

# Plant Life of Kentucky: An Illustrated Guide to the Vascular Flora

Ronald L Jones

The University Press of Kentucky,  
663 South Limestone, Lexington, KY 40508-4008;  
URL: <http://www.kentuckypress.com>.  
Hardcover, 2005, 18 x 25 cm (7 x 10 in),  
xvi + 850 p with 20 figures, 16 tables, line drawings of the  
great majority of plant taxa treated in the book, and black-  
and-white photographs of 15 (past and present) amateur  
and professional Kentucky botanists,  
ISBN 0-8131-2331-3, US\$ 75.



This book is an excellent account of the vascular plant life of Kentucky. As the title implies, it is more than a taxonomic manual. *Plant Life of Kentucky* is divided into two major parts: Part I—Introduction (p 1–105), and Part II—Taxonomic Treatment (p 107–834), each with its own Literature Cited section. Part I provides a brief overview of the book, including explanations about arrangement of taxa, family descriptions, keys, distribution of taxa within Kentucky, and so on; a good qualitative description of the vegetation, plant communities, and floristic plant geography of Kentucky; brief overviews of the physiography (natural regions) and geology of Kentucky, with some mention of the geologic history of plant life in the state; postsettlement anthropogenic-caused changes (for example, by logging, coal mining, and agriculture) in the plant life of Kentucky; and a very well-done short history of floristic botany in the state, starting with André Michaux in the 1790s and continuing to the present.

Part II is the taxonomic manual portion of the book, containing keys to all of,

and illustrations of many of, the 2030 native and 570 (22%) nonnative plant taxa documented (by herbarium specimens) to occur, or to have occurred (that is, historically), in Kentucky. In addition, 250 taxa are included in the manual that are expected to occur in the state, that is, they are found near Kentucky in adjacent states. Dr Jones does not follow any single reference as a source of nomenclature for families and lesser taxa. Thus, he states that, “The names were selected on a case-by-case basis in an attempt to be consistent within groups and to reflect the most up-to-date and accurate information available” (p 6).

Part II begins with a “General Key to Vascular Plants of Kentucky” (p 109–111). This key leads the user to families Cuscutaceae, Polypodiaceae, Viscaceae, and Cactaceae or to one of 26 keys, which then either lead directly to a family or to another key that leads to family keys. In the latter case, for example, the first couplet is “Plants strictly aquatic...” versus “Plants terrestrial...” If the unidentified plant is strictly aquatic, then proceed to Key A (p 112), where, by using Key A, sev-

eral families can be identified, or referral is made to keys A-1, A-2, A-3, and A-4, each of which is a key to several families. Once the plant is identified to family, then simply go to the appropriate page in the manual where a key to genera and species is provided. Families are arranged in alphabetical order under each of the 4 groups of vascular plants: pteridophytes (ferns and “fern allies”), gymnosperms, dicots, and monocots. Following the technical description of many of the families, a section on “Family Notes” includes information on uses of taxa in the family by wildlife and humans, effect of diseases (for example, chestnut blight) and other pests on plants, and other such information—a very useful feature of the book. Information given for each species includes the most appropriate synonym; common name; flowering period; general habitat; geographic distribution in Kentucky as per occurrence in the three physiographic provinces that cross the state; abundance (that is, rare, frequent, infrequent); native or nonnative (and if nonnative where it is introduced from); and whether the taxon is listed as endangered, threatened, special

concern, or historical by the Kentucky State Nature Preserves Commission.

*Plant Life of Kentucky* includes 5 appendices; an excellent glossary (with illustrations); an index of Part I; an index of scientific names in Part II; an index of common names in Part II; a list of popular books on trees, shrubs, and wildflowers that can be used to identify plants in Kentucky and adjacent regions; and an index (on inside back cover) to the families treated in the book.

Thus, finally, after several attempts by various botanists and naturalists to produce a flora of Kentucky over the past 2 centuries, Dr Ronald Jones has done it, and he is to be congratulated for this fine achievement. As Dr Jones is well aware, however, much more field research is needed on the Kentucky flora. This need is indicated in the book by such statements as “to be expected in KY” (many species), “likely to be found in KY” (for example,

additional *Utricularia* taxa), “plants not well documented in KY” (for example, *Valerianella* spp.), “status unclear” (for example, *Heteranthera rotundifolia*), “credited to KY by...” (for example, *Potamogeton gramineus*), and “only recently reported from KY” (for example, *Bromus nottawayuanus*). Interestingly, 8 new species of *Carex* (the largest genus in the state), whose geographic range includes Kentucky, have been described in the last 20 y. *Solidago faucibus* Wieboldt is the most recently described species (in 2003) that occurs in Kentucky.

An atlas of the flora of Kentucky is much needed, and a project to produce one is well under way by Kentucky botanists. Personally, I think it would have been desirable to include county distribution maps of the species in Kentucky in *Plant Life of Kentucky* instead of putting them in a separate book. Had this been done, I would have rated the

book as an outstanding account of plant life in Kentucky rather than as an excellent account of it.

The University Press of Kentucky is to be congratulated for producing such an excellent quality book for a very reasonable price. The book is attractive (what a beautiful cover!) and well-bound. In addition, it contains few typos, and the text and illustrations are clearly printed.

Thus, I enthusiastically recommend *Plant Life of Kentucky* for purchase by research and teaching libraries and by individuals interested in the plants of Kentucky and/or in the eastern US.

—Jerry M Baskin

Jerry M Baskin is a professor of biology at the University of Kentucky, where he teaches ecology courses and conducts research on seed biology and on the flora and vegetation of cedar glades and xeric limestone prairies in the southeastern US.

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