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Medicinal Plants in Australia. Volume 4. An Antipodean Apothecary. Williams, C. J. 2012. Rosenberg Publishing Pty Ltd, PO Box 6125 Dural Delivery Centre NSW 2158, Australia; distributed in the United States by International Specialized Book Services. AUD 89.95. ISBN 9781922013507.

Before Cheryll Williams's unique and tireless foray into the ethnopharmacology of Australia (which is comprised of a total of 4 hefty volumes), one would have had a difficult time finding similar narrative-style writing on the subject. Most previous books have been straightforward lists of monographs. We have Lassak and McCarthy's (1983) wonderfully detailed, well-organized reference (Australian Medicinal Plants). Barr (1993) has a comprehensive inventory of plant profiles in the Northern Territory as well as the ethnobotanically rich and gorgeously photographed Traditional Bush Medicines: An Aboriginal Pharmacopoeia (Barr 1988). However, with her fourth installment in the series, Williams expertly fills in an accessibility gap that was missing from those otherwise excellent references. For that reason and others, this collection deserves more attention than it has gotten. It may not be the type of systematic treatment of a continent's medicinal flora that economic botanists are used to, but in many ways it might be better.

Williams describes herself as having "an extraordinary amount of faith in herbal medicine." And, while she is definitely inspired by that faith, rest assured that she is ultimately guided by facts. As it is her goal to pursue the "validation of traditional remedies by modern science," she is careful to craft her case with abundant citations—Lassak, Barr, and many others included. Her argument is not plodding and methodical; rather, it is vibrant and living. While the monographs have given us a foundation of primary information, Williams has synthesized and contextualized them for the reader. The result: a clear style with popular appeal that still stays rigorously true to the integrity of the subject matter. As such, while this is a truly fun read full of interesting and well-researched detail, it is also an important and integrative summation of ethnomedical scholarship in Australia. Many chapters read like the better articles from *Scientific American*—something many readers would be happy to curl up with. For instance, in Williams's exceptional treatment of Solanaceae ("Kangaroo Apples and Blackberry Nightshades") the expert juxtaposition of her craft is visibly apparent. Beautiful and relevant photographs abound next to voluminous tables of data and references, making for an overall bright and inviting text.

Indeed, each chapter is akin to a stand-alone article with even smaller vignettes delineated within those articles. The reader is repeatedly invited to graze through a nearly bewildering amount of material. If there is any drawback to this impressive collection of information, it would be in the organization of all the interlocking pieces. As in volumes 1 through 3, this collection does occasionally feel a bit cobbled together. Williams's overarching treatment of the material certainly would not be called systematic, and some may even find the transition from chapter to chapter a bit meandering. Perhaps some additional editorial guidance would have improved the cohesiveness of the volume. For example, chapters run from broad concepts (40 pages on "Validating bush medicines," 50 pages on "New roles for old remedies") to exceedingly specific (30 pages on "Pituri: A mysterious narcotic," 20 pages on "Steroids from yams"). However, once inside the individual chapters, Williams connects the dots elegantly and convincingly.

Taken as a whole, *Medicinal Plants in Australia* is a lovely work full of thoroughly researched detail. While the subject matter is certainly specific to Australia, this collection would be pleasurable and informative for anyone curious about the history of the use of plants by humans and the science that underpins those uses. The collection stands as an expert narrative course in the economic botany and ethnopharmacology of Australia – past, present, and future. That being said, Williams notes that there was at least one publisher that told her the material she has investigated in these four volumes was “not scientific enough.” If she set out to prove them wrong, she has succeeded.

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Lassak, E. V. and McCarthy, T. 1983. *Australian medicinal plants*. North Ryde: Methuen Australia.

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