

A Note about Sketching and Journaling

[Introductory material for the *Plant Morphology* activity program]

Introduction

As part of our inquiry into the plant world, we can make and record observations of plant life. This undertaking can be adapted to any situation — indoors or outdoors. As we go through the *Plant Morphology* program, we can keep a journal or sketchbook and thus note the progress we make. Perhaps we will notice more about the form and function of plants as we learn some of the whys and wherefores. We can make observations during the classes and between classes on our own.

If you put a sprouted seedling on its side, does it try to grow upward? Does it know which way is up? Let's try it and make some sketches or descriptions. We can be the botanist in the Amazon Basin finding the new cancer drug — making detailed field notes for later study.

The instructor will provide each participant in the *Plant Morphology* program with a suitable blank sketchbook or unlined journal.

It is interesting to note that the advancement of the science of botany would not have been possible without corresponding advances in the technology of printing botanical illustrations, such as woodcuts, copper engravings, steel engravings, etchings, and mezzotints. In retrospect, we take this for granted, but those innovations required ingenuity and hard work. We remember the names of the botanists and the illustrators, but not the inventors or the printers.

[Note: For books and videos about botanical drawing, see the paragraphs that follow. For more commentary about botany in general, skip to the heading: "Reflections on botanical observation." End of note.]

Drawing & sketching how-to resources

The following books and DVDs are designed primarily as independent study resources for the botanical drawing hobbyist. Material can be extracted for group lessons as well.

Some of the most prolific authors and video instructors in this field are: Keith R. West, Margaret Stevens, Peggy Dean, and the duo of Rosie Martin & Meriel Thurstan. For the authors with more than one book on this topic, I list only one book — go ahead and look up the others as well.

The publishers mentioned here often have similar books available. It pays to snoop around in library and bookseller databases to find exactly what you want. The listings below focus on drawing rather than watercolors or painting — a complete list would be voluminous. Some of the books and videos come out of “The Eden Project” in Cornwall, England (authors Rosie Martin and Meriel Thurstan).

Local classes

Check for local nature drawing classes at museums, nature centers, Audubon societies, or municipal programs (Adult Education, Recreation Department, or Senior Center). See if the “Master Naturalist” course is offered in your area (not specifically about drawing).

Online Resources

John Muir Laws: <https://johnmuirlaws.com>

This nature drawing expert has multiple resources available (which include animals and landscapes as well as plants). He works with the curriculum expert Emilie Lygren and the California non-profit publisher Heyday. His 2016 book *The Laws guide to nature drawing and journaling* is available from libraries and booksellers. A more recent book titled *How to teach nature journaling* is available on his website as a free PDF download. He also has online classes and a Youtube channel.

Online Educational Services

Public and academic libraries often subscribe to online educational services such as “Lynda” and “Universal Class.” These are worth investigating for video instructional material. Here is an example of a series of video lessons available from Lynda.com:

“5-day drawing challenge: drawing closer to nature, with Von Glitschka.” Mr. Glitschka is a well-known design professional with his own studio and consulting practice.

If you know how to search for online tutorials about botanical drawing, then try that as well (vimeo.com, youtube.com and other sites).

Print books published in the USA

Dean, Peggy. Two recent books: *Botanical line drawing: 200 step-by-step flowers, leaves, cacti, succulents, and other items found in nature*, and *Peggy Dean’s guide to nature drawing and watercolor: learn to*

sketch, ink, and paint flowers, plants, trees, and animals of the natural world. Both published by: Watson Guptill, 2018 and 2019 respectively.

Edwards, Betty. *The new Drawing on the Right Side of the Brain: a course in enhancing creativity and artistic confidence.* Jeremy P. Tarcher/Putnam 1999. This book is not specific to nature. Earlier editions were published at ten-year intervals.

Hollender, Wendy. *Botanical drawing in color: a basic guide to mastering realistic form and naturalistic color.* Watson-Guption Publications, 2010. This same author has a 2020 book titled: *The joy of botanical drawing: a step-by-step guide to drawing and painting flowers, leaves, fruit, and more.* (Same publisher.)

King, Bente Starcke. *Beautiful botanicals: painting and drawing flowers and plants.* North Light Books, 2004. This author also has a DVD.

