

**Biotechnology in Agriculture and Forestry, Vol. 4, Medicinal and Aromatic Plants:** edited by Y. P. S. BAJAJ, Springer, Berlin, 1988, 550 pp. \$226.90.

Although the title might mislead you, this is yet another book on the production of secondary metabolites in plant cell culture. It covers much the same ground as the recent two volume set on phytochemicals in cell culture from Academic Press and one may query whether yet another compilation is needed. While the first section of this on techniques (some 185 pages) covers very familiar ground, the rest of the book is different in that it contains a series of case histories on the exploitation via cell culture of particular medicinal plants for their secondary substances. Thus, T. W. Baumann and P. M. Frischknecht discuss the production of caffeine by cell cultures of the

coffee plant, but at the same time provide an interesting summary of the background literature on the coffee plant, its purine alkaloids and their use by Man. Other plants given similar coverage include poppy species, *Cinchona*, foxglove, *Rhazya stricta* and inevitably I suppose *Lithospermum erythrorhizon*, the source of shikonin.

While one can hardly claim this as an essential purchase for a phytochemical library, it does provide useful information on the practical utilisation of medicinal plants for their active constituents in a new format. It is well produced and nicely illustrated and deserves consideration if you have no other recent books on this topic.

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