

BOOKS AND NEW MEDIA

Medical Botany: Plants Affecting Human Health. Walter H. Lewis and Memory P. Elvin-Lewis. 2003. 2nd edition. John Wiley and Sons, Inc. Hoboken, New Jersey. 812 pp. \$95.00. ISBN 0-471-62882-4 (cloth).

Following the publication of the first edition of *Medical Botany* in 1977, it was adopted as the textbook at the few colleges and universities (including MTSU) across the country where a course in Medical Botany was offered. So much has happened in the area of herbal medicine since that time: increasing popularity of herbal medicines, a growing interest in ethnobotany, especially its medicinal aspects, and the founding of the American Botanical Council, as well as semipopular publications such as *HerbalGram*. Also, research on the efficacy of medicinal plants is now being conducted at an accelerating rate throughout advanced countries of the world (although sadly less so in the United States).

Now, a quarter of a century later, this long-awaited revision has been released with considerable anticipation. The new edition, while retaining the same general format, is greatly expanded (812 vs. 515 pages). Following the first two chapters, which provide a brief overview of traditional and alternative medicine, the book is divided into three main sections.

Part I, "Injurious Plants" (chapters 3–5), treats plants that are poisonous when ingested, but is more concerned with those responsible for allergies (hayfever, dermatitis, etc.) and also those with potential for developing vaccines and treatment for diseases such as HIV/AIDS. Throughout the book, "plant" is used in the broadest sense to include algae, fungi, and even bacteria.

Part II, "Remedial Plants" (chapters 6–18), describes the use of plants and plant products in the treatment of a wide variety of ailments, from minor to major, including cancer. The arrangement of topics is by human body systems, consistent with the approach used in textbooks of internal medicine. Each chapter contains a brief overview of the anatomy and physiology of that

system. Traditional therapies as well as recent research discoveries are included.

Part III, "Psychoactive Plants" (chapters 19–22), includes information on plants and their products divided into three categories: stimulants, hallucinogens, and depressants. Chapter 19, "Central Nervous System and Psychiatry," presents conclusions from clinical trials on herbal remedies used for such conditions as attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD), depression, and Alzheimer's, and should be of interest to many readers.

There are numerous black-and-white illustrations throughout, including appealing paintings of plants reproduced from 19th century medical texts. The many photographs, though instructive, are less attractive. The 17-page glossary will be useful for many readers. Each chapter concludes with numerous citations; as an example, chapter 6, "Cancer," has 384! There also is an extensive, more general, bibliography at the end of the book, arranged geographically.

This book, although written primarily as a textbook for upper-level and graduate courses in Medical Botany, also should have a wider audience including physicians, pharmacists, and ethnobotanists as well as scientifically literate laypersons. It is not, however, intended as a manual for self-diagnosis or self-medication.

Walter Lewis is senior botanist, Missouri Botanical Garden and also professor emeritus, Washington University. Memory Elvin-Lewis is Professor of Biomedicine in Microbiology and Ethnobotany, Washington University. This husband/wife team is to be congratulated for this monumental work that should soon become the "gold standard" for serious publications concerned with the interface between botany and medicine. However, it is hoped that a paperback version with a reduced price will be available in the near future.

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