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Book Review

Out of Nature – Why Drugs from Plants Matter to the Future of Humanity by Kara Rogers.

Published in 2012, by The University of Arizona Press, Tucson, Arizona U.S.A. 204 p. ISBN 978-0-8165-2969-8 (Paperback). Contains a bibliography and index; non-fiction.

The eight chapters of this book take the reader on a journey that illustrates the interaction of humans with plants and the importance of plants as medicine. Each chapter is related to human activities while introducing significant insights and history for medicinal plants that have enhanced life on earth. Chapter one, “Plants as Medicine,” begins with a focus on Pacific yew (*Taxus brevifolia*), but expands to describe the need for plant exploration as a source for many medicines. Chapter two, “Humans and Plants,” reminds the reader of the individuality of plant species as related to physical and metabolic processes, some of which are similar to that of humans. Chapter three, “The Biophilia Factor,” explores the close association of plants with all living creatures using the interaction to support life processes such as pollination and seed spread. Chapter four, “In Earth’s Garden,” traces the development of gardens as sources of food, medicine, and pleasure. Chapter five “Vanishing Life,” focuses on the loss of plant diversity and the consequences to functioning ecosystems and human health, while Chapter six, “Out of Nature,” discusses plants and plant derived drugs that have enhanced healing for humans. Chapter seven, “Learning to Coexist,” stresses the importance of plants and plant compounds in the development of new drugs. Chapter eight, “The Forest for its Trees,” brings together the challenges and need for biodiversity and conservation of plant materials for human health.

An analysis of chapter contents, however, does not adequately describe the character of this book. Instead, the chapters are only stopping points along a trail to view the vista of nature and nature’s contributions to human life. As a whole, the book intertwines plant and human history, providing the reader with new perspectives on the relationship between both of these living organisms over the several centuries humans have depended on plants for food, medicine, and shelter. By focusing on the medicinal contributions of plants to humans, the author reminds the reader of the closeness of nature to human life and asks that everyone take a “second look” at the natural wonderland that surrounds them, emphasizing the need to protect plants from habitat destruction and overharvesting.

This book is written for a general audience and provides special insights into the beauty and bounty of the natural world in which we live. The emphasis on medicinal plants and their history will especially appeal to those readers interested in medicine and the role of plants in human life. The author has done an excellent job in bringing together the story of plants and humans.

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