

**Review: *Flora of North America North of Mexico:*
V.1: Introduction;
*V.2: Pteridophytes and Gymnosperms***

Ed. by Flora of North America Editorial Committee

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Flora of North America has been in the planning stages for over 30 years. If the first two of the 14 volumes planned is any indication, the wait has been well worth it. This compendium aims to provide systematic experts, botanists, and interested lay people with a guide to plants of the United States, Canada, and Greenland. The editors draw upon the full range of systematic literature, herbarium specimens, and experts in the field of plant systematics to do so. The number of experts and the range of literature consulted for the project is quite impressive.

The first volume is an easy-to-read, well-organized and well-documented history of the evolution of the flora of the continent. These introductory essays are written by recognized flora authorities and cover geographical, ecological, and systematic topics influencing North American floristics. One essay, which explains the basic concepts underlying genera and species classification, is well-placed in Volume One so beginning students of plant taxonomy may read it before delving into Volume Two. An added feature is an overview and key to flowering plant families. The essays and the key provide the student or nonbotanist with an excellent starting point to plant classification. They also provide the expert with a foundation for the classification system used in the rest of the volumes. A helpful addition would have been a glossary of terms, given the wide intended audience.

Volume Two begins the classification of Pteridophytes and Gymnosperms. These groups include the ferns, horsetails, cycads, and conifers. Keys are provided for each family, genus and species in taxonomic sequence. Each species review includes a map of geographic range, morphological and habitat descriptions, phenological information,

chromosome number (if published), citations from original descriptions, and geographic range. The physical description is the primary feature over chromosome number for this compendium. Relational maps between parental taxa, and sterile hybrids are provided in reticulograms or relational diagrams. All base maps are drawn from the same Lambert equal-area projection, providing easy comparison of area and range from one species to another. The illustrations are very high quality, but few in number. Only one out of three species is illustrated.

An important feature of the *Flora of North America* project and future volumes is a continuously updated database. This aspect of the project is not yet fully underway. However, it promises to provide quick data input for changes and additions, as well as the capability to search and compare data fields such as habitat or physical descriptions.

The *Flora of North America* will not replace extensive local floras such as *Flora of the Pacific Northwest* by C.L. Hitchcock and A. Cronquist. However, it is a very valuable regional guide and together with the database, provides a solid foundation for biodiversity studies. The *Flora of North America* is highly recommended for public and academic institutions as well as environmental organizations who study the flora of their regions.

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