

BOTANY

Common Mosses of the Northeast and Appalachians

By Karl B. McKnight, Joseph R. Rohrer, Kirstin McKnight Ward and Warren J. Perdrizet. 2013. Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, NJ, USA, 08540-5237. 301 pages, 24.95 USD, Paper.

To my knowledge this guide, another in the line of Princeton University Press field guides, is the first field guide covering the mosses. This is fortunate because mosses are common but frequently under-appreciated by naturalists. The publication of a field guide helps to bring knowledge and recognition of little known organisms to popular attention and can lead to better information on distribution and abundance.

The arrangement of the guide is by growth form and leaf shape. These categories are colour-coded on the edges of the guide's pages to help in identification. There are keys that correspond to each of these features.

The book's claim is that you can identify any moss within the geographical area with a hand lens and spray bottle, and of course, the field guide. This claim is accurate although I would add an Xacto knife or razor blade to this in order to help separate plant parts for identification or collection. The guide provides some excellent instructions on how to examine moss and how to collect moss for a reference collection. This includes some instructions on how to make a paper folder to place a sample.

The geographical area covered by this guide includes much of southeastern Canada, New England, the Great Lakes states, and the Appalachian Mountains. The guide is also potentially useful in other parts of the upper Midwest. It covers an area of high moss diversity.

Each species account includes a colour photo of the moss and drawings of the stems, capsules, and leaves. There are also colour close-up photos of plant characteristics, descriptions of appearance, leaves and capsules. There is a description of the habitat and similar species that may be confused. Finally, there is a description of microscopic characteristics. A microscope is not essential to identify mosses in this guide, but having one is value-added to studying these plants.

This is an excellent easy to use guide that I hope will be in the knapsack, back pocket, or library of every naturalist. I predict this guide to become a popular addition to the naturalist's field guide collection and that it will enhance the appreciation and understanding of these underappreciated organisms.

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