with any particular health condition along with every associated caveat. This is not the case here. When discussing safety, prevention, and long-term health, the approach is rational, enabling, and positive—not clinically over-cautious and disempowering.

The final section, Common Illnesses in Women, departs from specific women’s issues to diseases that affect women differently from men: cardiovascular health, musculoskeletal problems, HIV, a range of mental conditions, and diseases of aging. The penultimate chapter looks at a whole woman approach to healthy aging, followed by the editors’ epilogue, which raises issues affecting the social construction of gender inequality in health: economic inequality, environmental factors, the paucity of clinical and scientific research on sex and gender differences, and the need to recognize women’s traditional role as healers.

Written by women, primarily for women, this book provides a powerful and practical set of guidelines for an integrative, celebratory, whole person approach to women’s health.

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Probably every adult on earth is familiar with the unique sulfur-related flavors and scents of garlic (Allium sativum, Alliaceae) and onions (A. cepa). Millions also associate garlic with skin bites that can occur when too much fresh garlic is applied for too long. Alarmingly, photos of topical (skin) garlic burns that can occur when too much fresh garlic is applied for too long.

Appendix 1 on the unique photos of several species of garlic and onions, highlighting the important differences that occur between 2-propenyl and 1-propenyl compounds and the critical importance of the unique Allium enzymes, alliinase and lachrymatory factor synthetase. The author also describes several new mass spectral methods that have allowed the identification of short-lived sulfur compounds and proof of mechanistic pathways. The history of the discovery of garlic’s sulfur compounds is well described and includes unique photos of several of the early (pre-1950) founding scientists. Appendix 1 contains an extensive table of the cysteine sulfoxides (flavor precursors) content of 39 Allium species.

While the author has had limited experience in conducting clinical trials, he has done an admirable job of critically reviewing the evidence and the meta-analyses on clinical trials of garlic supplements for cardiovascular effects and epidemiological studies on the possible anticancer associations. He is thorough in listing and describing worldwide expert panel reviews on the possible health benefits of garlic, such as those by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) at the US National Institutes of Health, Health Canada, The European Scientific Cooperative for Phytotherapy (ESCP), and the World Health Organization (WHO). The author describes the levels of evidence that are used to assess human health benefits and the elements that should be part of any high-quality randomized clinical trial. Because garlic has been used for centuries for what we now would call its antimicrobial effects, the author provides an extensive table in Appendix 1 on the in vitro antimicrobial activity of allicin, ajoene, and the allin-derived allyl sulfides on 41 different bacteria, fungi, and protozoa. He also expounds upon the adverse effects that some Allium compounds (thiosulfinates) can cause, with alarming photos of topical (skin) garlic burns that can occur when too much fresh garlic is applied for too long.

Garlic: The Science and Therapeutic Application of Allium sativum L. and Related Species, the first scientific book in English on the chemistry and possible health effects of garlic, was published in 1996 by Williams & Wilkins (and was co-edited by this reviewer). With 2,500 references, that book represents an exhaustive review of the scientific literature on garlic to that date. The 2010 book by Block, with its 1,100 references, is the second most extensive scientific book on the chemistry and medicinal studies on garlic. It provides, among many other unique features, important updating of the chemistry and health studies that have been conducted in the intervening 14 years. When the 1996 book was written, numerous clinical trials on the cardiovascular effects of garlic products had shown more positive effects than the also numerous trials that have been conducted since then, probably due to inferior quality in the conduct of the earlier trials. Hence, Block’s book summarizes and emphasizes the serious doubts that exist about the effects of garlic on serum cholesterol and platelet aggregation, although the effects on lowering blood pressure among hypertensive individuals has been supported by two recent meta-analyses. Thus, Block’s book is an important and complementary reference work to the aforementioned 1996 publication. Non-scientists should find much of the book to be most interesting, while anyone with a serious interest in the chem-
Herbal Medicine: Trends & Traditions

A frequently-expressed concern of laypeople regarding herbal medicine is that it takes too much effort to decide which sources to trust. Some scientists criticize popular herb use, believing that Western herb traditions have no discernible system or standards. Herbal Medicine: Trends & Traditions admirably addresses both ends of the spectrum, communicating how to use herbs effectively, safely, and within guidelines understandable at any level of expertise. In his introduction, Charles W. Kane addresses the common fears of the herbal neophyte as well as the research-driven expert.

