BOOK REVIEW


A WEED GROWS IN BROOKLYN … AND BALTIMORE, AND BOSTON, AND DETROIT

Wild Urban Plants of the Northeast: A Field Guide is a new sort of field guide. The book focuses on what Del Tredici calls “spontaneous urban plants”, those that grow without assistance in urban environments. Like other weed guides, this book focuses on the plants we often fail to see or do not want to see, but Del Tredici takes delight in these weedy plants where others generally present the information a gardener or ecologist might need for identifying and controlling them.

In the introduction, Del Tredici offers several arguments for why these plants not only deserve careful study and attention, but also our appreciation. He uses urban ecology literature fairly convincingly to make the case that urban environments already reflect many of the changes we expect with global climate change (e.g., higher temperatures, higher CO₂ concentrations, and higher frequency of extreme water events). The plants that succeed in urban environments without our assistance are, therefore, plants that have adaptations that may be necessary across much of the globe in the future. Del Tredici also points out that these species take up carbon and produce oxygen like native plants and may be particularly good for bioremediation or the uptake of toxins in the soil. The very tenacity and proliferative growth that annoy many gardeners and ecologists are, therefore, sources of delight for Del Tredici. I found the sociological aspects of this review the most interesting, particularly some of the historical information reflected in the tables, with lists of species found in the Northeast in the 1600s and species used medicinally in the first century of the current era. Some of the ecological insight is a bit vague and superficial, and I found the organization somewhat peculiar. It is only a 25-page introduction, though, so a light treatment is perhaps appropriate. All of the information is accessible to any reader with an interest in

447