



Book Review – Hugh Barrett

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Field Guide to the Grasses of Oregon and Washington. Roche, C.T., Brainerd, R., Wilson, B. L., Otting, N., Korfhage, R. C., pp. ix, 460. Oregon State University Press. 2019.

The *Field Guide to the Grasses of Oregon and Washington* is a photographically rich and informative guide to the 376 native species, subspecies and varieties of grasses in Oregon and Washington. Included, as well, are the commonly encountered introduced and naturalized agricultural and ornamental grasses, and the weedy invaders abroad our Northwest landscapes today.

An early reviewer wrote that “... grasses are important functional components in a variety of ecosystems ... ranging from wetlands to deserts and from sea level to alpine ...”, I would add, however, that despite their importance and ubiquity, grasses are, for many, the most difficult group of plants to identify, second perhaps to sedges and rushes and/or the cryptogams.

Written in a comfortable, almost conversational style, the Introduction takes the reader on an armchair, or tailgate, or spot on the ground under the shade of a tree journey through the evolution of the grasses, their morphology and structure and their vocabulary: awns and glumes, lemmas and paleas, florets and inflorescences, rames and panicles, auricles and ligules, puberulent (I love that word!) and pubescent ... For the stout of heart and student-in-training (You have to learn this – There. Is. No. Easy. Way!) there is a tightly drafted dichotomous key. And for we “Old Dogs”, the author endearingly suggests the “Leaf Method” of grass identification. Don’t know what that is? It’s in the book!

The text and excellent macrophotographs dealing with the individual species are without parallel, exposing many of the mysteries of the Poaceae family, while truly enhancing their magic. Of the many commendable features in book - in addition to the photography and text - the two I most appreciate are: 1) in the discussion of a particular species, similar species, crosses, and hybrid intergrades are described, and 2) the index serves as a synonymy for earlier classifications. (e.g. *Agropyron spicatum*. See *Pseudoroegneria spicata*)

For those of us who cut our taxonomic teeth on the pen and ink illustrations and the clipped, abbreviated and economical texts of the venerable Hitchcock’s *Manual of the Grasses of the United States*, or the more recent Hitchcock & Cronquist’s *Flora the Pacific Northwest*, this guide, through its excellent photography and descriptive text, would have been most appreciated when I began my journey into the taxonomy of the grasses all those years ago.

As I told some friends recently - this book belongs in every Botanist’s library, on the front seat of any Range Con’s pickup, on any Master Gardener’s kitchen table, in any Naturalist’s knapsack, and in any Cowboy’s saddlebag.

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