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New Edition of Classic UNC Press Book Displays Wild Flowers of North Carolina, Southeast

By DAVID WILLIAMSON
UNC News Services

(Chapel Hill, N.C.) One of the most colorful books ever produced in North Carolina—and one of the most popular—will make a new appearance in mid-May as the University of North Carolina Press publishes the second edition of *Wild Flowers of North Carolina*.

More than 100,000 copies of the floral reference's first edition have sold since 1968, making it one of the state's all-time bestsellers. That volume, which the *New Yorker* called "a model for any state field guide," also quickly became a favorite among naturalists and plant lovers throughout the South.

Among flowers featured are those with such lovely common names as nodding ladies' tresses, showy lady's slipper, passion flower, hearts a'bustin, pussy-toes, bride's feathers, and fawn's breath.

Others are Indian paint brush, mistflower, black-eyed Susan, meadow beauty, Carolina silverbell, fairywand, honeycups, Maypops, pinkladies, and sweet wake robin.

Some wild species' names are less appealing but just as evocative: bastard toadflax, beard tongue, beggar's ticks, marsh fleabane, snakeroot, sneezeweed, spatter dock, sourgrass, crow poison, harvest lice, cancer-root, and spiderwort.

Entries run the gamut from Adam and Eve to Zenobia and from the extremely common dandelion, found throughout much of the world, to the rare and ever-fascinating Venus flytrap, which grows wild only near the coastal border between the Carolinas.

[more]

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Folk uses for many of the plants also are given, such as food, beverages, dyes, and medicines for a host of problems including diabetes, burns, snakebite, and leukemia.

The new edition adds 100 more species of flowering plants to the 400 already depicted in color in the first. Authors are the late Dr. William S. Justice, an Asheville surgeon; Dr. C. Ritchie Bell, professor emeritus of botany at UNC and founder of the N.C. Botanical Garden; and Dr. Anne H. Lindsey, Bell's wife and co-owner of Laurel Hill Press.

"Even though this was a labor of love, the second edition was a whole lot more work because we now have charts too with just about anything you would want to know about the plants," Bell said. "That includes where and when the flowers bloom, what conditions they thrive in, whether they are poisonous or not and whether they are endangered or threatened."

Also featured is a key character code for each entry for help in identifying plants by their characteristic structure, flowers, and leaves, along with references, a glossary, numerous drawings, several appendices, and an index.

"A portion of the royalties from the book will go to the N.C. Botanical Garden where people can go to look at native plants as they exist in nature," Bell said.

Developments over the past 30 years or so have produced bad news and good news for wildflowers in North Carolina and the rest of the Southeast, Bell said.

"People are, of course, a problem for the flowers, but the biggest threat now are the deer," he said. "If the population of deer, which no longer have natural enemies, is not controlled better, wild flowers are going to become even more rare because deer like to eat them. Some may disappear completely. Also, without control, many thousands of the animals will ultimately succumb to disease or starvation."

On the positive side, people over roughly the same period have developed a strong interest in growing wild flowers, Bell said.

"Three decades ago, if people wanted wild flowers or to start a garden with them, they would just go out and get them off the land," he said. "Then interest built up, and that pushed growers into wild flower propagation. And they also started propagating interesting mutant

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forms that didn't even exist 30 years ago."

Seeds and plants for many different wild flowers now are available in the trade.

Besides founding the N.C. Botanical Garden, Bell was partially responsible for persuading N.C. tree farmers in the mountains to start growing Fraser firs for Christmas trees decades ago. Their efforts have evolved into a multimillion-dollar industry in the mountains and Piedmont.

The publishing company Bell owns with Lindsey, Laurel Hill Press, produces natural history guides, videos and DVDs.

A photo gallery of selected wild flowers is available at www.uncpress.unc.edu.

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by William S. Justice, C. Ritchie Bell, and Anne H. Lindsey

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