



Book Review

M.A. Dirr and K.S. Warren. *The Tree Book: Superior Selections for Landscapes, Streetscapes, and Gardens*. 2019. Timber Press Portland, OR 939 pp. ISBN 978-1-60469-714-8.

Intended for professionals and tree lovers alike that are interested in substantially deepening their knowledge-base and understanding about the identification, selection, and propagation of ornamental trees, *The Tree Book* is an intently-researched resource produced by world renowned plant experts, Dr. Michael Dirr and Keith Warren. This 939-page hardcover book is informative, enlightening, and perhaps most powerful of all, filled with praise-worthy, professional-quality color photos of trees. This work is composed in a manner that is engaging to all, and surely gripping to any tree enthusiast.

In the 'Introduction', the authors detail a deep connection with trees that began in their youth:

"For both of us, this love affair began early in life – with the deciduous monarchs of the Midwest (for Dirr) and the great coniferous rainforests of the Pacific Northwest (for Warren)." (p.8)

The authors also detail specific memories and moments relating to interactions with trees:

"Whether walking through the redwoods of California, admiring the massive structure of a Midwest oak, or perhaps having exited a hot freeway pulling into the cool deciduous shade of a tree-lined street in an eastern city, we never cease to be amazed by the majesty of trees... doubtless our bond with trees is unusually strong, as the two of us feel kindred spirit with trees...to us, it seems to be a part of our humanity." (p.9)

The authors continue with discussion about the economic benefits associated with urban trees, detailing how they can enhance the aesthetic component of commercial districts and play an important role in economic vitality. Stormwater abatement, infrastructure enhancement, and heat abatement are but a few of the other benefits of urban trees, highlighted by the authors.

Dirr and Warren also detail the health benefits associated with urban greenery – of which trees can be an important component. Emotional benefits, stress reduction, mood enhancement compose the psychological components; reduced hospital stays, exercise, and protection from the sun's harmful rays may constitute some of the physical aspects.

With substantial contemporary discussion centering around invasive insect and disease pests that may decimate monocultural urban tree populations, the authors indicate that a critical step in protecting urban forests is diversity beyond that of a strict measure pertaining to species, genus, and family:

"The concept of embracing diversity in our urban planting is of great importance, but understand: the diversity in our plants doesn't

adhere to strict percentage rules. Species designations are somewhat artificial lines we draw in the continuum of nature, so we need to look at the extent of diversity within species, genera, and families. Not all genera are equal. *Quercus* and *Acer*, our oaks and maples, are among the most diverse genera and are highly important urban trees that deserve more representation in our plantings than a strict percentage rule might dictate. We absolutely embrace horticultural diversity, but evaluate that in terms of true biological diversity and look beyond the names." (p.17)

Regarding the popular topic of invasiveness as a result of importing exotic plant material, the authors indicate that "more emphasis" should be placed on selecting suitable urban plantings from existing native plant populations, as the potential for invasiveness from these populations is "less likely." (p.17) The extensive introduction in this book covers other important topics including nursery production, plant breeding, selection, and nomenclature.

Trees that are detailed in this book are arranged in alphabetical order, commencing with the botanical spelling of the genus. Thus, the heart of this book commences on p. 36 with color photos and descriptions of fir (*Abies* spp.) trees, and continues with descriptions and photos of trees – familiar and unfamiliar – through to the final species, Chinese date (*Ziziphus jujuba*), on p. 919.

A perhaps easily overlooked aspect of this comprehensive book that should be appreciated by even the most ardent tree-lover relates to the authors' warnings about the drawbacks of planting trees:

"...we realize that some people are put off by the problems that trees can create. Tree lovers need to recognize this. We, too, have raked the leaves and even repaired the roof when the trunk has come crashing down..." "A tree in your own garden can be a source of pleasure but also of work, expense and potential liability." (p.14) "By selecting and breeding trees that property owners appreciate and find to be of lower maintenance, better structure and less potential liability, our urban forests will grow." (p.15)

In composing this tremendous resource, the authors indicate that their goal is to "spread the knowledge of horticulture" and specifically, the attributes of a wide number of species and cultivars with the intent that "trees will be chosen and planted with careful long-term consideration of the site." (p.14) Readers should be assured that in this effort, the authors have unequivocally succeeded.

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