

Practical Polyphenolics: from Structure to Molecular Recognition and Physiological Action; edited by Edwin Haslam. Cambridge University Press, 1998. 422 pp. price £60.00. ISBN 0-521-46513-3

Professor Eddie Haslam of Sheffield University will be known to many *Phytochemistry* readers for the excellent books and review articles he has written on plant polyphenols, and especially on plant tannins. In 1989, for example, he published a volume entitled *Plant Polyphenols—Vegetable Tannins Revisited*, which was widely acclaimed at the time. This volume, which brings the story of plant tannins up-to-date, follows on from that earlier work but contains much new material and many new thoughts about the molecular properties and biological functions of these widely distributed plant substances.

The book opens appropriately with a personal tribute to Dr. E.C. Bate-Smith, whose studies of plant phenolics have been acknowledged worldwide. Bate-Smith could be described as one of the father figures of modern tannin research, who continued to contribute usefully to the practical analysis of plant tannins in his retirement, working at the Institute of Animal Physiology at Babraham.

The chapters that follow consider in turn the structure and biosynthesis, the molecular shapes, the tastes and properties of these polyphenols. Food science is discussed in two chapters on 'Taste, bitterness and astringency' and on 'Maturation—changes in astringency'. There is then an interlude on anthocyanin copigmentation but we return to the plant tannins with an account of polyphenols and herbal medicines. The book concludes with two chapters on practical aspects: quinone tanning and oxidative polymerisation; and polyphenols, collagen and leather.

With its many beautifully drawn structural illustrations, its occasional quotations from English literature and its fluent writing, this book is a joy to read. For anyone wishing to refresh their ideas about the role of tannins in nature, this is the book to have. It also provides an important overview for scientists needing to know about these fascinating plant molecules, in the fields of food science and agriculture.

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