

BOOK REVIEWS

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Fruits of Oceania. 2002. Annie Walter and Chanel Sam. English translation by Paul Ferrar. ACIAR (Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research), Monograph No. 85. Canberra. 329 pp. ISBN 1-86320-331-1. Price \$90.00 Aus. (softcover). (ISBN 2-7099-1430-1). First published in France by IRD Éditions as *Fruits d'Océanie*.

This book, shedding light as it does on the unique edible fruits of southern Oceania, is long overdue. It treats in detail 50 species of indigenous fruits, with a tabular summary presented at the back of the volume for 157 species (including the 50 covered in the text) that are eaten on islands between New Guinea and the Cook Islands. While not covering the full geographic breadth of Oceania (thus rendering the title overly ambitious) this slim, flexi-bound volume does cover in depth four specific island groups—Vanuatu, Samoa, Tonga, and New Guinea (specifically, the Ankave people)—as exemplars of the places where tropical fruits are eaten and used in the broader region of Oceania. It does an admirable job.

Opening chapters provide a glossary, introduce the four study regions, introduce the book, explain traditional alimentation and arboriculture in Oceania, and then lead into the main text.

In the main text, or “ethnobotanical inventory of fruiting species,” the 50 species are arranged alphabetically by scientific name; synonymy is minimal. Each species account begins with a box that includes family name, common names, consumption, part eaten, and toxicity, followed by a brief botanical description, a map, illustration, and paragraphs for ecology and exploitation, alimentary uses, other uses, and related species with notes. There are copious illustrations, both line drawings and color photographs, which depict the plants, fruits, and ethnobotanical practices.

And what sorts of fruits will one find covered here? Not your typical tropical fruit medley! Even the genera will be unfamiliar to many exotic fruit enthusiasts and ethnobotanists. Ever hear of *Aceratium*, *Burckella*, *Finschia*, *Pipturus*, or *Pometia*? Likely not, for those living outside the Oceanian region. Each of these, and many others, has a fascinating story told within the pages of *Fruits of Oceania*.

Following the main text are a series of indexes and lists: synonyms for the accepted names used in the text, vernacular names in detail, index of scientific names, index of common names, a list of herbarium specimen vouchers, and indexes of distribution maps, botanical illustrations, and photographs.

I could not find anything to quibble with in the book itself, but I do have a complaint about getting access to it. Like many government agencies, ACIAR is set

up to spend public funds, not to make money, so they tend to be unresponsive to requests for their products. My email inquiry about *Fruits of Oceania* has never been answered. Fortunately, I was offered a review copy so the lack of reply from ACIAR did not prevent me from obtaining this book. But would that it were in commercial production, where any inquiry from a prospective buyer brings prompt attention! I hope others will be luckier than I in finding ways to obtain it. This reference is well worth pursuing and I encourage anyone with an interest in Pacific cultures, peoples, and plants, exotic fruit species, or arboriculture to seek it out. My copy now occupies, and deservedly so, a place in the first rank of references closest to my work station.

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Stevia. The Genus *Stevia*. A. Douglas Kinghorn (ed.). 2002. Medicinal and Aromatic Plants—Industrial Profiles Vol. 19. Roland Hardman, ed. Taylor & Francis, 11 New Fetter Lane, London, EC4P 4EE, UK. xii + 211 pp. (hardcover). US \$99.95. ISBN 0-415-26830-3.

Like other volumes in the *Medicinal and Aromatic Plants* series, this book is thorough, well-edited and nicely produced, a must-have for anyone working with the genus in question. Its high quality begins with Kinghorn's information-dense introductory chapter, which discusses the use of *Stevia rebaudiana* (Asteraceae) from historical, industrial, and chemical perspectives. *Stevia*, a Paraguayan endemic whose leaves contain compounds hundreds of times sweeter than sugar, has been a popular commercial sweetener for decades. It remains unapproved in some countries; the U.S. government prohibits its use as a sweetener, although it can be obtained as a dietary supplement.

While the American ban is widely regarded as a sop to the sugar and chemical industries, some believe that the safety of stevia has been inadequately proven. Most research has focused on the sweet compound stevioside; as consumed stevioside is not absorbed, it has little bioactivity. Huxtable's chapter on pharmacology explains that in rats, stevioside is converted into steviol by intestinal bacteria and excreted as such. Steviol can be absorbed by intact cells; it affects several mitochondrial enzymes *in vitro*, and a metabolite is muta-