

Education

Garlic and other alliums

Eric Block

Cambridge: RSC 2009 | Pp454 | £29.95 | ISBN978 0 85404 190 9

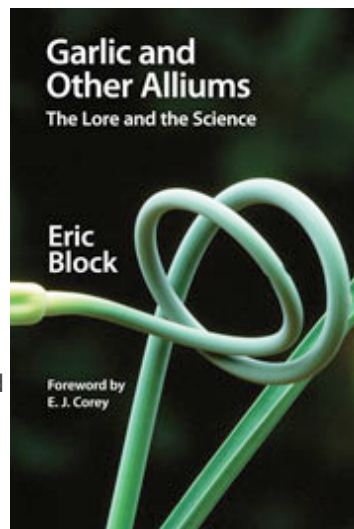
Reviewed by David Quick

This book is essentially the story of a life devoted to garlic, with onions, leeks and other alliums invited on board during the course of the journey. The life is that of a distinguished research chemist.

Avoiding hyperbole and thoroughly referenced, the subject is covered in just over 400 pages. At the book's heart is the mystery posed by the distinctive flavours and scents of the allium family, emitted only when the plant is violated. There is some fascinating chemistry told here. Both the chemistry itself and the story of its revelation are given in detail.

In the final section Block explores the traditional, alternative and historical roles of garlic and onion with attention to detail and careful referencing. It is perhaps inevitable, if disappointing, that this can lead to a dispassionate tone, though the potential use of garlic extract in agriculture offers some excitement.

This book will permit ready referencing of the many virtues attributed to the allium family, though the more general reader may struggle to make the journey from cover to cover. Within the book there are some fascinating anecdotes - a town in America where it is illegal to attend a theatre after eating raw onions, the resigned reflection that despite its benefits 'garlic mouthwash is unlikely to be a winning consumer product' and the warning that garlic in your socks will come out in your breath. Now there's an experiment any of us can try.



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