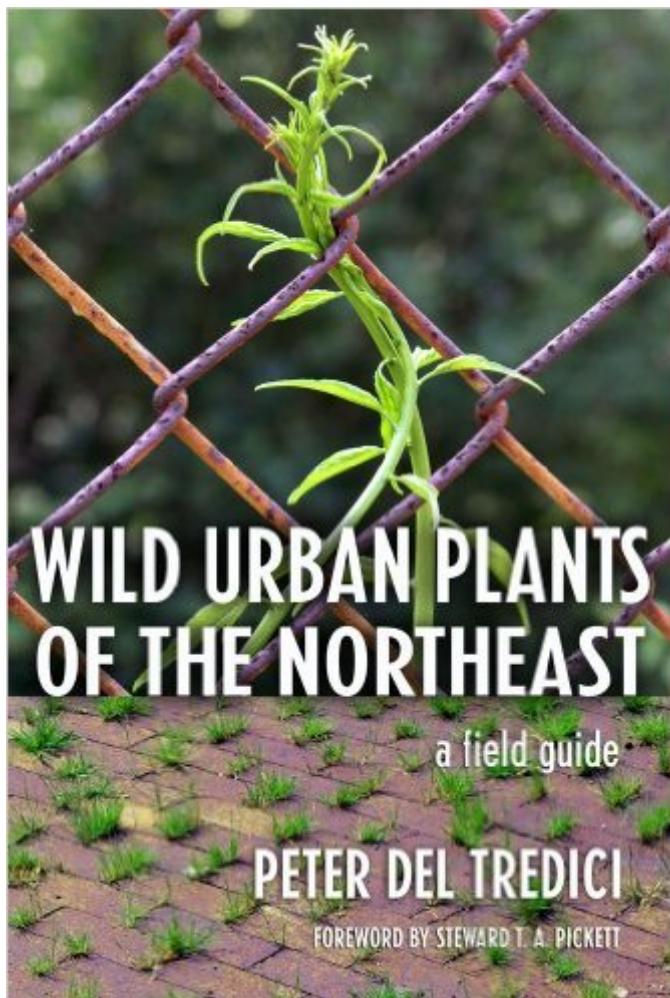


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Wild Urban Plants Of The Northeast: A Field Guide



Synopsis

Characterized by an abundance of pavement, reflected heat, polluted air and contaminated soil, our cities and towns may seem harsh and unwelcoming to vegetation. However, there are a number of plants that manage to grow spontaneously in sidewalk cracks and roadside meridians, flourish along chain-link fences and railroad tracks, line the banks of streams and rivers, and emerge in the midst of landscape plantings and trampled lawns. On their own and free of charge, these plants provide ecological services including temperature reduction, oxygen production, carbon storage, food and habitat for wildlife, pollution mitigation, and erosion control on slopes. Around the world, wild plants help to make urban environments more habitable for people. Peter Del Tredici's lushly illustrated field guide to wild urban plants of the northeastern United States is the first of its kind. While it covers the area bounded by Montreal, Boston, Washington, D.C. and Detroit, it is broadly applicable to temperate urban environments across North America. The book covers 222 species that flourish without human assistance or approval. Rather than vilifying such plants as weeds, Del Tredici stresses that it is important to notice, recognize, and appreciate their contribution to the quality of urban life. Indeed their very toughness in the face of heat islands, elevated levels of carbon dioxide and ubiquitous contamination is indicative of the important role they have to play in helping humans adapt to the challenges presented by urbanization, globalization and climate change. The species accounts • 158 main entries plus 64 secondary species-feature descriptive information including scientific name and taxonomic authority, common names, botanical family, life form, place of origin, and identification features. Del Tredici focuses especially on their habitat preferences, environmental functions, and cultural significance. Each entry is accompanied by original full-color photographs by the author which show the plants' characteristics and growth forms in their typical habitats. Wild Urban Plants of the Northeast will help readers learn to see these plants—the natural vegetation of the urban environment—with fresh appreciation and understanding.

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Customer Reviews

Del Tredici has belled the cat: instead of belaboring whether plants are native or invasive, good or evil, Del Tredici has taken the unexpected leap of looking at urban plants scientifically. With his long experience of plant and habitat management, he has asked the simplest and most elegant of questions about the functionality of each neglected "weed" familiar only to urban botanists: what really are the native plants of urban landscapes, and how can we evaluate their ecological roles and functionality in those settings. The first twentyfive pages of this book should be mandatory reading for all American landscapers--henceforth they will be for all of my classes. Del Tredici explains how European studies for years have focused on plant associations, degree of disturbance and on tracing historical introductions, along with their co-evolution with human societies. Americans tend refer to them all as "aliens". Del Tredici has studied for many years how American urban vegetation could be reasonably sorted into useful types, based on the factors which distinguish urban from wild ecology: degree of disturbance, of annual human maintenance effort, and of similarity to floristic patterns in nearby undisturbed areas. He very sensibly suggests three groups based on these studies: remnants of the original flora, managed "gardens" where annual effort maintains a suite of landscaped plantings, and highly disturbed areas, where nutrient and water budgets are neglected and his volunteers provide unmanaged greenery at no societal cost. Nearly a thousand of his own photos showing characteristic views of these plants make identification for laymen very easy. One is tempted to say Peter Del Tredici has in one book elevated these organisms from weeds to urban heroes.

Peter was my first real teacher of natural history some forty years ago when he was a roommate of my girlfriend in an old mill house in the town of Harvard Massachusetts. It is a joy to see his field guide to wild plant life in urban New England. In those days Peter would have me collecting different maple leaves to understand their variation in appearance. Later when I taught environmental history, I would show my students pictures of ailanthus trees tearing apart chainlink fences in the city, akin to the picture on the cover of Peter's book. I am also glad to see Peter mention Frank

Egler whose ideas of succession we read in a pirated manuscript because Egler was so unacceptable to the profession of the day. This is a great book. I am a bit sorry I moved to California 15 years ago when I retired because I would take Peter's book and meander around streets I knew so well identifying those plants which were unfamiliar to me. I remember meandering the woods of exurban Boston with Peter and his response to people back home in California where he had grown up who questioned his move east: In California everywhere you look someone will soon be living there; whereas in New England someone had lived there and it was now woods. Sometime later flying over my house in southern New Hampshire I couldn't find it for all the trees. I would take my students into the woods of the University and we would look at the boundary between the native secondary growth there and the wild urban landscape parts of the school. The introduction to Peter's book is excellent, laying out a corrective understanding of the role of wild urban plants.

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