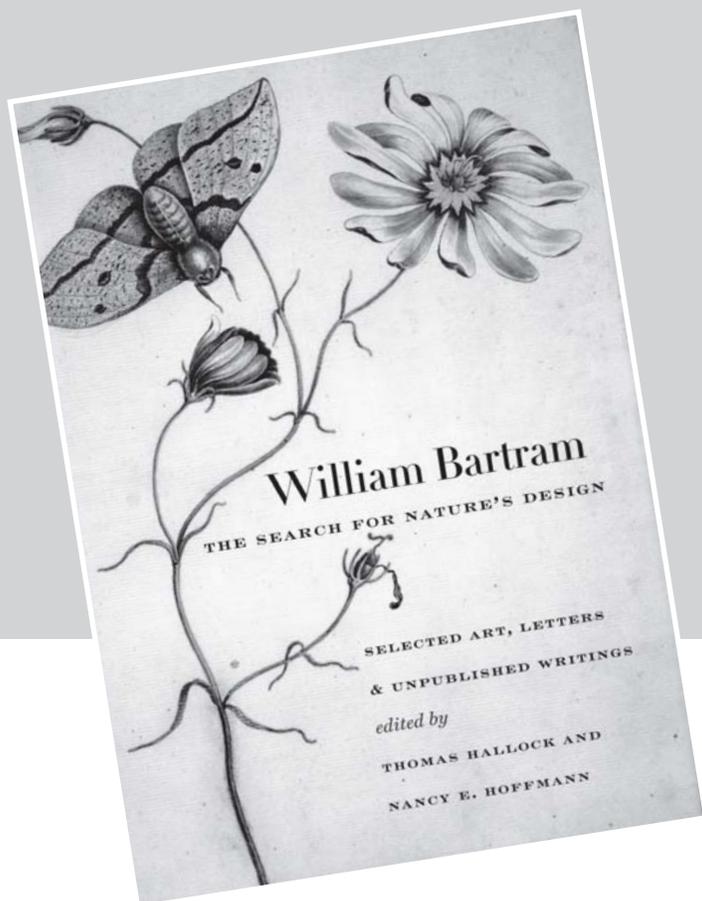




Palmetto





William Bartram, The Search for Nature's Design *Selected Art, Letters, and Unpublished Writings*

Edited by Thomas Hallock and Nancy E. Hoffmann

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Review by Sally Robson

Part 2, William Bartram's "Commonplace Book", is a compilation of selections from 13 or more of Bartram's small sewn booklets. Some of the booklets have missing pages and non-continuous text, and that we have them at all is due to the care of his descendants, who treasured and preserved them.

These selections show us Bartram's unorthodox thinking on discussions of the day, including environmental protection, slavery, and the interconnectedness of all life forms.

Bartram's essay "On Gardening", gives us insight into the prevailing and the "new taste" of garden design. As Florida native plant gardeners, we may want to remember that our thoughts and efforts to change prevailing ideas were also experienced by Bartram who argued that "gardens should please the imagination with scenes of the sublime, the beautiful, and the melancholy."

Native plant aficionados will appreciate the book's lengthy index of plants organized by the historic names used by Bartram and others. A side by side index lists historical plant names, scientific names, and modern common names, along with page numbers, making it easy locate plant information.

We are extremely fortunate that Bartram's travels throughout the Southeast (1772-1776) are described in great detail, with much written about Florida. We can accompany him from the "innocent green Camellions climbing up our backs" to the "The Thundering Crocodile Alligator." Through the "low rich swamps, up the shelly bank which is covered with spreading red cedars, the fruteful Orange Trees, Hibiscus and the sweet Lantana camarara." And, we can pause with him to listen to the "Winged Choir."

William Bartram, The Search for Nature's Design should be required reading for all who care about the environment and the interconnectedness of all life forms. It is an adventure full of surprises, humor and persistence that will take you on an exciting exploration of the primordial landscapes of the southeastern United States 200 years ago.

William Bartram, the Search for Nature's Design

arrived on my doorstep not long after I heard it reviewed on our local public radio station. Although I was not prepared for the arrival of a book this size, I decided to work my way through it a bit at a time, and after the first few pages, it became difficult to lay William aside. This is a wonderful book for anyone interested in the nature, landscapes, Indians, and early settlements of Georgia, Florida, South Carolina, and Tennessee in Bartram's time.

William Bartram (1739-1823) was America's first native born naturalist/artist and the first author to portray nature through personal experience as well as scientific observation. His life was a multi-faceted adventure uncovered here through previously unpublished material, including art, letters, journal entries, botanical illustrations and unpublished manuscripts. All of these expand our knowledge and understanding of Bartram as the complex and unorthodox person that he was. Often regarded as a recluse or eccentric, Bartram emerges as deeply engaged with the major scientific and cultural ideas and issues of his time.

Part 1 of *William Bartram, the Search for Nature's Design* includes Bartram's correspondence to family, friends and peers. Bartram was a botanist first, and his language is sometimes redundant, difficult to follow, and tedious. We are reading about the man as he was, as he spoke and wrote. His personal narrative forms a singular treasure for those who value American history, native plants, and the natural world and culture as he experienced it.



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Editorial Content

We welcome articles on native plant species and related conservation topics, as well as high-quality botanical illustrations and photographs. Contact the editor for guidelines, deadlines and other information.

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The purpose of the Florida Native Plant Society is to conserve, preserve, and restore the native plants and native plant communities of Florida.

Official definition of native plant:

For most purposes, the phrase Florida native plant refers to those species occurring within the state boundaries prior to European contact, according to the best available scientific and historical documentation. More specifically, it includes those species understood as indigenous, occurring in natural associations in habitats that existed prior to significant human impacts and alterations of the landscape.

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