

sion on chemotaxonomic implication and biological properties of these plant isoquinolines would also add enormous value to and wider acceptance of this book.

While the trivial name index provides a comprehensive alphabetical listing of plant isoquinoline alkaloids with immediate access to their structures, botanical sources and appropriate references, the structural index includes the structures of all these compounds. Structures of these compounds are intelligently presented under various structural classes, e.g. unsubstituted, monosubstituted, 6,7-HO, HO-substituted, 6,7-HO, MeO-substituted, 6,7-MeO, HO-substituted, 6,7-MeO, MeO-substituted, 6,7-MDO-substituted, 7,8-HO, HO-substituted, 7,8-MeO, HO-substituted, 7,8-MeO, MeO-substituted, 5,6,7-HO, MeO, HO-substituted, 5,6,7-MeO, MeO, HO-substituted, 5,6,7-HO, MeO, MeO-substituted, 5,6,7-MeO, MeO, MeO-substituted, 5,6,7-MeO, MDO-substituted, etc. This kind of classification is rather artificial, but it seems to have worked out quite well. The authors have used 'R' or 'S' within some of the structures to describe the stereochemistry of the chiral centre (s), but it has not been followed consistently for all structures.

The taxon index presents a complete and valuable listing of botanical sources of the isoquinoline alkaloids. However, the information presented in this index could easily be transformed into a more visual distribution table. In addition to these major sections, there are also a plant families appendix which categorises all genera

according to their families, an appendix on isobenzofuranone nomenclature and a journal names appendix which provides the full name of journals used in the cited references in abbreviated forms.

Looking at the title, one might expect this book to provide an insight into the biosynthesis, occurrence, chemistry, structures and biological activities of various isoquinoline alkaloids, but obviously that is not the case. The information compiled in this book is not that different from the information one can easily obtain from the readily available *Dictionary of Natural Products* (DNP) CD-ROM or *Combined Dictionary of Organic Compounds*. Despite these limitations, this book is presented superbly with all necessary and correct names and structures of isoquinolines; it is reasonably priced and user-friendly. This book undoubtedly stands out in its own merit as an affordable and cheaper alternative to DNP for accessing information on isoquinoline alkaloids, and can be recommended as a reliable reference source for any scientist dealing with phytochemicals, and particularly, isoquinoline alkaloids.

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Major Herbs of Ayurveda

Compiled by Dabur Research Foundation and Dabur Ayurved Limited, Edited by E. Williamson. Churchill Livingstone, Elsevier Science Limited, Edinburgh, UK, 2002. xiv + 361 pp. + 70 plates. ISBN 0443 07203 5. Hard back £39.99.

There are very few compilations of information and data on Ayurvedic plants that are readily accessible, and so this treatise is particularly timely and welcome. The volume is comprised of 70 monographs of the principal herbs of the healing tradition of Ayurveda, a system of philosophy and medicine of India. There is no single system of medicinal plants of Ayurveda, since the diversity of the ecological regions of India connotes that very different plant ecosystems will be available in the various locales. The chosen plants are the most widely used. While there is much known about many of these materials, the volume quickly indicates that there is also much remaining to be disclosed. In the past few years, increasing numbers of these materials are finding their

way to the health food stores and dietary supplement shelves of pharmacies in Europe and North America; products such as ashwaghandha (*Withania somnifera*), gotu kola (*Centella asiatica*), and the guggulsterols (from *Commiphora mukul*). Yet, the information in most Western volumes of dietary supplements is scant or non-existent, so it is timely indeed to have a volume available which presents substantial important information.

Each plant in the monograph is represented by a color picture of the fresh and dried plant material located in a single section at the beginning of the volume. This is followed by a brief introduction to the principles of Ayurveda. The monographs are comprised of the Latin name of the plant, its English, Hindi and Sanskrit names, a brief overview of the plant, a description of habitat, a botanical description, and the parts used. The traditional and modern uses are followed by any veterinary uses. Major chemical constituents are summarized by chemical type, and this is followed by the medicinal and pharmacological activities. There is a safety profile

offered for the plant, a recommended dosage, and the Ayurvedic properties (Gunas) are also indicated. There are two reference sections for each monograph; one relating to further reading on the plant in major volumes, and the other a numbered compilation of the key research papers cited in the earlier sections. Each monograph is typically 3–6 pages long. The volume concludes with a therapeutic guide to the plants based on their clinical application, a glossary of terms (both Ayurvedic and English), and a very detailed index. It would have been nice to have seen where in India, and by which ethnic groups, these plants are primarily used. The book is well-produced, the writing is clear, and the

literature coverage is very good. It is highly recommended for those interested in the field from a research perspective, as well as those who encounter Ayurveda in their professional experience as a health practitioner. Given the current availability of Ayurvedic products, university and public libraries should definitely consider acquiring this volume.

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