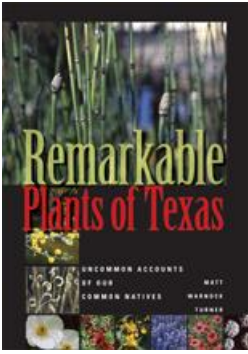


Book Review: Remarkable Plants of Texas

By Marilyn Sallee



Remarkable Plants of Texas: Uncommon Accounts of Our Common Natives by Matt Warnock Turner, University of Texas Press 2009, Hardbound, 336 pages.

This is a remarkable book about remarkable plants on several accounts. While most books about plants have a tight focus, staying within tight confines of botany or landscaping or identification, this book is a fun spree through the most important aspects of the individual plants however they apply. So a tree may be treated for how its wood can be used, or its importance of food source, or its uses by indigenous people, or maybe it's place in the modern landscape, whichever is most important.

The many color photos and botanical descriptions, habitat and distribution, even an explanation of the meaning of the scientific name, make it an excellent source for those interested in botany. And the history, with food preparation and medicinal uses, make it important for the herbalist or survivalist. For anyone just interested in plant lore of all types, it is a find.

But it is the combination that makes this book most remarkable. Each plant has a special tidbit, or several, that make it stand out.

For example, the U.S.S. Constitution, the oldest warship afloat in the world today, was so tough that the British cannon balls bounced off her, earning the nickname "Old Ironsides". But the ship itself was an example of the use of Live Oak wood in ship building. Much of Texas' Live Oak forests went into making the U.S. an awesome naval force.



Another example: The Creosote Bush constantly renews itself through cloning, and the original mother plant may be more than 11,700 years old.

The chapters on plants of myriad uses, such as Sotol, Prickly Pear and Agaves go on at length on how to process them as food, fiber, or other uses so that you might try your own hand at these almost-forgotten crafts and try cooking a few. While chapters on poisonous or dangerous plants give repeat warnings not to try them yourself, especially the Daturas, Peyotes and some other "medicinal" plants.



The longest chapter, on the myriad uses of the ubiquitous Prickly-pear cactus, covers the food, water, medicine and cattle forage aspects of the *Opuntia*, but also has delightful stories. Such as the appearance of "Pear mouth" in cattle, since they will feed on the spiny plant despite the long thorns. Pear mouth describes cattle whose lips are full of cactus spines; easily prevented by torching the cactus first. Cattle quickly learn the sound of the



torch burning spines off the cactus and come running to feast on the now safe cactus pears or tunas.

The book is even physically remarkable. A nicely cloth-bound bright red cover with startling lime green end papers. The paper of the text pages is high quality, thick and eminently suited for the many full color photos. The quality makes for a remarkably sturdy and heavy book that will last the many times you'll want to go back to re-read about a particular plant or section.



Highly recommended for either reference shelf or an interesting casual read.