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Book Review: *Remarkable Plants of Texas:
Uncommon Accounts of Our Common Natives* By
Matt Warnock Turner

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Remarkable Plants of Texas: Uncommon Accounts of Our Common Natives. By Matt Warnock Turner, Austin: University of Texas Press, 2009. xvi + 336 pp. Map, photographs, glossary, bibliography, index. \$29.95 cloth.

At last: a book dealing with numerous Texas plants that is neither a field guide nor a dry litany of ethnobotanical uses. *Remarkable Plants of Texas* is an easy, informative, and enjoyable read. Its 65 entries cover over 80 species of some of the most common, well-known, and well-used plants of Texas (many of which also occur in the southeastern or southwestern United States or Mexico). The short (four- to eight-page) chapters are grouped by life form: trees, shrubs, and herbaceous plants (also including cacti, grasses, vines, and aquatics). Although most treatments are about a single species, a few cover several species within the same genus, either for reasons of similarity or because of difficulty in distinguishing between species. There is at least one color photograph for every treatment (my only disappointment with the book is that some photographs are poorly focused).

At the beginning of each treatment, the origin of the scientific name is provided along with multiple common names, family, simple description, habitat, and distribution information. While the volume's primary focus is ethnobotanical (prehistoric to present), there is also information on history (both natural and human), culture, wildlife uses, ecology (both at the single species and community level),

conservation, toxicology, paleobotany, geology, etymology, interesting tidbits, folklore, and even folk songs!

This book should appeal to the amateur as well as the professional. Although most of the writing is easily readable, Matt Turner does not shy away from the occasional technical term, providing the beginning botanist with an opportunity to learn something of value. The professional will find in-depth botanical discussions, such as that on ocotillo leaves, and probably discover a few new things about old plant friends. Other impressive features include an extensive bibliography; a comprehensive index including people, Native American tribes, cities, uses, wildlife, and the plants themselves; and an unusual glossary that includes not just the regular botanical terms but also brief details for over 100 Native American tribes.

Matt Turner weaves an exotic tapestry from a myriad of often ordinary facts about mundane species. Not only does he provide fresh information about some of the best-loved and most written-about Texas plants (such as bluebonnets), he is at his best when convincing the reader why much maligned species such as Ashe juniper, mesquite, hackberry, and prickly pear (to name a few) are just as important. If you have ever been asked, "If you were a plant, what would you be?," *Remarkable Plants of Texas* offers all you need to know to make your choice. Even as a seasoned botanist, I'm looking at these common plants now with a slightly different perspective. **Jackie M. Poole**, *Wildlife Diversity Program, Texas Parks and Wildlife Department*.