

CSIRO Handbook of Economic Plants of Australia

Eds M. LAZARIDES and B. HINCE, CSIRO Publications, 314 Albert St East, Melbourne, Victoria, 1993. 330 pp., hardbound. Price \$50. [ISBN 0-643-05240-2]

This is, as the introduction states, "... essentially an expanded and revised edition of William Hartley's 1979 version of *A Checklist of Economic Plants in Australia*, now out of print. This booklet owes its origins to the *Standardised Plant Names* of 1942 and both were essential reference works for professional, industry and casual users of plant names in use within Australia.

The earlier works were dry, featureless listings, while the current book has been upgraded into a pleasing A4 size with a substantial improvement in typesetting and layout, including additional information such as comments, usage, life form, life cycle and major references plus a distribution map. Plants are listed with scientific and common names plus the family name alongside the genus name. Reference is made to synonyms and misapplied words e.g. *Themeda australis* with full information under the now accepted *Themeda triandra*.

Organisation of the book is in alphabetical order according to scientific names, with full information given after the name. A comprehensive index to common names, using dual entries for 2-worded names is included as an appendix, e.g. mung bean is indexed as both "mung bean" and "bean — mung" enabling quick cross-checking of similar common names such as "bean" with very different scientific names. This is likely to be of considerable use to casual users or those lacking considerable botanical knowledge.

As always with common names, there are possible omissions or arguments over the validity of some used in the book, especially of tropical species with e.g. Asparagus pea used rather than snake bean for *Vigna unguiculata ssp. sesquipedalis*, and adding one or two more common names may have been more appropriate.

There are also several glaring omissions of species e.g. *Andropogon gayanus* — gamba grass, *Paspalum notatum* — Bahia grass and *Macropitium longipedunculatum*, all of which are

common species in use in the Australian tropics and there are inadequate botanical names for the stylos, omitting the botanical varietal names.

A major criticism is the manner in which the distribution is shown as a shaded map of Australia indicating those states in which a species occurs. This gives an erroneous indication of distribution, implying it occurs throughout the shaded area. For states such as Western Australia, Northern Territory and Queensland with wide variation in climate, this is ludicrous e.g. *Stylosanthes guianensis* is shown to be present throughout all of WA, NT and Qld, but not in New South Wales. There are also errors in some of the distributions, with *Stylosanthes scabra* not being present in Queensland or *Leucaena leucocephala* not present in WA (it is a major pasture species in parts of the north-west of WA and the Ord River region) and *Zea mays* present only in NSW! These possibly occur because of the manner in which the maps are generated — from state flora lists, which may not adequately represent usage and distribution of economic plants, but they should have been detected through the proof reading.

For some of the species from northern Australia, there is probably disagreement with the common names used in the book e.g. *Ficus virens* is commonly known as a banyan tree *not* white fig as listed in the book.

Even though there are considerable criticisms of the book, no other publication attempts so comprehensive a listing of Australian economic plants. More importantly, the authors are requesting users to send comments to them for updating the database on which it is based. Hopefully, an updated version will incorporate corrections and criticisms.

The book is well produced and despite its shortcomings should be very useful to the intended audience of scientific and technical staff involved in the plant industries, providing an essential and uniform reference to plant taxonomic names, albeit less useful for plant distribution.

At the price, it is good value for individual purchase for those regularly needing access to correct plant names and essential for agricultural libraries.

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