

The New Oxford Book of Food Plants, by J. G. VAUGHAN and C. A. GEISSLER, University Press, Oxford, 1997. 239 pp. £25, 239 pp. ISBN 0-19-854825-7.

As a phytochemical editor and author, I have three indispensable botanical books always to hand: Mabberley's "The Plant Book", Ainsworth and Bisby's "Dictionary of the Fungi" and the Oxford Book of Food Plants. While the first two are simply alphabetically-laid out dictionaries, the third has the greatly added attraction of a series of excellent colour plates illustrating the many fruits and vegetables, herbs and spices that we depend upon. This was written in 1969 and the need for a new Book of Food Plants arose partly as a consequence of the numerous more exotic fruits and vegetables that have become available on supermarket shelves in recent years.

This new version has grown in size (26 × 21 cm) and in length (an extra 33 pages). The splendid illustrations remain but have been added to by B. E. Nicholson, E. Dowle and Elizabeth Rice. The text has been thoroughly revised and updated. More emphasis has been placed on nutritional qualities. There is a useful chapter on nutrition and health and also extensive nutrition tables for all the edible plant materials included in the main section.

This New Oxford Book is both bigger and better than the old. It is a pleasure to handle and to consult its pages. It performs everything that it sets out to do. At £25, it is a bargain and even if you have already got a copy of the old version, it is to be most warmly recommended.

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Spices: Flavour Chemistry and Antioxidant Properties, ed. S. J. RISCH and C. T. HO. ACS Symposium Series 660, American Chem. Soc., Washington DC, U.S.A. 1997. 253 pp. ISBN 0-8412-3495-7.

The American Chemical Society has already produced several earlier volumes in the symposium series dealing with the more volatile components of fruits and vegetables and their contributions to flavour chemistry. This volume deals specifically with spices and contains several general chapters on the chemistry and analysis of many of the more common spice plants.

There are a number of more specific chapters reporting the recent research on onion flavour, saffron aroma, mustard oil and vanilla essence. Variation in composition of commercial essential oils is the subject of a separate chapter.

In summary, this volume provides another useful series of review chapters, charting recent developments in flavour research. It is particularly important for the food scientist, but the phytochemical reader will also find much of interest in these pages.

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