

A gift from one of North Carolina's greatest authors

"Is there a good 'North Carolina book' that I could give my friends for Christmas?"

I start getting this question every year about this time. Because I host UNC-TV's "North Carolina Bookwatch" program, some people think I ought to be able to make such recommendations. But the more books I read, the more I learn that I will never know enough to be able to tell other people what they should give their friends for Christmas.

Except this year I have an answer. Get the new book by Paul Green. It is called "Paul Green's Plant Book."

"But Paul Green has been dead for more than 25 years," my knowledgeable friends will say. They will point out that although Green is famous for many reasons — writing "The Lost Colony," winning the Pulitzer Prize, inspiring

hundreds of younger writers as a teacher at UNC and much more — that since he is long



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dead they must ask, "How could he have a new book?" The answer makes for a good story, and I will tell it to you if you read on. But first, I ought to tell you why I like the book so much. First of all, Green's new "Plant Book" is a series of descriptions of the most common plants in North Carolina's Cape Fear Valley — trees, flowers, weeds, and bushes. They are clear, colorful descriptions — all of them in Paul Green's plainspoken words.

Green tells us of traditional uses that many common plants have. The toad-flax, for instance, could produce a medicine for hemorrhoids. (Don't ask why I'm interested!) Sunflowers produced cures for "dysentery and bladder infection and so on." One hundred years ago in North Carolina, when Paul Green was growing up, the meadows and forests were people's drugstores.

These rich descriptions might be enough to make the book one of my favorites. I find myself sometimes in the midst of the beauty of the plant life that surrounds us — especially in seasons of change like this year's lovely autumn. But I seldom know enough to identify more than a few plants. Nor do I know origins and uses of them.

Green's descriptive passages

are wonderful, but what seals the deal for this book are the lovely sharp color photos of the plants that show the reader exactly what Green writes about. I am drawn to these photos because I recognize many of the plants even though I do not know the names of many of them.

The combination of Green's words and his daughters' photos makes for a "nature book" that is not only beautiful enough to put on my coffee table, but also communicates with me with words that I can understand.

The photos are mostly the work of Green's daughters, Betsy Green Moyer and Byrd Green Cornwell. Moyer was the driving force behind the new book, which she and Ken Moore edited. Moore is the former assistant director of the North Carolina Botanical Garden,

which is the publisher.

How then could Paul Green write this book 25 years after his death? Actually, Green wrote it over a lifetime of "collecting words, expressions, proverbs, games, herbal remedies, botanical information, and stories of the folk." He kept his notes on thousands of note cards and scraps of paper. These were edited by Green's longtime assistant, Rhoda Wynn, and published shortly after his death in two big volumes under the title of "Paul Green's Wordbook: An Alphabet of Reminiscence." The "Wordbook" can be found on the bookshelves of many North Carolina writers and history buffs, but, unfortunately, not many others.

For the new "Plant Book," Moyer took entries from the "Wordbook" that described or

commented upon plants. By combining those words with appropriate and beautiful illustrations, she has made her late father's work come back to life vividly. The result is a great gift to us, one that will reintroduce Paul Green as a "new writer" to a new generation of North Carolinians.

Note: Hardcover Price: \$28.95; softcover \$19.95. If copies are not available at your local bookstore, order from the N.C. Botanical Garden. Phone 919-962-0522. Web www.ncbg.unc.edu.

D.G. Martin is the host of UNC-TV's "North Carolina Bookwatch," which airs on Sundays at 5 p.m. This week's guest is Gerhard Weinberg, author of "Visions of Victory: The Hopes of Eight World War II Leaders."