

Wildflowers of Glacier National Park and Surrounding Areas

A Book Review

by Annie Garde & Diane Hafeman

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Wildflowers of Glacier National Park and Surrounding Areas by Shannon Fitzpatrick Kimball and Peter Lesica; Published by Trillium Press

Wildflowers of Glacier National Park is a true “field” guide. Along with its pleasing aesthetic qualities—gorgeous photos, clutterless layout, and intelligent text—every aspect of this book is geared towards functionality in the field.

As we hiked in Glacier with Pete and Shannon’s book, we found the large type and unadorned font style ideal for on-the-hoof viewing (also very handy for readers who forgot their glasses!). Searching for a flower by color was effortless, thanks to the page-wide color banners across the top of the book. When using the detailed index for Latin or common name look-up, page numbers set in the upper outside corner of each page allowed for additional ease in trailside use. Sturdily bound, this guidebook withstood the rigors of being pulled in and out of a crowded pack, and survived constant page turning, cover bending and consultations in the rain and alongside damp streamsides.

The format of just one or two photos per page was ideal, making for ease-of-use in the field and pleasant viewing in one’s campsite lawn chair. The inclusion of leaves and stems in most of the photos was a great asset in our amateur identification attempts. (Diane is new to botany and Anne has been new to it for years.) If we were still befuddled after studying the plant and the photos, we went to the text. The descriptions are brief and give key characteristics, scientific enough for any budding botanist and easy enough to observe with or without a hand lens. Measurements are given in inches (thank goodness). On occasions

when we were unable to confirm ID, it was comforting to be assured by our thoughtful authors that “a technical plant key is often necessary,” or “this is the largest genera in Glacier National Park....making field identification difficult.”

Over 300 of the most common plant species in the Park are featured in this book. That’s a lot. On a July hike in the Sperry Chalet area, with book in hand, Anne was able to identify over 100 species of flowering plants, as well as several shrubs and even a sedge and some ferns. Diane found that not once in all her Glacier trips this summer did she fail to find the flower, or at least a close relative, she was trying to identify with the help of this book. And though flowers were her main interest, she found herself distracted enough by the impressive tree, fern, and grass photos to add these to her ID quest, piquing an interest that has stayed with her in subsequent field trips.

In late August, with a plethora of berried bushes circling our tent in St. Mary’s Campground, a silver-leafed shrub minus flower or fruit caught our attention. With the use of a hand lens and the authors’ instruction to look for rust colored glands on the leaf underside, we were close to identifying the shrub as silverberry (*Elaeagnus commutata*). Clinching our ID was a line in the notes informing us that silverberry could be found “at the end of St. Mary’s Lake.”

Such clear identification instruction doesn’t happen by accident. Peter Lesica, one of the founders of the Montana Native Plant Society, has been a field botanist in Montana for over 25 years, is the author of the definitive *Flora of Glacier National Park* for serious botanists, and has been getting down on the ground to get that perfect flower shot for even longer. He’s teamed up with fellow botanist and Glacier consultant Shannon Fitzpatrick Kimball, and their collaboration makes full use of their scientific, creative, and technical expertise.

Can you tell? We love this book. It’s definitely worth taking in your pack on hikes in Glacier and surrounding areas. Having this book with you is like having Pete and Shannon along, and you won’t consider going out without them again. That is, until, as Diane says, “...some dream future when Latin rolls off my

tongue and I know what a galea is and why I need to know. Then I'll move excitedly on to Pete's big *Flora of Glacier National Park*."

NOTE: Shannon and Peter's book will be available from the chapters for \$15, \$5 of which goes to MNPS.