

Journal of Medicinally Active Plants

Volume 1 | Issue 1

1-1-2012

The Chinese Medicinal Herb Farm: A Cultivator's Guide to Small-Scale Organic Herb Production by Peg Schafer, 2011. Chelsea Green Publishing, White River Junction, Vermont. ISBN 978-1-60358-330-5 (pbk.), ISBN 978-1-60358-331-2 (ebook).

Jean Giblette

High Falls Gardens, Box 125 Philmont NY 12565, info@highfallsgardens.net.

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.umass.edu/jmap>

 Part of the [Plant Sciences Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Giblette, Jean. 2012. "The Chinese Medicinal Herb Farm: A Cultivator's Guide to Small-Scale Organic Herb Production by Peg Schafer, 2011. Chelsea Green Publishing, White River Junction, Vermont. ISBN 978-1-60358-330-5 (pbk.), ISBN 978-1-60358-331-2 (ebook)." *Journal of Medicinally Active Plants* 1, (1):45-46.

DOI: [10.7275/R5R20Z9P](https://doi.org/10.7275/R5R20Z9P)

<http://scholarworks.umass.edu/jmap/vol1/iss1/10>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in Journal of Medicinally Active Plants by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact scholarworks@library.umass.edu.

The Chinese Medicinal Herb Farm: A Cultivator's Guide to Small-Scale Organic Herb Production by Peg Schafer, 2011. Chelsea Green Publishing, White River Junction, Vermont. ISBN 978-1-60358-330-5 (pbk.), ISBN 978-1-60358-331-2 (ebook).

In his foreword for this book, Steven Foster credits Dr. Shiu Ying Hu of Harvard's Arnold Arboretum for inspiring the production of Chinese medicinal herbs in the United States. She was highly influential indeed, sustaining the Arboretum's interest in Chinese plant species that began over a century ago with E.H. Wilson's collection trips and resulted in last year's celebration of the 20th anniversary of the NACPEC (North America China Plant Exploration Consortium)ⁱ, an important collaboration among botanical gardens.

The work of Peg Schafer and her colleagues in furthering domestic production, however, originated in the efforts of Robert L. Newman, L.Ac., M.S.T.C.M., in the late 1980s a student at the American College of Traditional Chinese Medicine in San Francisco. Ms. Schafer and her collaborators responded to the growth of traditional Chinese medicine in the U.S. which, like its contemporary the organic farming movement, originally took place outside preexisting academic institutions. By the mid-1990s Robert had collected over 700 species of Asian medicinal plants, most as seeds, through botanical garden seed swaps and his own trips to China; Steven Foster's book *Herbal Emissaries*ⁱⁱ was published; and eight independent cultivators across the country, including Peg Schafer and me, had begun the process of growing out and evaluating Robert's seeds. Two decades later, like NAPEC, we have our own body of results to celebrate.

The Chinese Medicinal Herb Farm is the first American compendium on cultivation since *Herbal Emissaries* and a comprehensive presentation of the most important findings of those who grew out Newman's seeds. While not claiming objectivity in this review, I can say that the book is much needed information. The author writes like she farms, with graceful but painstaking attention to detail and an ability to organize myriad elements into a coherent whole. With the resources of Chelsea Green Publishing behind her and their aim to present the great accomplishments of the master farmers, many of whom founded the organic movement beginning in the 1970s and are still farming, the book is useful on several levels.

Written for small-scale, diversified growers but accessible to anyone with moderate horticultural experience, the book leads off with its major premise: that the healing herbs of any tradition but most particularly, Chinese herbal medicine in which most of the species are still collected from the wild, are under serious threat worldwide. In the first quarter part of the book, Ms. Schafer poses the problem of continued access to a full array of traditional Chinese medicine products, with worldwide trade estimated at \$30 billion in 2004ⁱⁱⁱ and advocates high quality cultivation as the solution.

Next she describes the basic setup for small-scale, organic production of Chinese herbs, including a definition of wild quality, addressing matters of planning, management of invasive plant risk, an overview of horticultural and production requirements, harvesting and marketing. This section is replete with tables, photos, asides and tips, enough to serve as a point of departure for a serious grower. A concluding chapter in this section, devoted to conservation and global trade, questions the effectiveness of wild-plant protection strategies and calls for a collaborative approach involving widely distributed production, herbal practitioners, medicine makers, and product manufacturers. Consumers bear responsibility for knowing the source of the herbs they consume as their spending habits can change the industry.

Three quarters (210 pages) of the book consist of 79 herb profiles. These are practical guides for growers rather than simple fact sheets, and describe the species, propagation, garden and polyculture planting, suitable companion plants, field production, pests and diseases, harvest and yield, and also a brief summary of medicinal uses contributed by Sean Fannin, CH, DiplCEM. The photos are very clear, and most of the profiles include a photo of the whole plant and one of the harvested medicinal fraction. A cross-reference table listing botanical and common name and also Pinyin name of the medicinal fraction is included in the appendices, along with a good list of resources, endnotes, references, and index.

The profiles are based on Ms. Schafer's direct experience--what grows well and what sells--which ranks the book at the top in terms of usefulness to commercial growers. However, as she acknowledges, no one farm can produce all these herbs. What reproduces successfully in one setting may not be a candidate for production there and, even in the Zone 9 coastal climate of Ms. Schafer's farm, some plants do not thrive. (The book presents a table of the 79 species according to their regional adaptability in the United States.) This reality begs for cooperation among interested parties in the herbal marketplace, but also represents a substantial opportunity for diversified growers who, with a little experimentation, may find one or more plants that fit their operation and yield a profit.

The Chinese Medicinal Herb Farm is a unique book, of interest to all horticulturalists from the academic to the backyard variety. Educators within the agricultural extension system, farm support agency personnel, and new crop specialists also will find it useful. Highly recommended.

Jean Giblette, Owner,
High Falls Gardens, Box 125 Philmont NY 12565, 518-672-7365, info@highfallsgardens.net.

ⁱ *Arnoldia*: The Magazine of the Arnold Arboretum, Volume 68, Number 2, 2010 devotes an entire issue to NACPEC. On line at <http://arnoldia.arboretum.harvard.edu/issues/247>.

ⁱⁱ Foster, Steven and Yue Chongxi, 1992. *Herbal Emissaries: Bringing Chinese Herbs to the West* (Rochester VT: Healing Arts Press, Inner Traditions International)

ⁱⁱⁱ O'Neill Michael, 2004. Finding the TCM Standard, China International Business, Issue 204 pp. 42-43, (Beijing: International Business Daily)