Book Reviews


This revision of the classic work Handbook of Northwestern Plants, by Helen M. Gilkey, is intended, like the original, for students of botany and “individuals willing to use keys and learn basic botanical scientific terminology.” Coauthor through several revisions since 1967, La Rea J. Dennis has made minor revisions to a number of descriptions and keys, while making the present volume easier to use by arranging the genera and species alphabetically within families. The nomenclature has also been updated, so that Similacina becomes Mainanthemum, Disporum becomes Prosartes, etc.

Although much of the botanical literature for the Pacific Northwest covers southwestern British Columbia, or at least related areas in northwestern Washington, these areas are not included in the Handbook of Northwestern Plants. This should serve as a warning to those who might purchase the book sight-unseen and wonder why Northwest coastal plants, such as Woodwardia fimbriata and Juniperus scopulorum, are not mentioned.

The concise descriptions are matched with excellent line drawings for a number of taxa. While the keys are well-written and supported by a good glossary, there are no descriptions or keys for the Cyperaceae, Juncaceae or Poaceae. Instead, readers are referred to other floras (e.g., Flora of the Pacific Northwest by Hitchcock and Cronquist) for assistance in identifying plants from those families. But this is not a drawback, as their inclusion would have made the book more unwieldy and technical.

The book reveals no hint of the taxonomic adjustments being made as a result of modern molecular research (e.g., fundamental adjustments to the monocots and generic realignments in Scrophulariaceae, Plantaginaceae, Ericaceae, and Caprifoliaceae). The author is undoubtedly aware of these, but—since the taxonomic dust has not adequately settled—he wisely sticks to a conservative interpretation.

—DOUGLAS JUSTICE, UBC Botanical Garden, 6804 SW Marine Drive, Vancouver, BC, V6T 1Z4 Canada.


Myristicaceae is a pantropical family of largely dioecious trees best known for the spices nutmeg and mace, which are obtained from the seed and aril of Myristica fragrans and similar species. This floristic treatment of the Southeast Asia members of the Myristicaceae represents the first all-in-one study since Warburg’s (1897) initial monograph of the family, and the only comprehensive update since Sinclair (1958). Since those treatments were published, the addition of two segregate genera, Enallocomnia and Paramyristica, increases the number of treated genera to six. Altogether, the Southeast Asian nutmegs number 400+ species, ranging from the monotypic Paramyristica to Virola (80), Kneau (90), Myristica (100), and Horsfeldia (170). These are found from southern China through the Australasian archipelago (including the Philippines), with a few species reaching northern Queensland Australia. By any measure, de Wilde’s revision was a major undertaking, one that will serve as the basis for study of this family in Southeast Asia for years to come.

The volume is handsomely illustrated with distribution maps, a few color plates, many detailed and accurate original drawings, and a number of other illustrations. A general description of the family and what is known of its biology is presented that, although serving as an adequate introduction, is by no means comprehensive. Unfortunately, literature citations follow individual