the entire ecosystem breaks down.

His most important message: Insects don't eat foreign plants; however, native plants, even those in the same family as aliens, can host and feed hundreds of species of insects without displaying any noticeable damage.

Most important fact: even though the birds might eat the berries from alien or invasive plants, they must have insects to raise their young. Without the insects from the native plants, there are no new birds to eat the berries when they grow up.

He has an easy, low-key approach to converting to natives. Instead of the rip-and-burn, all-or-nothing approach, Tallamy advocates slowly expanding the beds at your borders of your property with natives, and replacing any foreign plants over time with similar natives. Most important is to plant trees – specifically the trees native to your particular region that support the most insects and wildlife. According to Tallamy, that is usually the native Oaks.

To help you do this, he has large sections of the book devoted to the best native trees – more than 50 pages of trees descriptions and photos; and, since he is an entomologist, 74 pages of "bird food" – the arthropod herbivores (plant-eating insects). He also has 30 pages of lists of best plants by eco-region and another 10 pages of host plants of butterflies and moths.

The one weakness of the book is that Tallamy is very New Jersey-Pennsylvania centered. His lists include all eco-systems in the US, but our little corner of the world, Texas, gets short shrift. But you can match his suggestions from a good DFW native plants list to make an excellent local natives guide.

The biggest strength of this book is the plethora of gorgeous photos of native landscapes, plants and especially the close-ups of the insects. If it wasn't a handy pocket-size paperback, it would have made a great coffee-table picture book.

Tallamy is an educator with dedication to biodiversity. You can get tips on diversity gardening at his website, also view his speaking schedule there: <http://bringingnaturehome.net/> He is one of the keynote speakers at the October 7-10, 2010 NPSOT Symposium in Denton.

— Marilyn Sallee