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Book review

Ivan A. Ross, Medicinal plants of the world: Volume 3 Chemical constituents, traditional and modern medicinal uses, Humana Press Inc., New Jersey, 2005, ISBN 1-58829-129-4, pp. 623

The subtitle of the book is the only guide given to the reader as to the purpose of this series. In the Preface the author, Ivan Ross, explains that some of the species covered in this volume may be "controversial" medicinal plants as they are known to be toxic. But this is true for many plants used in traditional medicine and the author does not go on to justify which species he is referring to. What I found missing from the Preface was a rational for the series. For example, what criteria were used to select the species of plants and how will the species differ from volume to volume? This is the third volume of a series of unknown volumes covering an unknown number of species. Thus the publishers have not helped the author promote this book, which is a shame as today there are a large number of books being produced on medicinal plants and a reader, especially a librarian, will want to know more about the book, especially if it forms part of a series. To date the author has covered 50 species in volumes 1 and 2 and it is difficult to see any link in the selection of plants between the earlier volumes and this volume.

As indicated in the subtitle this volume contains information about the "Chemical constituents, traditional and modern medicinal uses" of 16 species. The species include *Camellia sinensis*, *Cannabis sativa*, *Cocos nucifera*, *Coffea arabica*, *Daucus carota*, *Ferula assafoetida*, *Hordeum vulgare*, *Larrea tridentata*, *Nicotiana tabacum*, *Olea europaea*, *Oryza sativa*, *Plantago ovata*, *Saccharum officinarum*, *Serenoa repens*, *Sesamum indicum*, and *Zingiber officinale*. For each species information is provided about the common names used to describe the species in different countries (although no information is provided about scientific synonyms), a botanical description, origin and distribution, traditional medicinal uses, chemical constituents, pharmacological activities and clinical trials and then a list of cited references. When describing the traditional uses of each species the author has, in most cases, provided information about the part of the plant used, the type of extract used and whether it is taken orally or used topically. Similar information has been provided when listing the pharmacological activities, although it would have been useful to have more information about the doses used (if available).

This book contains useful information for those researching the medicinal properties of plants. Especially for researchers wanting to study the traditional uses of plants for specific conditions as the index will assist the reader identify the species and parts of the text that contain information about the assays undertaken to study the condition. Thus, the book will be of use for those wanting to collate information about traditional uses with the results from more modern pharmacological assays. The author has gathered an extensive amount of information about each species and although not always complete the breadth of literature covered is impressive. I would recommend the book. However, I would like to know what is coming next to see if I should leave a space on the shelf for another volume.

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