

the result of accumulation of experience and knowledge in the long-term production and life in ancient times. In China, literary records on medicinal plants might be traced to the Spring and Autumn Era (770 BC~221BC) or much earlier. Till the Ming Dynasty, the world wide famous comprehensive medicinal book *Compendium of Materia Medica* (Li Shizhen 1578), contained more than 1200 species of the medicinal plants.

Generally speaking, Chinese traditional medicine as a cultural treasure of China, together with Western medicine, plays an important role in human health care, and is the commonwealth of mankind. However, not all records in the traditional medicinal literatures were correct, and some of them were proved to be wrong or inaccurate with long-term clinical practices or scientific tests. Furthermore, some new pharmacological effects of these medicinal plants have been revealed, and some new medicinal plants have been gradually added to our knowledge. Therefore, the science of medicinal plants as an ancient and developing science needs systematic testing of the records in the traditional medicinal literature, and also needs a continual infusion of new knowledge or scientific findings. Actually modern medicine, or Western medicine, as a whole, has persistently absorbed a great deal of valuable experience and knowledge accumulated in the course of long-term clinical application and scientific research. However, the science of medicinal plants itself has been in the shade, and not summed up the progress of time.

The *Comprehensive Monograph of Contemporary Medicinal Plants* is divided into three parts and four volumes. The Chinese and English versions were published successively. The book collected information on more than 800 frequently used medicinal plant species from both China and abroad. Each entry of medicinal plant species includes Chinese, Latin and English names, main geographical distribution region, main morphological characteristics, medicinally effective

parts, chemical composition, pharmacological effects and the progress in clinical applications. Abundant diagrams are used to supplement the explanations. The book adopted the definition of the medicinal plant species in broader sense, to include not only the traditional medicinal plant species being used for a long time both in China and abroad, but also the new products made from the medicinal plants, natural health plant products, natural plant cosmetics, natural plant pigment, and so on.

The book reflects the results of the authors' in-depth investigations on these medicinal plant species for many years. On the basis of systematic compilation and analysis of the illustrations of the efficacies of these medicinal plants in the voluminous traditional medicinal literatures, the book introduced the latest medical progress in plant biochemistry, pharmacological, toxicological and clinical research. For each medicinal plant species mentioned, the authors also give pertinent comments and suggestions on sustainable exploitation and utilization, as well as safety in clinical applications. All these might contribute greatly to the clarification of the mechanism of the role of the traditional medicine plants, to the modernization of the science of traditional medicinal plants, and to guidance for future clinical applications.

The book is well written with few errors. Abundant illustrations help readers understand the explanations. The book is suitable for professionals who engage in plant science, pharmaceutical research, production, development, testing as well as sales staff or other persons who are interested in these fields.

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Book Review Editor's note: Continuing with our decision to investigate suitable websites and, if appropriate, include their reviews. I have written the following review. If others know of similar suitable sites and are moved to submit a review please contact me at r.john@rogers.com.

MushroomExpert.Com website

By Michael Kuo. 2008. <http://www.mushroomexpert.com/index.html>.

I recently wanted to identify a mushroom in my yard and, with help, thought it might be a Turkey Tail. On the web I found MushroomExpert.Com, a site developed by an Illinois English teacher and amateur mycologist, Michael Kuo. He is also the author of two conventional books; *Morels* (2005), and *100 Edible Mushrooms* (2007) [University of Michigan Press]. By following Dr. Kuo's keys and his "Totally True Turkey Tail Test" I confirmed I had a totally true Turkey Tail.

I was very impressed by the individual pages on each species – the field guide section. This section current-

ly covers 700+ mushroom species using identification keys. Each species has a web page with identification information, background material, habitat and some excellent photographs. Some of the photos are by the author, but there are many other contributors. The text is clear and easy to follow and shows a certain sense of humour. I smiled at phrases like "...let me say this as plainly as I can: *You are stupid if you eat this mushroom.*" It certainly gets to the point! There are web links to other mushroom sites, so you can see additional photos and read other versions of the species' characteristics [these were not as attractively displayed nor as well illustrated as Kuo's site].

There are three ways to search. You can step your way through the key system by clicking "Identification keys." For, say, *Boletus luridus* this is a four-step process and leads to Kuo's page [four photos]. For *Boletus flammans* you get moved to RogersMushroom with only one photo.

