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# *Guia de flora urbana de Barcelona*

**Pere Barnola Echenique and Josep Maria Panareda Clopés**

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Regardless of their subject matter, guides are a gateway to a world to which we would otherwise have no access. They provide us an easy starting point from which to immerse ourselves in new fields of knowledge and are – as their names indicate – guides for discovering their most important features, for learning about which aspects are worth our attention and for the self-taught person to shed their fear of discovering what is around them.

It is not at all surprising that a city like Barcelona has a host of guides aimed at explaining and showcasing its heritage, in the broadest sense of the term (architectural, artistic, historical, intangible, etc.). And the natural heritage cannot be an exception, especially today, when the role of biodiversity as a part of the local wealth – even of cities – is becoming clearer, as it supplies ecosystem services, wellbeing and quality of life and shapes the environment, the urban landscape.

The *Guia de flora urbana de Barcelona* (Guide to Barcelona's Urban Flora), published by Ajuntament de Barcelona (Barcelona City Council) and Cossetània as part of the “Barcelona Ecologia i Natura” collection, focuses precisely on an extraordinary yet little-known part of this natural heritage: flora. More specifically, it hones in on the plants that grow spontaneously in the city, that is, the ones that have not been intentionally planted or sown. Therefore, it discusses the flora that occupies the less urbanised areas in the city, as well as the plants growing in empty lots, parks, spaces between the shrubbery in gardens, tree pits, old walls or even tiny cracks in the pavement. It encompasses a much more diverse set of plants than what one might initially imagine, a total of more than 1,000 different species that includes trees, shrubs and especially grasses from very different families. Because these are anthropised environments, this flora includes both local plants and a considerable contingent of allochthonous species from all over the world. Throughout history, these exotic plants have been brought to Barcelona as ornamental plants, or they have accidentally arrived here as stowaways on transports conveying goods

or people. They have gradually naturalised and come to be part of the urban flora, and what they all share is that they are well adapted to environments influenced by anthropic action, so they live well in altered, stirred up, busy, trodden spots.

The book dovetails perfectly with many citizens' interest in reconnecting with nature after decades of gradually distancing ourselves from it, which has led to a dire lack of information on the living organisms around us, their interactions and the role they play both locally and globally. It also fully fits within the "citizen science" movement, which makes citizens prominent actors in the construction of scientific knowledge and is spreading quickly thanks to digital technologies. Thus, this guide can be the perfect travel companion for anyone who is curious about all those plants that stubbornly occupy the city's nooks and crannies, as well as for those who already regularly observe them and want to learn more about Barcelona's flora.

The authors, Pere Barnola and Josep Maria Panareda, are the best pair to write a guide like this one. They are united by a passion for and extraordinary knowledge of Barcelona's local plants, which has resulted in many scientific, informative, educational and social contributions and initiatives in connection with the knowledge of flora. Yet they also represent two very different approaches to botany, as one of them is self-taught and the other an academic, which means that they perfectly complement one another and are able to strike the perfect balance in a guide targeted at all audiences.

The collaboration between these two authors has yielded an extremely comprehensive book with a painstaking selection of species. Especially noteworthy is their use of plain, understandable yet precise, rigorous language. Thanks to this felicitous balance, the guide is perfect for both novices just learning how to recognise plants and people who want to further their knowledge of Barcelona's flora.

The bulk of the *Guia de flora urbana de Barcelona* is made up of fact sheets on more than 125 species of all kinds which can be found in the city. For each one, they offer a set of brief information points including the name (Catalan, Spanish and scientific), family, type of plant, flowering season and curious tidbits like their uses, healing properties or historical and cultural facts. Likewise, each fact sheet contains a detailed description of the plant's morphology (height, leaves, flowers, fruit, etc.), its geographic origin and the environments where it can be found. Each fact sheet comes with one or more photographs that will help readers to identify the species.

Therefore, the book can be read at different levels depending on the reader's interests: first, it is an illustrated guide to help readers identify the most common species; secondly, it provides a series of "quick facts" on each plant; and finally, it also offers a detailed description for more extensive information on the characteristics of each species.

In keeping with its purpose of helping readers to learn about plants, the guide also contains different sections that describe the environments, general features and values of urban flora. It

also provides a glossary of the most common terms in the descriptions, recommendations for learning about plants and indexes of the Catalan, Spanish and scientific names of the species described.

So, having this *Guia de flora urbana de Barcelona* handy on any stroll through the city is totally worthwhile, as it will help users to discover this plant world that is hidden in plain sight until we start paying attention to it. And it's also worth carrying it in your pocket, perusing it, looking at its photos, trying to identify the species you find or randomly opening it up to any page to discover exciting details of this living heritage that Barcelona harbours.