

## Review of Medicinal and Aromatic Plants of Indian Ocean Islands

**Medicinal and Aromatic Plants of Indian Ocean Islands.** By A. Gurib-Fakim (University of Mauritius) and T. Brendler (Consultant). MedPharm GmbH Scientific Publishers, Stuttgart, Germany. 2004. viii + 567 pp. 20 × 27 cm. €228.00. ISBN 3-88763-094-7.

the ethnopharmacology of Indian Ocean islands, and as such is a valuable reference.

**Wendy L. Applequist**

Missouri Botanical Garden  
 St. Louis, Missouri

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This reference provides one- to two-page monographs on about 350 species, both native and introduced, that are used in the Mascarenes, Comoros, and Seychelles and in Madagascar. Each monograph includes general information (on the genus), family, synonyms, vernacular names, etymology, botanical description, distribution and ecology, conservation status, drug specification (i.e., parts used), chemistry, pharmacology, and use in traditional medicine. When nothing is known about the chemistry or bioactivity of endemic species, the authors usually provide information on related species or genera. The choice of citations for well-studied species is somewhat idiosyncratic (e.g., for *Centella asiatica*, no human clinical trials are mentioned).

Almost all the monographs include line drawings of plant specimens and/or structures of unusual chemicals. Additionally, most plants are depicted in a separate section of color photographs. A particularly useful introductory section provides maps of the islands surveyed, with discussions of ecology, climate, and conservation issues.

Ethnobotanical information is generally detailed enough to be useful, although the geographic or cultural source of a plant use is sometimes unclear. Compilation of common names seems biased toward the Mascarenes. Malagasy names are often indicated to derive from one of the major ethnic groups or associated dialects; some cultural background, perhaps with a map, might have been helpful to readers. Included species are compiled at the back into an “indications index”, which is too general to be of much use (e.g., “conditions of the metabolic system”).

This book’s greatest weakness is in its lack of botanical expertise. Botanical descriptions, presumably compiled from available literature, are variable in length and format; some are quite detailed, while others omit basic information and could not be used to confirm a plant’s identity. Confusion regarding taxonomy is occasionally evident, and a few plants are given obsolete assignments to family (e.g., *Scolopia*, properly placed in Salicaceae, is assigned to Flacourtiaceae, and pharmacology is discussed for “other Flacourtiaceae, in particular *Erythrospermum monticolum*”, which is at best distantly related). A few typographical errors in scientific names have been overlooked, and the abbreviation of authors’ names is inconsistent. Etymology of scientific names, which in this reviewer’s opinion is a waste of space anyway, is frequently wrong or incomplete.

One hopes that a second edition will someday include greater attention to botanical science. In the meantime, this volume is undoubtedly the best readily available source of information on

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