

Book Review

James A. Duke

Plants of Semillas Sagradas: An Ethnomedical Garden in Costa Rica

By Rafael Ocampo and Michael J. Balick

Edited by Ruth Goldstein and Katherine Herrera

Finca Luna Nueva Extractos de Costa Rica, S.A.

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Cubans should be pleased to learn of the downloadable version of «Plants of Semillas Sagradas: An Ethnomedicinal Garden in Costa Rica». It can be free downloaded on: [<http://fincalunanuevalodge.com/sacred-seeds/semillas-sagradas.pdf>] [<http://fincalunanuevalodge.com/>] 5.23 Mb.

The authors, Costa Rican Botanist, Rafael Ocampo, BSc. and New York Botanical Garden Botanist, Michael Balick, PhD, long time friends of mine, have succeeded admirably in the goals of the book, "devoted to preserving the diversity of plants so important in traditional healing and the field of botanical medicine". Another goal of theirs is to stimulate creation of similar medicinal plant gardens wherever traditional medicinal plants are endangered.

In a time when fewer and fewer people can afford conventional medicine, it is important to have teaching gardens like this, to teach people the plants and their traditional uses. The older I get, the more I believe that, in many cases, traditional herbal approaches will prove better and safer and cheaper than their pharmaceutical alternatives.

The Sacred Seeds Sanctuary, established in 1994 by Paul Schulick, at Finca Luna Nueva in the volcanic rainforest of northern Costa Rica, now, like my Green Pharmacy Garden in Maryland, has more than 250 medicinal species, from all over the world. Both are learning and teaching gardens.

The authors selected around 10% of their species for discussions in the first volume.

The major topics covered for each species are History and Traditional Uses, Pharmacology and Biological Activity, Toxicity, and Conservation Status. In this volume you'll find the following neotropical species: *Aristolochia gigantea*, *Arrabidaea chica*, *Asclepias curassavica*, *Bauhinia guianensis*, *Borojoa patinoi*, *Bursera simaruba*, *Cecropia obtusifolia*, *Cissampelos pareira*, *Cnidioscolus chayamansa*, *Chaptalia nutans*, *Dorstenia contrajerva*, *Dracontium gigas*, *Eryngium foetidum*, *Euphorbia lancifolia*, *Fevillea cordifolia*, *Gliricidia sepium*, *Hamelia patens*, *Hymenocallis littoralis*, *Hyptis verticillata*, *Jatropha curcas*, *Jatropha gossypifolia*,

Justicia pectoralis, *Lippia alba*, *Lippia graveolens*, *Malachra alceifolia*, *Phlebodium decumanum*, *Psychotria ipecacuanha*, *Quassia amara*, *Senna reticulata*, and *Uncaria tomentosa*.

Many of the 250 species in the Semillas Sagradas Sanctuary [also occur in Cuba]. Because of my great love for Cuba's *culantro cimarrón*, *Eryngium foetidum*, the most impressive spice in sancocho (ajiaco in Cuba), rather a national dish in Panama, where I lived off and on for more than 3 years.),

I will talk about the layout of the book using that species account for my book review. In the two pages devoted to *Eryngium*, they list taxonomic synonyms, the plant family (Apiaceae), Some Common Names (nearly twenty). Under History and Traditional Use, we learn that it is traditionally used as a spice due to the highly volatile essential oils, hence best used fresh. Costa Ricans take the leaf tea three times a day to lower cholesterol. Afro Caribbeans on the coast take decoction or tea for anemia and gastritis. Other uses are given for Costa Rica, Belize, El Salvador, Honduras, Peru, the Caribbean and Venezuela.

Then there's a short paragraph, Pharmacology and Biological Activity, with only one entry, regarding the topical antiinflammatory activity of the leaf extract in mice.

In the paragraph captioned Toxicity, we learn that the LD₅₀ of the extract injected intravenously in mice is ca 50 mg/kg body weight while the oral LD₅₀ is ca 1,000 mg/kg.

In the final paragraph, the Bibliography, there are 10 full citations to the references cited in the *Eryngium* account. There are also two color illustrations.

You can download and see this beautiful book for yourselves, looking at Central American uses for many Cuban medicinal plants. The authors, editors and sponsored are to be congratulated and thanked for producing the book. If my Cuban readers would like to see my own formatted summary on any one of these species and several other Cuban species, I can try to send it by e-mail jimduke13@verizon.net