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Review of *American Wildflower Florilegium* by Jean Andrews

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American Wildflower Florilegium. Jean Andrews. Denton, TX: University of North Texas Press, 1992. 125 pp. Oversized, 50 plates \$50.00 cloth.

This book is a collection of 50 watercolor paintings of American wildflowers (“florilegium” means, literally, “a gathering of flowers”). Accompanying each full-page painting is a summary of general information about the plant, including notes about its botanical classification, the etymology of its name, life history, distribution, description, flowering period, pollination, and propagation.

Botanical illustration is often difficult to evaluate, because aesthetic standards can be quite separate from standards of botanical accuracy and clarity. Jean Andrews does very well on both counts; she is an accomplished painter who manages her difficult watercolor medium with impressive skill but nonetheless

manages to produce an accurate representation of each plant—including, leaves, stems, flowers, and roots. A few of the paintings, including my favorite, the luminous representation of chicory, would compete favorably with some of the best illustrations from Italian manuscript herbals of the Renaissance.

Which leads to a minor quibble. What is *chicory*, an introduced European plant, doing in a collection of *American* wildflowers? Especially when there are only fifty plates in the book and thousands of spectacular American plants to choose from! The book includes several such lapses, most of which can be forgiven because of the beauty of the paintings.

As she explains in her introduction, the author painted all of her plants from life, often returning to a plant repeatedly to find different stages of flowers and fruit, even rising before dawn and driving a long distance each day for a week to produce the painting of the night-blooming Missouri evening-primrose.

Some plants were brought in and potted or placed in water to be sketched indoors. This shows in a few of the pictures. The winecup poppy mallow appears to be somewhat the worse for wear, with many of its leaves fallen or withered and its flowers looking smaller and paler than normal ones, as if they had opened indoors.

Each of the plants is at the same scale as all of the others in the book. This means that the smaller plants have been shown in their entirety, while larger ones have had portions left out. The author has followed the convention of placing two inconspicuous lines to indicate that the central part of the plant is missing. In a few cases—such as the ox-eye daisy (another European introduction), the Maximilian sunflower, and the basket flower star thistle this convention does not work very well. In each of these plates, the plant looks curiously dwarfed or deupauperate, as if it had been repeatedly mowed off, even though the omission of the central part is clearly indicated.

This “florilegium” deserves high praise for overall book design as well as the artistic skill and the botanical accuracy of the paintings. It would be a prized possession for anyone fond of flowers and flower paintings. **David M. Sutherland**, *Department of Biology, University of Nebraska at Omaha*.