

Guidelines for Newcomb's Wildflower Guide

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These notes are to help navigate *Newcomb's Wildflower Guide*. There are a number of places in this useful field guide where people often get confused, and hopefully these pointers will make easier to help identify plants using this popular book. One of the difficulties with Newcomb's is that it simplifies botanical concepts, which can lead to confusion especially if you are already familiar with these terms in their more specific botanical sense. An obvious example is what Newcomb's calls a 'divided leaf' would be a compound leaf in most sources.

When first using this book, use it to identify plants you already know. This way you can backtrack if you find yourself on the wrong page or plant, and figure out where your mistake took place.

There is only one edition of Newcomb's, though there are many different covers. If you are purchasing this book for a class, you can buy any used or new copy you find.

Newcomb's Basics

1. Newcomb's is divided into sections; read each of these to acquaint yourself with the book.
2. Three sections guide you through the plant identification process.
3. The other sections should be read as well as they define the terms and approaches that Newcomb's uses which are sometimes different than conventional usage.
4. Note that the first 22 pages use Roman numerals. If using Newcomb's for teaching, it can be helpful to have students write the conventional numbers alongside.

Sections of Newcomb's-in order of appearance

1. **The Three Classifications**-these are either on the inside of the front cover or the first page depending on the edition.
 - This is where you start the plant identification.
 - Below the chart, there is a description of how to use the keys in this book.
2. **Illustrations of inflorescences** (no title)-across from Three Classifications
 - Drawings of various types of inflorescences.
3. **The Key System and How It Works**-pages *x-xiii*
 - Description and notes on how to use the keys.
4. **Explanation of Basic Terms**-pages *xiv-xvii*
 - Description of the terms used in the Three Classifications
 - Illustrations of how they classify the various types leaves *page xvi*
5. **Floral Structure**-pages *xviii*

- Basic description of flower parts.
- 6. **Glossary** *pages xix-xxii*
- 7. **Locator Key** *pages 1-14*
 - The second part of keying out of a plant.
 - The set of three numbers obtained from the Three Classifications will take you to this section.
- 8. **Descriptions of Species**-*page 15*
 - Symbols and abbreviations used in the text.
- 9. **The Plants**-*pages 16-463*
 - Where to go after the Locator Key.
 - These pages have illustrations and detailed descriptions of the plants.
- 10. **Index**-*pages 465-490*
- 11. **Illustrations of Leaves**-*back pages or back cover*
 - Illustrations of leaves and leaf arrangements with associated terms

Considerations and Tips

1. A good way to learn how to use this is to start by identifying plants that you already know. If you end up at the wrong plant, you can follow your steps backwards and see where the mistake was made.
2. Once the layout of the keys is learned, the Newcomb's identification system is pretty easy to follow.
3. Newcomb's uses some unconventional terms, which may be confusing, especially if you are used to using these terms differently. This is particularly true with leaves. Look through the illustrations and pages describing them.
4. Some of the leaf confusion arises from the following;
 - Whether the leaves are toothed, lobed or divided. It is important to read the section describing these differences. For instance, leaves lobed at the base are often considered entire, as opposed to lobed.
 - The book does not distinguish between compound and simple leaves.
 - Whether leaves are opposite or alternate on a plant if it has both.
5. The Newcomb's key is not dichotomous (with just two choices) and it is important to look for third or fourth choices when keying out a plant.
6. When looking on a plant species page, look for *continued* at the bottom of the page, as the plant might be on the next page.
7. Under *Plant Type* in the Three Classifications people often miss the last two options of whether the plant is a shrub or a vine.
8. Newcomb's editions over the years are all basically the same despite the changes of the front cover. The only changes are a slight difference with the first and last pages. So every edition can be used together (this is important when purchasing copies for a class).