FLORA OF NORTH AMERICA, NORTH OF MEXICO, VOL. 4. Magnoliophyta: Caryophyllidae. part 1. Flora of North America Editorial Committee (ed.). 2004. Oxford University Press 198 Madison Avenue, New York, NY 10016. 584 p. b&w line illus., and species distr. maps. Hardcover. ISBN 0-19-517389-9. \$120.

It is often the case, I have found, that when you feel you have the least to learn is when you better pay attention. A case in point would be Volume 4 of the Flora of North America, which I was recently asked to review. This volume, dominated by accounts of the families *Cactaceae*, *Chenopodiaceae*, and *Portulacaceae*, struck me as a book more valuable to someone who deals primarily with plants of our western deserts and coastal areas. Truth to tell, it was not that I didn't have a lot to learn about these plants, it was just that, as curator of a collection of 800 plants native to the southeast U.S., I was skeptical about how valuable this volume would be to me professionally. Happily, I later found that assumption to be unfounded.

To begin, as a horticulturist, one of my challenges is keeping up with current nomenclature, and just like the other FONA volumes I have reviewed, this book helped to bring me up to date on a few issues. An excellent rock garden plant that I have in our collection is *Talinum teretifolium*, and since I began my review process for this book by trying to find the plants native to my region that I knew should be included. I was confused when I found only two *Talinum* species listed: a genus I knew to comprise closer to twenty species native to the U.S. This search led me to find that almost all of these species have now been placed in the genus *Phemeranthus*. Here was yet another label to revise! Next, I found that the prickly pear I knew as *Opuntia drummondii* was now *Opuntia pusilla*. To someone responsible for accurately labeling the plants in my care, these revelations can be both enlightening and maddening. There are always discussions, which can go on at length about lumping and splitting species, but I am always grateful, upon reading the latest *Flora of North America* volume, to have become an informed participant in the debate.

As with the previous volumes in the series, I found the illustrations to be very helpful with identification. My only complaint was that all of the species weren't illustrated; something that would have no doubt required an amount of space unavailable to the publishers. The genetic history of the plants is often given where applicable, and this is helpful to me in explaining to garden visitors the extent of a relationship between species.

As a budding technophile, my main question concerns when and if these volumes will make it online. When I travel to botanize, I usually cannot carry with me 100 pounds of FONA volumes to help me with identification. I can however, carry a laptop to use after a day in the field collecting. It would be quite special to be able to page through these books online, leaping from one volume to another without unzipping a single suitcase.

Maybe someday.

To conclude, Volume 4 of this series would probably be most valuable to botanists and horticulturists working in the western half of the U.S. That said, I greatly enjoyed brushing up on the members of these families native to the southeast. I found a few that I will now try to add to our collection that were unknown to me, some of which are locally rare. As always, this series has once again made my job a bit easier, and that I appreciate.

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