

The \$64 Tomato

by William Alexander

Algonquin Books, 2007; \$13.95

I've been obsessed with growing tomatoes this year, so when a book called *The \$64 Tomato* was recommended to me I jumped at the chance to read it. William Alexander writes *The \$64 Tomato* in a well-paced, down-to-earth, and engaging manner. His memoir takes you through more than 20 years of his extreme gardening ups and downs. Anyone who has dreamed of having a garden will relate to his high hopes and his pride in his success—and how he is humbled by nature time and again. His anecdotes are hilarious and acutely portray not only his gardening experiences but also his relationships with family, neighbors, and the occasional workman. I laughed out loud at the parts where Alexander describes his encounters with deer, squirrels, groundhogs, caterpillars, and every other pest imaginable with a wry and self-deprecating humor. He learned the hard way (as we all do) that “the only perfect garden existed in books and catalogs and our dreams.” Alexander’s passion for gardening, coupled with his never failing optimism that despite the constant challenges there is always next year, make his book an inspiration.—Liz Olson

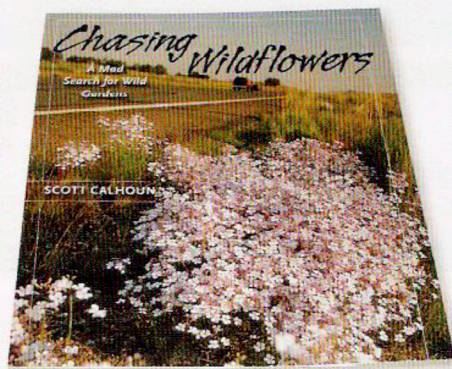
Chasing Wildflowers

by Scott Calhoun

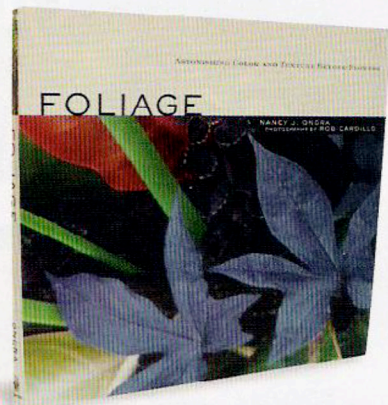
Rio Nuevo, 2007; \$16.95

If you think Bill Bryson writes great travel books, then you haven't read Scott Calhoun. A self-confessed plant groupie ready to brave suspect motels, dusty roads, and crack-of-dawn sorties into the wild in search of his trophies, Calhoun has spent weekends for the past two years on a series of wild and wonderful field trips through the deserts and mountains of the Southwest. This is the diary of his adventures. Even if you have never spent an hour searching for wild plants, you may end up becoming a “vagabond for beauty” like the author's hero, the lost artist Everett Ruess.

Calhoun brings a poet's eye and an explorer's determination to his search in Baja for the biggest boojum (*Fouquieria columnaris*); he slips and slides on scree in Colorado looking for penstemons and white Colorado columbines with members of the North American Rock Garden Society; and he notes compelling natural combinations—for instance *Eschscholzia californica* and *Eriogonum fasciculatum* var. *foliosum* creating a surreal grid of orange and purple in California. His delightfully lateral thinking leads him on tangents of remembrance as he takes us into Mormon and Mexican villages and to where the West meets the South in Texas.



If you enjoy plants and travel then you'll have to add this to your collection. It is part diary, part autobiography, part botanical guide, and wholly delightful.—Nan Sinton



Foliage

by Nancy J. Ondra

Storey Publishing, 2007, \$24.95

Leaves are a given in most gardens, but that doesn't mean we should take them for granted. Nancy Ondra's new book, *Foliage*, pushes readers to think about leaves as much more than filler between flowers.

In a brief but complete first chapter, Ondra highlights the extremes of foliage size, shape, texture, and color; tells how to combine different foliage and incorporate flowers; and provides growing tips specific to foliage plants. The bulk of this book, though, contains plant recommendations and advice on creating appealing combinations, all organized into chapters by foliage color. Within each color chapter, plant profiles are further organized by foliage texture. The excellent design, thorough descriptions, and outstanding photographs by Rob Cardillo make *Foliage* a truly useful guide. Whether you have a gap to fill or you need a jumping-off point for a new design, there's a foliage plant that fits the bill, and you'll find it in this book.—Meghan Lynch