

Bringing Home the Wild: A Riparian Garden in a Southwest City

Juliet C. Stromberg

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Botanist Juliet C. Stromberg's engaging, effervescent memoir covers the ecological restoration of an abandoned four-acre farm in south Phoenix.

In a twenty-year effort, Stromberg and her partner Matt created a verdant oasis on what had been an arid, neglected parcel at the edge of a sprawling Arizona city. An accomplished botanist, Stromberg replaced a dying citrus grove with species suited to the desert environment. She also used her property's water rights on the nearby Salt River to irrigate the land.

The book describes the rich variety of plants now thriving on the property—including desert ironwood, velvet mesquite, sacred datura, spider lilies, pomegranates, apples, and figs—as well as a remarkable diversity of insects, spiders, birds, and mammals attracted to the thriving ecosystem. Emphasizing the benefits of reducing consumption, living off the land, and connecting with the natural world, the book promotes principles of urban gardening that could apply anywhere. It also suggests that gardeners who focus only on “native” plants are missing out. Embracing “all the ‘wild plants,’ irrespective of their ‘nationality,’” will result in a more inclusive, resilient, diverse ecosystem.

The accessible, entertaining narrative is written with gentle humor, as when Stromberg speculates that she may be “part beagle” because she loves playing in the dirt. This playful tone is tempered when the book addresses the challenges of water shortages in the Southwest and other impacts of climate change. These alarming trends make restoring natural ecosystems even more important, Stromberg argues.

Lively photographs, including stunning closeups of a black chalcid wasp, a queen butterfly, and a robber fly, enhance the book's detailed wildlife observations. With its jaunty voice and compelling vision, *Bringing Home the Wild* demonstrates that the process of transforming an urban landscape has the power to transform lives.

KRISTEN RABE (November / December 2023)

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