
Herbes i flors de camps i vores de camins. Plantes ruderals i arvenses

(Herbs and flowers in fields and roadsides. Ruderal plants and weeds)

Josep Maria Panareda i Clopés

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It is surely a fact that we tend to place more value on things that are less common, stranger and more difficult to find. And this tends to dovetail with their being further from us. We wonder about flowers and plants from distant countries but are also surprised by species nearby which are endangered or very difficult to see because their habitats are tiny or inaccessible. In contrast, the closest landscapes that are part of our daily lives end up being trivial and not highly valued. And the plants located in our most immediate environs end up being almost invisible to our eyes. However, all plants play an equally important role in ecosystems, and it can be considered somewhat unfair—and mistaken—to neglect this nearby vegetation that is part of our everyday lives.

The reason for this brief introduction is to showcase the value of the field guide presented here, which fills a gap in the world of nature guides, given that the 157 plants described in detail (in addition to the 207 others mentioned) are part, as the author himself notes, of environments that have particularly been transformed by a continuous human presence. The majority of these species are only described in exhaustive works such as *Flora manual dels Països Catalans* and we are unaware of any other field guide that helps users to identify them on the ground.

This book is the fourth publication of the seven that so far comprise the Maluquer Collection of Brau Edicions and the second by the same author (the first is *Els arbres silvestres de Catalunya* from 2019). I should add that the hundreds of publications by Josep Maria Panareda include several field guides of different plants within the geographic regions of Catalonia.

The first few pages of the book provide a meticulous introduction to the basic concepts that are used to put the plants in this guide in their context, specifically detailed descriptions of the terms *ruderal plant* and *weed* (and the most significant environments where these types of plants are found), as well as exotic plants. Given that the 157 plants are described on fact sheets, the end of the introduction includes a careful explanation of the different parts of each fact sheet so that they can be properly interpreted.

Entering now into the content of the guide, it is important to note that the design of the fact sheets is a small wonder of information synthesis: it includes the family to which each species belongs (the fact sheets are organised by the 41 different families covered in the book); the common name in Catalan (the most frequent one has been chosen, given that many plants have several); the scientific name of the species, indicating the taxonomist; and synonyms, when they exist. It also includes the range of altitudes in which the species can be found, as well as the months in which it blossoms and how abundant the species is in Catalonia. The range of abundance spans 4 levels, from very infrequent (only four species) to very abundant (a total of 51 species). Three-quarters of the 157 species are fairly or very abundant (levels three and four).

The text in each fact sheet contains several sections, beginning with a detailed description of the plant as a whole and its different parts (leaves, flowers, fruit, stem, etc.). Secondly, there is a description of its habitat and distribution; this section mentions the plant's geographic origin and notes which plants are exotic. It systematically includes a section which describes similar plants by highlighting the similarities and differences in relation to the species being covered in the fact sheet. And when relevant to the plant, there is a fourth section that explains its traditional uses, either dietetic or medicinal, as well as its contraindications.

It goes without saying that the most visually striking part of the fact sheets is the high-quality photographs, often with a small box with the close-up of a significant part of the plant. Some fact sheets also include drawings of elements worth highlighting. All the illustrations are by Maravillas Boccio, who has regularly worked with the author; most photographs are by both authors; if not, their authorship is stated in the credits at the beginning of the book.

At the end of the book there are four sections worth mentioning: a glossary of terms which is extremely useful and provides a brief definition of 151 botanical concepts; a brief bibliography (13 works, all of them very significant); a webography (10 electronic addresses of databases of botanical institutions, which are also very useful for people interested in learning about botany); and finally, an alphabetic list of all the plants described in the book (all 364) and the page on which each of them appears. This list includes a mix of common and scientific names which can be distinguished by the use of italics for the latter.

This book will unquestionably be useful for anyone interested in learning about plants in general and is likely to spark their curiosity to learn the name and details of the plants that they may be *sick of seeing* but have probably never paid too much attention to. This potential readership includes students, nature lovers and professionals from a variety of fields, especially those relating to land planning and management.