The second way to get to a species is to select a scientific name from a drop-down box. If you choose *Boletus bicolor* you get to Kuo's page. Oddly, if you go through the keys and decide this is your species there is no link to any further page.

The third method is to go to a search box and type in turkey tail and this will take you out to Google with a link back to MushroomExpert! This will also happen if you enter *Boletus flammans*, and the link will be the page with the link to RogersMushrooms. This all seems a little odd, but it does work. I think this is a reflection on the incomplete status of the site. The author, for example, states "We have not yet completed a key to North American polypores, but we have started the ball rolling with a key to the pale-fleshed, stemmed polypores".

I explored the site further and found it covers Collecting for Study, Making Spore Prints, Descriptions & Journals, Identifying Mushrooms, Determining Odor and Taste, Pronouncing Latin Names, Testing Chemi-

cal Reactions, Preserving Specimens, Using a Microscope, Mushroom Taxonomy, Introduction to Mushroom Photography, Digital Photography Tips, Scanning Mushrooms, Eating Wild Mushrooms, Mushroom Toxins, Meixner Test for Amatoxins.

I read a few of these sections and found them informative and remarkably well done. Where required they have excellent illustrations or photographs, including step-by-step sequences. If you intend not to heed the author's warning in paragraph two above, then read the section on toxins. Under Amatoxin he states, in part, "But the remission is a cruel hoax; in the meantime, the victim's liver and kidneys are being destroyed." A very unpleasant thought.

Kuo is currently writing, with Andrew Methven, *100 Cool Mushrooms*, [University of Michigan Press] and *Mushrooms of the Midwest* [University of Illinois Press.]

I have often been frustratingly confused by mushroom field guides. This is the first time I have actually enjoyed the process of resolving identification issues. This site is now in my list of "favourites" – a rare event as I only have 20 or so favourites.

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Between Earth and Sky: Our Intimate Connections to Trees

By Nalini M. Nadkarni. 2008. University of California Press, 2120 Berkeley Way, Berkeley, California 94704-1012. 322 pages. 24.95 USD Cloth.

Nalini Nadkarni, forest ecologist and author of *Between Earth and Sky*, has written a natural and social history of trees, a tribute to the strong and influential global inhabitants she dearly loves. As she writes in the introduction to *Between Earth and Sky*, "I love trees: how they look, how they behave, how they smell and sound, and how I feel when I am around them." The first dedication of her book is to the "maple trees outside the front door, where this book began."

Nine chapters exploring the relationship between humans and trees cover topics as diverse as "what is a tree"; tree goods and services; trees as shelter and protection; trees and health and healing; trees in play and the human imagination; trees and the expression of time; trees as signs and symbols; trees in spirituality and education; and trees and mindfulness. Woven throughout the chapters is scientific fact, personal reflection and narrative, and a variety of visual material.

It is a compelling combination. I found the generous sprinkling of tree quotes, poems and other passages particularly intriguing. Passages from Shakespeare's *Othello*, Homer's *The Odyssey*, and a Woodie Guthrie song. Poems by Wendell Berry, William Blake, John Clare, E. E. Cummings, Jane Hirschfeld, Pablo Neruda, Li Po, Rumi, Christina Georgina Rossetti, Percy

Bysshe Shelley, and Rabindranath Tagore. Quotes by Hermann Hesse, Federico Garcia Lorca, and Antoine de Saint-Exupéry. One of my favourites is a line from *The Power of Myth* by Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers: "God is the experience of looking at a tree and saying, 'Ah!'"

Creative writings aside, the book contains no shortage of scientific and other facts. I discovered "arboreal soil" situated on large branches in certain forests, spaces that epiphytes, insects, earthworms, and spiders call home. I learned about "witness trees," which bear permanent marks carved by settlers of forested lands to marks territorial boundaries. I was interested to read that the sacred architecture of Greek temples and Gothic cathedrals is thought to be inspired by sacred groves, and that Hindu and Buddhist temples are in fact associated with living trees.

Anyone who loves trees, who admires their steadfastness, who finds in their presence a certain peace and calm, will love this book. As Nadkarni writes in the introductory chapter, "When I place my own strong brown hand on the trunk of a tree, I feel connected to something that deserves my curiosity, care, and protection." Reading *Between Earth and Sky* makes you want to rush outside and follow her example.

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