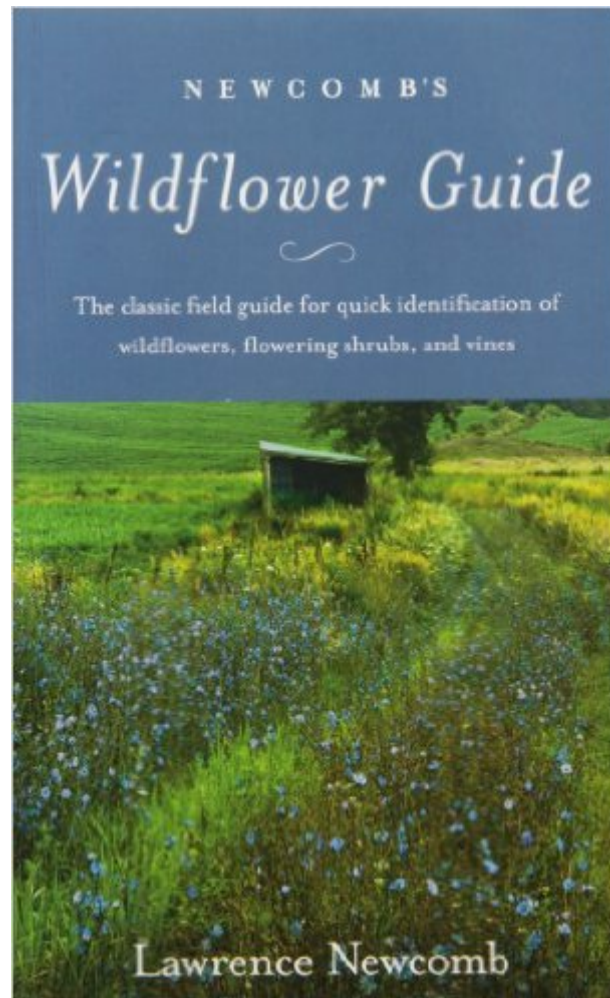


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Newcomb's Wildflower Guide



Synopsis

Lawrence Newcomb's system of identification on wild flowers is based on natural structural features that are easily visible to the untrained eye and enables amateurs and experts to identify almost any wildflower quickly and accurately.

Book Information

Paperback: 490 pages

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Average Customer Review: 4.4 out of 5 stars Â Â See all reviews Â (154 customer reviews)

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Customer Reviews

The author's system allows even amateurs like me to quickly and accurately identify wildflowers. It is as simple as answering five questions which point the user to the appropriate page in the book where the flower is described and pictured. The text is great. The first sentence of each description distinguishes that plant from all others in that group. If you are looking for a wildflower guide, they do not get better than this one.

If you're going to buy just one book on wildflower identification, this is it. While not foolproof, this system is the best I've seen. It beats by far other methods using color and shape of flower, as used in the Audubon and Peterson field guides (though both the latter have their place, and you should get both if you're really serious). A most unique aspect of this book is that it includes shrubs as well as plants normally considered wildflowers, adding greatly to its utility for the amateur observer.

I've noticed from other reviews that this guide is seen to be specific to the northeast. When I first wanted to learn about wildflowers I took a workshop in the western NC mountains and this was the required text. Every wildflower that we identified was in the book. It seems that the cooler

mountain elevations offer the same climate found in New England and Canada. Also, learning by leaf type makes it a lot easier to identify the plant when it's not blooming. I've had a copy of it in my car for the last 10 years and intend on keeping it there.

The Newcomb's Guide is not the first field guide that I have ever used, but it is the one that I use most for identification of flowering plants in the Northeast. I found the key very easy to use, which results in rapid identifications. Eventhough it is not totally complete, it is an excellent guide for student botanists who want to learn about N.E. flowers with only this guide as instruction. More guides should be written in this style!

After reading the other reviews, I feel that I should open this review with a caveat: this book is regional, and only covers the northeastern states. With that said, I have been using this guide almost exclusively for 10 years, and if you are serious about learning how to identify a wide variety of wildflowers, you can't go wrong with this book. The black-and-white illustrations are excellent, and while there are some color plates included, I have never felt they were essential to the presentation. If you are more interested in the casual identification of more common flowers, you might indeed prefer a guide that is organized by color. For the serious naturalist, however, flower color should really be the last characteristic you examine. Floral features such as petal shape, structure, and organization, as well as stem and leaf morphology are much more reliable. If you want to be able to quickly identify a variety of flowers in diverse habitats, a guide organized by color is simply impractical. The book makes use of a dichotomous key, whereby you answer simple questions about the structure of the flower to narrow down your final choices. For anyone who's spent ages flipping through the "pink" section of a color-organized guide, this will put an end to your frustration! Using the key does take a little practice, but once you've gotten accustomed to it, it's an indispensable tool. The book also contains flowering vines and shrubs, which are often left out of other guides. I have been recommending this book for many years, and I am just as enthusiastic about it now as I was when I first picked it up. I never go hiking without it!

Newcomb's guide is a great book, once you get past the initial training period. For those of us used to flipping through pictures of flowers and fruit until we think we have the right one, this book can be initially off-putting. My advice...get used to it. Newcomb's system is more efficient and more certain than flower-flipping. A good book.

If you're looking for a field guide with pretty pictures of flowers, don't buy this guide. (The Audobon Society's field guide series has wonderful full color plates.) If you're looking for a field guide which will actually help you identify flowering plants, buy this guide! I have used it for both recreational observation and scientific research purposes, and it is user-friendly and accurate. The pictures are printed in black and white for a good reason- flower color is variable in nature, and color pictures could be misleading. Shape and structure (number of petals, etc) are much LESS variable, and thus better represented in black and white. Also, the dichotomous key structure of the guide makes it easy to quickly identify your specimens. Highly recommended (for Eastern United States only.)

I have yet to find a flower in the northeast that isn't in this book! It only takes a little practice to learn to use the key. I only wish they made a key like this for plants that aren't in flower. I own a comprehensive plant systematics book, but it's so daunting that I always reach for Newcomb's first. If you want to become a better naturalist, get this book!

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