

REVIEW

Plant Life in the World's Mediterranean Climates. Peter Dallman. 1998. xiv + 258 pages. \$29.95. California Native Plant Society Press and University of California Press, Berkeley. ISBN 0-520-20809-9.

To professional and lay botanists, horticulturists, and gardeners the world's mediterranean regions present an astonishing array of plant diversity, considering that the mediterranean climate occurs in only about 2% of the earth's land area. The mild weather conditions and long growing seasons contribute to a rich assemblage of plants and plant forms. The relatively small areas, widely disjunct from one another, offer an opportunity to witness and study parallel evolution among similar biotic regions. Peter Dallman, Chairman of the Strybing Arboretum Docent Council, has written a concise yet precise, and altogether entertaining treatment of the vegetation of the mediterranean regions of the world.

Chapter 1 sets the stage by discussing the Mediterranean Climate and its influence on plant growth. Chapter 2 on Plant and Climate Origins places climate into the context of why certain kinds of plants grow where they do, and what historical factors have influenced present and past climatic conditions in mediterranean regions. Chapter 3 summarizes various methods by which plants of mediterranean climates cope with the periods of drought, frequent fires, and nutrient-poor soils that characterize these areas. Chapter 4 treats the general types of Plant Communities that one encounters in mediterranean areas. It sets the stage for a comparative study of the five regions. The meat of the book lies in chapters 5 through 9, each covering one of the five mediterranean regions (California, central Chile, the western Cape, Australia, and the Mediterranean Basin, respectively). Each chapter is written parallel to the others, facilitating comparisons among regions. A brief discussion of landscape and climate is followed by a discussion of the important plant communities, organized as follows: sclerophyllous scrub communities; coastal scrub communities; woodlands and forests. Within the plant community segments discussions of the more important species are presented, often with clear and colorful illustrations. Each chapter ends with a short list of plants found in the region.

Upon reading about such interesting wild places, the natural reaction is, of course, "when do we go?" When is up to you, but in Chapter 10—Planning a Trip—Dallman provides us with the benefit of his extensive experience traveling these areas. He suggests specific localities in which to see the vegetation described in his book. This is bound to

be extremely useful for the botanical traveller—almost a travel guide. And do you have trouble with the metric values that you will likely encounter as you travel abroad? Dallman provides at the end of the book an easy to use set of conversions.

In little more than 250 pages it is impossible to cover the detail that will certainly interest many a reader. If you want to dig deeper into the subject, Dallman has provided 11 pages of references on the plants and plant communities of the mediterranean climates.

The chapters are eminently readable for non-scientists. Dallman shows a talent for explanation without excessive verbiage. The illustrations are generally of high quality and add a definite attraction to the book. The color photographs, most of them by the author, are especially handsome, with high resolution and bright color reproduction. A few black and white photographs are a bit washed out and not up to the standard of the rest of the photos in the book. In some cases the photos have been reduced to a size too small to allow resolution of the subject. Likewise, several drawings seem primitive by today's standards. I wish that the publishers might have gone the extra (short) distance to ensure that all illustrations were of equal quality.

So for whom is this book written? Given its depth, I doubt that it would serve as a focus of a graduate seminar in mediterranean floristics and ecosystems—but I doubt that was Dallman's goal in writing this book. It certainly does provide an enjoyable introduction to some of the world's more interesting ecosystems. Further, a major strength of the book is its comparative approach. Many of us consider ourselves fortunate to have visited and studied at most any two of these regions. Dallman's offering provides an introductory view of all five regions at the same time. Even if you're not a traveller but want to grow mediterranean plants in your garden, there is ample information in Dallman's book to help you understand why plants from these regions do better in specific soils and climatic conditions.

When I teach California botany to my students each year, I remind them that what they are about to see is unlike any other region in the world, floristically and ecologically, and that this is due in large part to the mediterranean climate's affect on plants. *Plant Life in the World's Mediterranean Climates* gives us a well-organized view of these regions, and inspires a desire to explore further the differences and similarities of plant life in these regions.

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