

Economic Botany in the Tropics (Fourth Edition)

S.L. Kochhar

Macmillan Publishers India Ltd., Delhi-110002, India

ISBN : 978-935-059-067-6 Rs 395

When Mr. S.L. Kochhar's "Economic Botany in the Tropics" first appeared in 1981, there was practically a vacuum in the text book space in this important field. The students (and teachers) had to make do with some classics that had become obsolete, or with piece-meal information scattered in journals and reports (in the pre-internet era!). Kochhar's book, emerging from his classroom teaching, not only served as ready reference but it practically revived the students' interest in economic botany as a discipline of learning. The book traced the origin and diversification of cultivated plants, and then went on with well-organized chapters on fibres, cereals, legumes and pulses, vegetable oil, fruits and nuts, vegetables, spices, beverages, wood, rubber, medicinal plants and insecticides. Each chapter included description, composition, production data and uses of the major crops, with due emphasis on the human endeavour for crop improvement and innovation in processing and use.

Being user-friendly the first edition of the book saw many reprints, but Kochhar didn't rest on his laurels. The second edition, published in 1998, had new chapters on essential oils and on "Vavilov and his work on Centers of Genetic Diversity". An unconventional feature of the Second Edition was inclusion of an overview on Green Revolution, with original contributions by the architects Dr. M.S. Swaminathan and Dr. Gurdev S. Khush. A chapter on transgenic crops by Prof. A. Grover, Prof. S. C. Maheswari and Mr. S.L. Kochhar presented state of the art information on crop biotechnology, and the environmental concerns associated with it. Another original contribution, by Prof. J. Schell dwelt on "why plant biotechnology is essential for economically rewarding and environmentally sustainable agriculture".

The third edition, brought out in 2009, saw inclusion of chapters on three more topical themes-plant diversity and its conservation,

petro-crops and ethanobotany. A novel feature was the coverage on garden plants.

Over the years Kochhar-the-Author travelled widely and visited several research institutes working on domesticated plants in India and abroad. Based on his first hand experience, and relying on the feedback that he never failed seek, he has further enlarged the scope of his book. The 'gradually evolving' Fourth Edition has updated production data on major crops in India. In addition, new chapters/appendices/addendum have been included on TPS technology, sugarcane propagation and breeding, other sweetening materials, aquatic plants as source of human food, difficulties encountered in mango cultivation, antioxidants and unsaturated fatty acids, and common names of some food consumed during Indian festivals. In the end there are 32 colour photographs of some common economic plants.

The book by Mr. S.L. Kochhar is as complete a textbook as is possible on the boundary-less field of tropical economic botany. It more than adequately meets the requirements of UG and PG students of botany, agriculture and horticulture. Even for others it can serve as a customized window to the fascinating world of useful plants of a region that has been the cradle of human ingenuity for exploring plant diversity for human welfare. What's more, the 664 page, well illustrated book comes from Macmillan at a very reasonable price or Rs. 395.

Professor A.K. Bhatnagar

Department of Botany

University of Delhi

Delhi - 110007, India

E-mail: akbhatnagar49@gmail.com