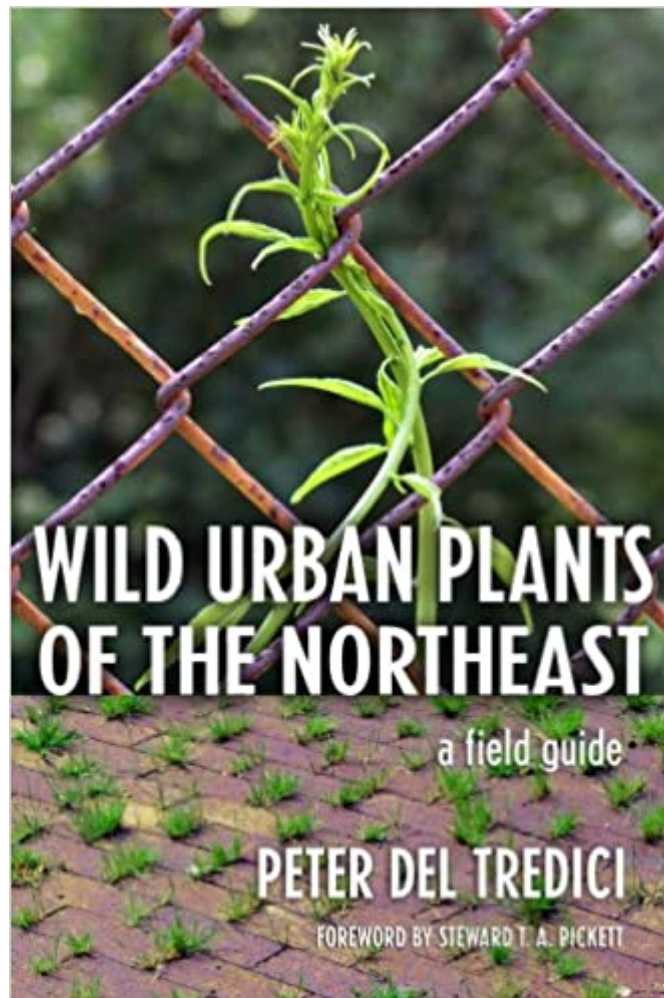




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Wild Urban Plants Of The Northeast: A Field Guide



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 medians, 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.

Book Information

Paperback: 392 pages

Publisher: Comstock Publishing Associates; 1 edition (February 19, 2010)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0801474582

ISBN-13: 978-0801474583

Product Dimensions: 0.8 x 6 x 9 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.6 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.7 out of 5 stars 34 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #59,669 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #1 in [Books > Crafts, Hobbies & Home > Gardening & Landscape Design > By Region > Middle Atlantic](#) #6 in [Books > Crafts, Hobbies & Home > Gardening & Landscape Design > By Technique > Urban](#) #33 in [Books > Crafts, Hobbies & Home > Gardening & Landscape Design > Reference](#)

Customer Reviews

"Del Tredici approaches his subject with a scientist's eye for detail, yet makes it very readable. His book honors 158 herbs that manage to flourish in wayward places. . . . Del Tredici introduces these innovative species as immigrants with histories of their own, adapting to roadsides and abandoned lots. Even pushy plants do have virtues, assisting with oxygen production, carbon storage, temperature reduction, erosion control, and wildlife food and habitat." *—* [American Herb Association Quarterly](#) (July 2011) "Del Tredici's book will be a great resource for those working on greening our industrial landscapes I can envision creative park managers, urban planners, DIY urban restorationists, permaculture practitioners, neighborhood activists, and other running to this field guide to get ideas for free, readily available seed mixes for speeding up the greening of landfills, abandoned yards, decaying asphalt, and unused railroad lines." *—* [Judy Kingsbury, Ecological Restoration](#) (March/June 2011) "Peter Del Tredici has written one of those rare books that completely overturns the way you look at the landscape *—* in this case, the landscape of the city's derelict cracks and corners, which in his hands becomes a place of unusual interest, value, and beauty. Though ostensibly a field guide, this book is much more than that *—* it offers a deep and wise reconsideration of our most cherished ideas about nature. You will never look at an 'invasive species' the same way again." *—* [Michael Pollan, author of The Botany of Desire and The Omnivore's Dilemma](#) "I grew up in the heart of the San Fernando Valley in the Los Angeles basin and developed an interest in plants while I was in high school. Unfortunately, I did not have a resource to identify and understand the naturalized and weedy plants of my environment. I would have found such a book a fabulous resource then and today and would certainly recommend it to those interesting in the magnificence of nature, yet living in urban environments. This is a great resource for urbanites to experience the fascination, complexity, and beauty of the plants that grow around them." *—* [Joseph M. DiTomaso, coauthor of Weeds of the Northeast and author of Weeds of California and Other Western States and Aquatic and Riparian Weeds of the West](#) "Both experienced and novice users will find *Wild Urban Plants of the Northeast* to be an excellent tool for

