

# Journal of Medicinally Active Plants

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**Uses and Abuses of Plant-Derived Smoke: Its Ethnobotany as Hallucinogen, Perfume, Incense, and Medicine by Marcello Pennacchio, Lara Jefferson, and Kayri Havens. 2010. Illustrated by David S. Sollenberger. Oxford University Press Inc., New York, New York. ISBN 978-0-19-537001-0**

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***Uses and Abuses of Plant-Derived Smoke: Its Ethnobotany as Hallucinogen, Perfume, Incense, and Medicine*** by Marcello Pennacchio, Lara Jefferson, and Kayri Havens. 2010. Illustrated by David S. Sollenberger. Oxford University Press Inc., New York, New York. ISBN 978-0-19-537001-0

While countless reference books on medicinal plants are available, the authors of *Uses and Abuses of Plant-Derived Smoke* distinguish their approach by focusing on the properties of smoke produced by burning plant material. The 30 page introduction to the book consists of an enlightening ethno-botanical and anthropological account of plant smoke. Sections of the book describe multiple uses of plant derived smoke, including ceremonial, flavoring, medicinal, pest control, perfumery, preservation, recreational, religious, and veterinary among other historical and modern applications. While many are aware that smoke can be toxic, probably very few know that in 404 BCE, following the 27 years of siege on Athens by Sparta, Corinth, and others of the Peloponnesian Confederacy, a purifying smoke from *Juniper* spp. berries was used to disinfect the city and stop a mysterious plague that was causing multiple deaths.

The largest section of the book, 186 pages, is a fully referenced listing of plants in alphabetical order by genus and species with each entry describing the uses of the smoke from that specific plant. The book also contains an extensive repertoire of scholarly knowledge with a Glossary of Terms, Index of Species, and an extensive reference section. The text takes the reader around the world, beginning at the time of *Homo erectus* (1.3 to 1.8 million years ago) and describes the significance of fire and thus plant smoke on indigenous and modern cultures.

The majority of the book has been written with a general audience in mind and provides insight into the vast world of medicinal plants and the importance of their use in making smoke. The lack of discussion on alkaloids and other active ingredients present in smoke from burning plants, however, will undoubtedly leave many readers wondering why some types of smoke are helpful and other types of smoke are dangerous. Primarily, the book is a historical account on the use of smoke by various cultures.

In my opinion, the authors of this book attempted to cover smoke from too many of the world's plants. This extensive coverage has created a plethora of topics that are only briefly mentioned. The introduction is well written, but limited when more background information on differences in plants and thus the smoke would have been helpful. An arrangement of information on smoke by applications, as opposed to alphabetical by plant material, would have increased the value of the book to users. As an intriguing guide to smoke from a burning plant, this book is highly recommended for libraries and those interested in uses of smoke.

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