

Book Review

Herbal Drugs and Phytopharmaceuticals: A Handbook for Practice on a Scientific Basis
Norman Grainger Bisset (Ed.)

Medpharm Scientific Publishers, Stuttgart and
CRC Press, Boca Raton, Ann Arbor, London,
Tokyo, 1994.

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This volume has been translated and edited from the second German edition (Editor: Max Wichtl, Marburg) which was published in 1989. In the foreword written by Professor J. David Phillipson, the book is rightly stated to be of interest to all who are involved with plants as medicines whether they be physicians, pharmacists, herbalists, botanists, chemists or manufacturers. In addition, Professor Phillipson comments that the general public cannot fail but to be impressed by the wealth of information it encompasses. This is indeed a fitting introduction to a book which carefully and comprehensively describes 181 drugs which are used for the preparation of teas or are components of herbal mixtures common in pharmaceutical practice.

These days patients are often encouraged by health authorities to self-medicate for minor illnesses and complaints and it is inevitable that some will seek the benefits of alternative medicines either because of their traditional use or because they seek something different from the stringency and apparent toxicity of more orthodox medicines. Often patients seek medical or pharmaceutical advice on the use of herbal medicines, although generally their university studies ill-equip physicians or pharmacists for

coping with the demand for competent counselling in this traditional field of medicines.

This book has therefore been written with such counselling in mind and it is intended to fill the gap which modern medical and pharmaceutical training has often neglected. In former years the pharmacists' training dealt greatly with the art and science of pharmacognosy and they were indeed the experts on matters relating to the preparation and use of herbal medicines. In Germany and European countries further east, medicinal plants and their preparations are popular items of commerce although in some cases stringent quality assurance may leave much to be desired. However, in other western countries such days are in the past and the expertise has been partially or totally lost and more the pity because of this.

The book contains detailed monographs on medicinal herbs common in pharmaceutical practice. The text for each herb gives references to pharmacopoeial monographs, sources, synonyms, constituents (often with chemical structures), indications, side effects, preparation of a tea, commercially available phytomedicines, regulatory status, and authentication of herbals by macroscopical, microscopical and chromatographic techniques. Many of the monographs give photographs or drawings of the herbs as an aid to the process of authentication and quality control. Quantitative studies, likely adulterants and storage requirements complete the text which is supplemented by references to original scientific publications. Especially commendable are the high quality illustrations, many in colour, which make this volume not only useful but also an art form.

This book has much to commend it. It is a very readable text for students and practitioners alike. It is perhaps the most modern and comprehensive text on herbal medicines and their medicinal use currently available and it will find a use wherever information is sought as to which herb should be used to treat a particular illness. The editor of this English version, the editor of the original German versions and their collaborators

are to be commended on their efforts to correlate, rationalise and update information about medicinal herbs.

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