plant identification. Each species is presented with user-friendly descriptions and photographs of important vegetative structures as well as photographs of the species within the urban landscape. This work contains a thought provoking introduction to urban plant communities that will serve as an entry point for investigation by scholars and practitioners alike. To some, these species may stand as symptoms of environmental degradation, but Del Tredici documents the case that the urban plant community has been evolving since the first human civilizations and that it is part of a sustainable solution to vegetation management problems in the urban landscape. Recognition is the first step toward acceptance. *Wild Urban Plants of the Northeast* is the first field guide to acknowledge the urban plant community around us and it challenges us to judge the plants on their virtues rather than by their place of origin. This work will be the foundation for those who wish to evaluate plant communities by their function and sustainability rather than by nativity alone. We cannot go back and undo the edaphic changes and disturbance regimes that exist in our urban environments. Why should we? *Wild Urban Plants of the Northeast* will lead us forward."

—Richard Uva, coauthor of *Weeds of the Northeast*

Peter Del Tredici provides a unique perspective on the plants we find in our increasingly urbanized environment of the twenty-first century. Rather than dismissing the nonnative plant species that have been introduced into our city habitats, he portrays them as immigrants with a history and life of their own adapting to roadsides and abandoned parking lots. *Wild Urban Plants of the Northeast* is a must-read if we are to understand and appreciate the world's exotic biodiversity.

—W. John Kress, National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian Institution

Peter Del Tredici is Senior Research Scientist at the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University and Lecturer in Landscape Architecture at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. He is author of *A Giant Among the Dwarfs*. He has been awarded the Veitch Memorial Medal by the Royal Horticultural Society.

Steward T. A. Pickett is a Plant Ecologist at the Cary Institute of Ecosystem Studies.

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. Bravo to Comstock and Cornell for this landmark publication. Where others only see "aliens" and "invasives", and plan eradication efforts, he and his students study ecological and plant-soil interactions, and analyze tolerance and removal of pollutants. He makes the strong case that we need to look for the plants of the future, capable of surviving projected climate extremes and native soil degradation. Here they are today in neglected urban rubble and sidewalk cracks. This field guide is the tool we all needed to first identify, and then to study, and, yes, even grow to admire such brave new urban natives, created in a real sense by our neglect of the planet.

Peter Del Tredici led a field trip for a class of mine as an undergrad while at Boston University. I wish I had bought this book before that field trip so I could have had him sign it because his knowledge of urban plants is astounding. This is the best field guide I own, and the attention to variability in appearance with the pictures in the book for each species is most notable. If he ever sees this review I hope he knows that most of these plants can be found in Chicago, IL too. Hopeful that Del Tredici will tackle urban plants outside of the northeast. My book came with one of the pages folded and glued into the binding and with some extra paper on some of the pages and the color block guide from the printer. But I have loved this book for too long to send it back and did my best to mend the pages myself. However I won't let that change my number of stars review because the content and author of this book are far greater in importance than a few messy pages. 5 stars for Del Tredici, maybe 2 stars for whomever printed the book.

What I liked best about this book was its respect for the plants it describes. Too often such books

are catalogs of Weeds and How to Kill Them, and I wonder why the authors even bother writing about plants they despise. Del Tredici not only provides good photos and descriptions, he points out the ecological value of the plants, and shows how they thrive in urban settings. Nature is resurgent.

I bought this book to address my own inability to identify and discuss the values of/problems with so-called weeds in our school lot and garden plots. I knew names like chickweed and crabgrass, but other than dandelions I really wasn't sure how to identify what we had growing. This book was a perfect choice. It provides a range of photos for each plant, allowing someone with limited botany knowledge to identify plants by sight easily. Also, because the number of plants presented is limited to weeds found in urban areas of the northeast, it is fairly easy to use the volume with photos. (A full field guide covering non-urban, non-weed plants in the northeast would be less compact and probably less practical to use with only photos.) The book has several nice features, including a section for each plant discussing uses of the plant in different cultures or time periods. It also discusses the ecological role that each "weed" plays in the extreme urban environments it is found in. After I used this book for a few weeks, I was easily able to identify a half-dozen weeds at a glance and understand better why they were present and what benefits/liabilities they might present for an urban garden. I was able to share this with students and other teachers. In fact, I actually bought a copy of this book for a fellow teacher after we had a discussion of the term "weed" and how subjective that term can be. I would highly recommend this book to anyone with an interest in urban plants and ecology.

I concur with the other reviewers that Wild Urban Plants of the Northeast finally gives credence to the diverse ecology of urban plant / habitats. Native / non - native has always been a slippery slope in classifying plants in urban environments - and even in so called "natural" environments. This is where these plants thrive, are often beautiful, provide wildlife habitat and more often than not, such as with Phragmites, are a mirror of our role in shaping the environment. Wild urban plants contribute to the wonderful diversity of urban life. This is an well-written, clearly illustrated and unbiased book helping in the identification of these often curious and always tenacious plants.

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