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A guide to the trees of Utah and the Intermountain West
by Michael Kuhns

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BOOK REVIEW

A Guide to the Trees of Utah and the Intermountain West. Michael Kuhns. Utah State University Press, Logan, Utah 84322-7800. 1998. \$14.95, softcover.

This compact 4.5 × 8.5-inch book of 341 pages provides names, descriptive characteristics, and relevant line drawings for 219 woody species. All trees native to Utah and most introduced trees and treelike shrubs that can be grown successfully in the state are included. Although the book does not list all species that potentially could be grown in the warmer southern regions of Utah, it does suggest additional references should this information be desired.

Whereas the main body of the work is devoted to names, descriptions, and drawings, introductory information provides the nonprofessional reader with a workable vocabulary for basic understanding. Each species is consistently evaluated according to morphology of leaves, twigs/buds, flowers/fruit, bark, and wood. Much of this comparative information is superfluous, but it has made the treatment consistent. Less information is provided for less common species. General information concerning place of origin, ecological requirements, and light requirements is normally provided for each species as well as landscape use and plant hardiness zone recommendations. All native species are clearly marked with a symbol so they stand apart.

The author chose to arrange species within the text by the traditional similarity approach rather than alphabetically according to family. This generally means that one is obliged to look up the tree in the index by species name or by common name and then find it by page number. I personally find the nonalphabetical arrangement awkward because it requires looking up information twice.

Most species listed are accompanied by superb black-and-white line drawings that have been borrowed by permission from other publications. They greatly enrich the text since written descriptions of cones, flowers, and fruits do not convey comparative information as quickly or as well. The 12 color photos presented near the middle of

the book seem out of place and merely whet the appetite for more.

A key to 172 of the 219 species is provided so that one may work through a series of couplets and independently discover the identity of an unknown tree. The key is easy to use, but as with all keys, experience and intuition help. Leaving 47 species out of the key is a serious flaw. Nearly 1/3 of the trees I attempted to key were not included. Anyone depending on the key to identify a tree would probably find this experience confusing. The key has the same weakness as most keys in that it is written to assist the amateur, but its operation requires more knowledge than the average person possesses. For example, a novice trying to key *Sophora japonica*, using this key, would be baffled by insistence that its fruit is a legume (described in the glossary as a pod that splits). This particular tree has a loment, an unusual kind of legume that does not resemble a pod that splits. Either the key or the glossary should explain this unusual fruit; both fail in this case. Keys give amateurs independence, but in order to be totally useful, they need to be complete. Both the key and the glossary should be written with the layman foremost in mind.

Notwithstanding embarrassing mistakes, such as a color photograph of an atlas cedar inadvertently labeled as a bristlecone pine, this book will be a useful resource for those wishing to learn about the woody species growing in the Intermountain region. It will also be helpful to homeowners and professionals interested in selecting plants for landscaping purposes. It summarizes much practical information on species requirements, growth patterns, ultimate size, zone hardiness, site selection, planting, climatic considerations, and common cultivars. I find this book a valuable addition to my library and plan to use it in my field botany class. I recommend its use to those interested in learning about the woody vegetation of Utah.

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