

## Book Reviews

**Tibetan Medicinal Plants.** Edited by C. Kletter (Institute of Pharmacognosy, Stuttgart) and M. Kriechbaum (Institute of Botany, Stuttgart). Medpharm Scientific Publishers, Stuttgart, and CRC Press, Boca Raton, FL. 2001. xv + 383 pp. 19 × 27 cm. EUR 137.00, \$189.95. ISBN 3-88763-067-X (Medpharm), 0-849-30031-2 (CRC).

As the study, use, and marketing of Tibetan medicinal plants become increasingly popular, the publication of this introduction to Tibetan medicine and characterization of 60 most common medicinals is timely and functional. In addition to the editors, *Tibetan Medicinal Plants* is authored by D. Dawa, T. D. Dekhang, W. Holzner, and R. Krasser. The introduction to Tibetan medicine is concise and informative, summarizing a complex body of traditional knowledge in 10 pages. An even shorter ecological description of Tibetan habitats informs the uninitiated. The body of the work "Plant Monographs" is organized by Tibetan common name, presumably for students of Tibetan medicine and to facilitate identification of marketed products rather than for scientific purposes. The extensive color plates of plant anatomy and morphology likewise seem oriented to product verification from medicinal samples; this will be useful for international medicinal trade, if and when monitoring is implemented. The authors point out that the organization integrates information within Tibetan concepts of medicine (albeit alphabetically). Each mini-monograph includes Tibetan plant classification, botanical identifications (multiple), collections, generic discussion, plant description, ecology, conservation, drug, macro- and microscopic characteristics, chemistry, pharmacology, uses in Tibetan medicine, and references. Glossaries include botanical terms, food terms, and Tibetan medical terms. Multiple indices make the volume useful for those not oriented toward Tibetan common names.

There are drawbacks to the organization in that one common name may refer to different plants in different areas, and different common names may refer to the same plant in different areas, in different medicinal contexts, or for different parts of the plant. My own research is in the most eastern realms of the Himalayas, where Tibetan common names and plant uses differ significantly from Lhasa and even further from Dharamsala; in the eastern Himalayas local usages of plants and the plants themselves differ significantly from those reported in this volume. In this volume there is no apparent attempt to resolve confusions over scientific equivalents and multiple binomials are listed. This presentation is difficult for botanical reference. To help resolve this, for each common name the authors have collected and deposited a specimen, which they photograph (either alive or mounted), although these represent only a single species, while multiple species often are referenced. Since the morphology and anatomy are based on this specimen, other species used under the same common name could be rejected by international trade monitoring, were it ever activated.

This book is a fine reference for Tibetan medicinal plants, an obscure topic for many western scientists. Much literature referenced in this volume is published in Tibetan with limited editions, so that the information is difficult to access for western scientists. This volume facilitates access to information on the 60 common names included. The infor-

mation is presented in a very respectful, yet scientific vein. This is obviously appreciated by the Dalai Lama, who states in the foreword, "Preserving and studying this unique and ancient medical tradition is important, not just for the sake of the Tibetan people, but for all humanity."

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**CRC Handbook of Medicinal Spices.** By James A. Duke (Green Pharmacy Garden) with Mary Jo Bogenschutz-Godwin, Judi duCellier, and Peggy-Ann K. Duke. CRC Press LLC, 2003. iii + 348 pp. 18 × 26 cm. \$119.95. ISBN 0-8493-1279-5.

Dr. Duke's vision "...to teach America about the best and safest medicines..." becomes the underlying theme throughout this book, a collection of extensively documented and anecdotal evidence for the medicinal uses and curative properties for many common and some less frequently encountered spices.

Beginning with a brief introductory section outlining the format and explanation of the information that follows, the author paints a historical perspective of the ancient uses of spices and plants by humans and the birth of the spice trade. A detailed spice timetable (with references) is a nice addition. Purposely omitting culinary and medicinal herbs, covered in an earlier CRC Handbook of Medicinal Herbs (Duke et al., 2002), Duke details the five major headings that describe the individual spice entries in the book: medicinal uses, indications, other uses, cultivation, and chemistry.

Medicinal Uses garners the most attention. This section summarizes historical and/or new facts from referenced findings, including chemical and clinical abstracts for each spice. Much of this information is likely derived from the author's extensive knowledge of plants and their possible medicinal uses with frequent references to Dr. Duke's Phytochemical and Ethnobotanical Database maintained through the USDA-ARS website (<http://www.ars-grin.gov/duke/>). The Indications section is a concise list of identified biological activities for each spice, with a parenthetical "score" developed by the author to identify the reference source (i.e., f = folklore, 1 = in vitro studies with animal or chemical rationale, 2 = with positive clinical trials, etc.). Other Uses address nonmedical applications for the spice, such as culinary use or pesticide activity. Cultivation is surprisingly detailed, providing information on growing and propagating the described spice, apparently from the author's own "green thumb" experiences with more than half of the 65 spices detailed in the book. Finally, in the chemistry section, Duke spares the reader from long lists of individual phytochemicals reported from each spice. Instead, in somewhat narcissistic detail, the major compounds the author believes may be responsible for the reported activities are noted.

With due respect, each entry contains well-referenced, detailed, and meticulously arranged summaries for the

information provided. Readers of the *Journal of Natural Products* may find the lack of chemical structures and biosynthetic detail or discussions disappointing. However, anecdotal and folkloric uses for some spices make for interesting and sometimes humorous reading. For example, "In India, onions are believed to be aphrodisiac, especially if retained in a cow dung year in a well-stoppered pot for four months".

The information arranged under the five headings occupies the main section of the book under a "catalog" of spices, arranged alphabetically. Though detailed in the discussion and indications listing for certain spices, the section is concise, thanks to frequently used abbreviations. Unfortunately, the abbreviations list is incomplete and easily confused with the reference abbreviations.

Clinical herbalists or nutraceutical researchers would seem to benefit the most from this book. Home recipes (a lentil soup recipe to help in disarming the anthrax toxin) and other suggested medicinal uses of spices by the author take the book somewhat outside the realm of what might be considered traditional for a CRC Handbook.

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