This book is mainly a materia medica, but with useful additions. Clinical herbalists will appreciate a vitalist orientation without jargon. In the introduction, terse philosophical paragraphs explain why Kane avoids formulas for symptoms and conditions. This harmonizes well with the emphasis in integrative medicine on “patient-centered medicine,” a term coined by Michael Lerner of Commonweal. Kane concisely summarizes actual rather than theoretical applications of herbs representing a standard Western dispensary. Actions such as “astringent” or “vulnery” are as significant a shorthand for the Western tradition as descriptive terms are in Eastern systems of medicine. Using these actions in context, Kane gives simple physiological effects to make herbal actions more understandable.

The actions given for each plant cover internal and topical uses in each of the relevant body systems, communicating in common language. The preparations section is comprehensive as a modern herb guide needs to be. Appendices that augment the section include “Weights and Measures,” and worksheets to practice making percolations. There is a 30-page bibliography where several scientific papers are cited for each herb, though for Cannabis sativa (Cannabaceae) the omission of Dr. Ethan Russo’s published body of work seems odd.

The materia medica section describes medicinal uses for each herb is the most extensive. Firmly rooted in the Western tradition, Kane writes with confidence about the system that draws from Eclectic, Physiomedical, historical, and contemporary branches of herbal medicine. The monograph format abides throughout, though it has been extended by Kane to weave in points on wild-crafting, medicine-making, constitutional concepts of human physiology, and more philosophical discussions.

Herbs appear in alphabetical order by common name, from agrimony (Agrimonia spp., Rosaceae) to yucca (Yucca spp., Agavaceae). Each entry begins with the family, binomial, synonyms, a botanical description full of color and detail for newer herbalists yet accurate terms of identification to suit more experienced collectors. Information includes distribution, collection technique, and, as needed, commercial availability. Short paragraphs on chemistry, or constituent lists, are fairly standard but up to date and accurate. For instance, yerba mate’s (Ilex paraguariensis, Aquifoliaceae) alkaloids reflect scientific consensus rather than unsubstantiated marketing claims.

The actions given for each plant cover internal and topical uses in each of the relevant body systems the herb helps. Kane points out useful herb combinations for specific problems, and offers prevention tips in addition to the occasional entertaining aside. How to use the herb is followed by a bulleted list of indications for a quick review of highlights. Kane avoids any controversy regarding the way doses are given, perhaps in light of his explicit aim to communicate in common language.

The materia medica section could be improved with line drawings of each plant not represented in photos. In a comprehensive resource, a picture is worth an awful lot of botanical words, and those new to plants are likely to benefit from even a small image.

First drafted as a counterpoint to Army life while Kane was stationed in east Afghanistan, this herbal guide sustains a vital, positive feel, though sometimes the tone is sober. As if the immediacy of larger issues during the initial period of writing informed Kane’s style, there is a welcome and blunt summary on key points. In contrast to herbalists who have written lengthy introductions defining the place of herbs in modern healthcare, Kane suggests that the usefulness of plants needs no justification, though there is room for clarification.

Herbal Medicine: Trends & Traditions shares with readers the pragmatic experience of a focused man rather than the notions of one who reads and teaches about herbs. The point of the book, then, is to communicate in an accessible way how plants help people. Trends & Traditions achieves its aim with a clarity that makes it an essential resource for everyone who wishes to use both popular and less familiar Western herbs for medicine.

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