Kuo, Julia and Michael Wojtech. *Drawing trees and leaves: observing and sketching the natural world.* Quarry Books, 2016.

Ravet-Haevermans, Agathe. *The art of botanical drawing: an introductory guide.* Timber Press, 2009. Timber Press (Oregon, USA) publishes many fine books about botany and gardening — check out their other listings.

Stevens, Margaret. *An introduction to drawing flowers: form, technique, color, light, composition.* This book has more than one publisher, including New Burlington Books, 1994, and Chartwell Books, 2004. This author has written several books on this subject.

Swan, Ann. *Botanical portraits with colored pencils.* Barron's Educational Series, 2010.

Willenbrink, Mark, and Mary Willenbrink. *Drawing nature for the absolute beginner: a clear & easy guide to drawing landscapes and nature.* North Light Books, 2013. These authors have many books about drawing. This topic is a specialty for North Light Books —check out their other listings.

Print books published in the UK and UK/USA

Martin, Rosie and Meriel Thurstan. *Botanical illustration course.* B. T. Batsford, 2006. These authors, who have several books and a DVD on this topic, are affiliated with The Eden Project in Cornwall, England.

Vize, Sue. *Botanical drawing using graphite and coloured pencils.* The Crowood Press, 2017.

West, Keith R. *How to draw plants: the techniques of botanical illustration*. This book has more than one publisher, including Timber Press, 1996, in conjunction with the British Museum (Natural History). This author has written multiple books on this topic.

Instructional DVDs about drawing in general (a small sampling)

Two DVDs from Crystal Productions (Glenview, IL):
Price, Gail (instructor). *Drawing* (71 minutes, 2006) and *Pencil drawing* (23 minutes, 2007).

Two DVDs from Coyote Creek Productions (Fallbrook, CA):
Hugh, Donna (instructor), with Edith Cooper and Madison Cooper.
Drawing lessons for beginners, Volume One (76 minutes, 2007) and
Drawing lessons for beginners, Volume Two: drawing nature (58 minutes, 2001).

Note: There are British DVDs about botanical drawing by Bente Starcke King and Meriel Thurstan that are not readily available in the USA. These authors are included in the book lists above.

Reflections on botanical observation

Botanical sketching and journaling are great ways to sharpen observation skills. Of course, once you take pencil, pen, or watercolor brush in hand you are not limited to illustration only. You can also engage in creative artwork. The possibilities are unlimited. From a strictly botanical standpoint, the art aspect can fine-tune the close study of plants.

I include here two quotations that illustrate the value of close observation.

Both of these quotations come from the 1956 book *Liberty Hyde Bailey: An informal biography* by Philip Dorf (Cornell University Press). L. H. Bailey (1858-1954) was a horticulturist and botanist, serving as educator, researcher, extension specialist, plant explorer, and author. He was also a tireless advocate for the small farmer.

Here is an excerpt of Philip Dorf's account of Liberty's grade school education in a small rural schoolhouse near the shore of Lake Michigan. His teacher's name was Mrs. Fields.

"Though Mrs. Fields may have known little about natural history, she knew how to give direction and purpose to study. She suggested to her pupil the need for systematic organization of his facts. Above all she taught him

that direct observation is more valuable than memorization from a printed page.

“She also knew the value of the challenge as a teaching aid. ‘Liberty,’ she said to him one day, ‘I feel sorry for you.’

‘Why?’

‘Because you live in a beautiful world and you are going through it blind.’

He protested that this wasn’t so. He saw many things: the wild animals, the birds, the trees.

At this point she checked him. ‘What kinds of trees do you pass on your way to school every day? How tall are they? How are they growing?’”

Here is another brief excerpt of an incident when Liberty was about eight years older, in his teens:

“Prowling through the woods one day he met an Indian friend and showed him a plant. Could his friend locate samples of plants related to this one? He made the request with misgiving. The specimen in question belonged to a species which might easily be confused with another. To his amazement the Indian brought him twenty-six different specimens, each a true variety of the species. It was an object lesson on the powers of observation of untutored people who live close to nature.”

Note: For modern authors who write about nature study, try Richard Louv, *Our Wild Calling* and *Last Child in the Woods*, and Margaret Lowman, *Muddy Boots: Essays of a Field Biologist*.

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