

New edition of plant identification software released

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John Peterson (left) and John Seiler collaborated on the third edition of the Woody Plants in North America multimedia tutorial.

A pair of researchers from the College of Natural Resources and Environment recently released the third edition of Woody Plants in North America, an interactive multimedia tutorial for woody plant identification. The DVD-based program contains a staggering 23,000 photographs and includes information on 920 native and ornamental plants.

The program was designed to help students hone their skills in identifying trees and woody plants found across North America. With its

unprecedented number of color photographs as well as detailed descriptions of leaves, flowers, twigs, bark, and plant forms, the software is a [valuable tool](#) for students and practitioners, as well as individuals interested in plant identification. Users can identify different plant species by region, taxonomy, common name, and scientific name, or compare similar-looking species side by side.

The software's quiz function is particularly beneficial, allowing users to test themselves on both identifying specific species and recognizing the different parts of each type of plant. Full-color fact sheets on each species can be printed for further study or use in the field.

The software was developed over a 15-year period by Alumni Distinguished Professor John Seiler and laboratory specialist John Peterson of the Department of [Forest Resources](#) and [Environmental Conservation](#). The late Peter Feret, a professor in the department, obtained a U.S. [Department of Agriculture](#) Challenge Grant to fund the project initially; Seiler and Peterson were tapped to continue Feret's work. The pair has collaborated with Professor Ed Jensen of Oregon State University, who is a co-author on the project, as well as researchers from The Pennsylvania State University and the University of Georgia to compile the program's vast collection of photographs.

According to Seiler, the new edition represents a large improvement from its predecessors. "We constantly listen to student feedback. The whole navigation system is easier, there are dozens of new species and thousands of new photographs, and many poor photographs have been replaced," explained Seiler, who is also the Honorable and Mrs. Shelton H. Short Jr. Professor of Forestry.

Seiler and Peterson, recipients of a Virginia Tech XCaliber Award for their exceptional contributions to technology-enriched teaching and learning, count this project as an extremely successful endeavor. "We get

a lot of unsolicited email thanking us," Seiler said. "We've heard from arborists and other professionals who used the program to study for their certification exam and write to thank us for this resource."

In fact, the program has been so successful that Seiler and Peterson are in the process of developing an Android application based on the software. The app uses a cell phone's GPS technology to pinpoint where the user is located and narrow down options for plants that are native to the area. "This is going to be a really big deal," Seiler said. "There's no product like this in existence."

More information: www.kendallhunt.com/store-product.aspx?id=25400

Provided by Virginia Tech

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