

BOOK REVIEWS

Plants and Society. Estelle Levetin and Karen McMahon. 1999. 2nd ed. McGraw-Hill, Boston, 475 pp., \$67.80 (paper). ISBN 0-697-34522-1.

Botanists know that plants are exciting: plants display great variety, do things that animals cannot, and are essential for human existence. Many college freshmen think otherwise, and tend to avoid studies that focus on plants. As a result, enrollment in standard introductory botany courses has been declining for several years. Courses have been eliminated at some universities; at others, the subject matter has been trimmed and absorbed into general biology courses. During this same period there has emerged a renewed interest in medicinal herbs, the impact of species loss from tropical rainforests, and other plant-related topics. To accommodate this growing appreciation of the practical aspects of plants, many colleges and universities have developed one-semester general education courses for non-science majors, with names such as Plants and Civilization, Plants and Man, and Practical Botany.

This textbook was designed for such courses. Of the 24 chapters, nearly half have titles typical of a traditional botany course. However, further perusal indicates that basic topics are presented with a very humanistic emphasis. The remaining portions of the book focus more specifically on ways that plants (defined broadly) affect humans: Unit III, "Plants as a Source of Food"; Unit IV, "Commercial Products Derived from Plants"; Unit V, "Plants and Human Health"; and Unit VI, "Fungi".

The authors have been successful in preparing an attractive, well-balanced text for a one-semester, non-major, applied botany course. The numerous illustrations are adequate and instructive

though not in full color. There is a useful glossary. I look forward to using this book as the text in our proposed course Plants and Society.

Laboratory Manual for Applied Botany. Estelle Levetin, Karen McMahon, and Robert Reinsvold. 2001. McGraw-Hill, Boston. 264 pp., \$25.20 (paper). ISBN 0-27-246548-4.

Like the textbook *Plants and Society* by Levetin and McMahon, this lab manual is designed for a one-semester course for non-science majors. Also like the text, there is a splendid integration of traditional botanical topics with innovative, applied ones. A few of the more notable examples among the 18 exercise titles include: "Say it with Flowers" (6), "Genetic Diversity of Our Food" (8), "The Spice of Life" (14), "Bioprospecting for Medicinal Plants" (16), and "The Fungus Among Us" (18). There also are useful appendices including: A. "Science as a Process," B. "Field Trip to a Health Food Store," C. "A Taster's Sampler of Caffeine Beverages and Foods," and D. "Notes to Instructors".

In addition to the intended use of this manual for non-major courses, it could be adapted for use in upper division/graduate level courses in Economic Botany, and as a source of ideas for botanical projects at various levels from high school upwards.

Thomas E. Hemmerly
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