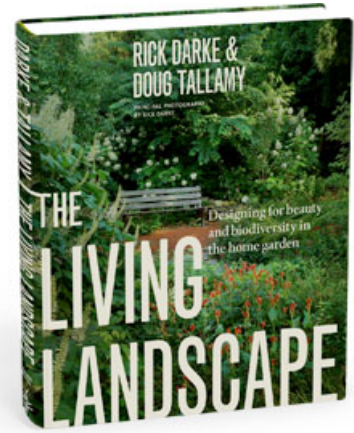


Book Review

The Living Landscape

Book Review by Brooks McCabe

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The September/October, 2015 issue of Horticulture has an article in its Science Matters column by Jeff Cox titled “Planting Natives for Natives” in which he discusses the work of University of Delaware Professor Doug Tallamy and in particular his recent book titled “The Living Landscape: Designing for Beauty and Biodiversity in the Home Garden.” It is an excellent article and the book by Doug Tallamy is clearly worth reading, especially by Master Gardeners. This review is about that book and why reading it can make a difference in how one thinks about home gardens and woodland areas.

“The Living Landscape” is authored by Rick Dark, a landscape consultant and photographer and Doug Tallamy, an entomologist. Together they have written a book full of insightful content with a large number of photographs illustrating their points. The photographs alone make the book a real pleasure to read as they provide visual expressions of what is possible here in West Virginia, as both authors live and work in the Mid-Atlantic region.

The book describes layers in wild landscapes, such as the vertical layers starting with the ground layer and working up thru herbaceous plants, shrubs, understory trees and finally the canopy. The horizontal, or lateral layers are the dynamic edge where two different habitats meet such as the transition from woodlands to meadow or grasslands. Streams and rivers offer a dramatic edge where as wetlands can be more subtle. Each of these layers and habitats have unique plant and insect life and they all have interrelationships that effect the ecology of each environment. These relationships are discussed in “The Living Landscape.”

One of the major take-a-ways from the book is the importance of biodiversity and ecosystem productivity. Diverse ecosystems are much more productive than those with less species. Native plants tend to support diversity whereas non-native plants have not had the time to allow insects to form host relationships with these plants. “There are, on average, nearly thirteen times more species of caterpillars that develop on woody plants indigenous to the Mid-Atlantic states than on plants not historically found in that area.” This becomes important as birds primarily feed caterpillars to their young. Without the caterpillars as a food source, the species of birds that feed on them will be become less populated. “Native cherries (*Prunus*) support 456 species of caterpillars while leatherwood (*Dirca palustris*) supports one.” Ninety six percent of birds in North America rear their young on insects. The Carolina chickadees need 6,240 to 10,260 caterpillars to fledge a single clutch of chickadees. Often non-native plants are used in landscaping for the very reason that they are not hosts to insects. This can be short sighted when the ecology of the forest and garden is considered as a whole. “The Living

Landscape” shows in text and in pictures how biodiversity can significantly improve ecosystem productivity.

A significant portion of the book is dedicated to an expansive list of the landscape and ecological functions of plants native to the Mid-Atlantic region. This alone is worth the price of the book for in 32 pages the authors list the ecological functions for trees, shrubs, woody vines, broadleaved herbaceous plants plus bulbs, grasses, sedges, rushes, and ferns.

“The Living Landscape” is a book worth reading and it will become a valued addition to anyone’s library. It is not only a visual delight, it is chocked full of helpful information that will leave the reader with a new appreciation of the importance of biodiversity within both the garden and woodland.