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Book review

Chemical Dictionary of Economic Plants

J.B. Harborne and H. Baxter (Eds.); John Wiley & Sons Ltd., Chichester, UK, 2001, 217 pp., 16 colour plates, ISBN 0 471 49226 4, £150.00

This is an excellent reference book on the uses and components of plants and plant products. The two extremely knowledgeable editors have crystallised the important information on the chemistry and uses into concise entries making it a good first reference guide for anyone interested in plant products. It is very refreshing to have substantiated information in this form with so much unreliable information on plant uses now available over the Internet. Where the claims for properties are not substantiated the editors state this.

The 753 entries are arranged by common plant or product names followed by taxonomic classification, uses and the major or important chemical components. The book is arranged into sections of Medicinal Plants (322), Essential oils (120), Oils and Fats (41), Dyestuffs

(80), Tannins (31), Plant Biocides (38), Hallucinogenics (31), Gums and Rubbers (32), Waxes and Resins (30) and Plant Fibres (28). References are not given for each entry but a list of other source books is given at the end. The index uses both common names of the products or plants and latin names.

I found this book very useful to find the plant sources of particular products. With the renewed interest in finding exotic food plants for sale, finding functional foods, rediscovering old herbal preparations, developing cosmetic products containing active plant materials, etc. I think this book will be valuable both to the industrial/academic researcher for ideas on plants to investigate further and also of value to the herbalist or lay-person as a good reference book.

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