

Potions, Poisons, and Panaceas: An Ethnobotanical Study of Montserrat. David Eric Brussell. Southern Illinois University Press, Carbondale. 1998. Pp. viii, 176. \$69.95 (cloth). ISBN 0-8093-1552-1.

This publication is another example of the growing interest in the ethnobotany of tropical cultures. However, while most ethnobotanical studies have focused on indigenous societies, this publication focuses on the Afro-Caribbean culture of Montserrat. This book provides an extensive survey of plant uses in numerous categories including: medicinal, poisons, plants associated with voodoo, construction, foods and dyes. The publication of this ethnobotanical survey is particularly relevant in light of the recent volcanic eruptions on the island, and the subsequent

The second section of the publication, ethnobotanical uses and specific discussion, is extensive and interesting. A total of 282 culturally useful plants are reviewed. A botanical description is given for each plant, noting where it was observed and collected, and describing its uses. Both the botanical and common names are provided for all plants described, a most helpful feature. Many of the ethnobotanical descriptions are interesting and give insight into Montserrat folklore. But again, because there is so little detail provided regarding local culture and the extent of voodoo beliefs in Montserrat culture, many questions remained unanswered.

Potions, Poisons and Panaceas is important in that there may not be another opportunity to collect ethnobotanical data on Montserrat for the foreseeable future. However, the book could have been much stronger had the editors insisted on more background information, especially concerning Montserrat's culture. I came away wondering about the people and their culture. The book seems to have been written as if Montserrat's culture and environment exist in a vacuum. Instead, massive change is impacting the island and its people. Yet, the reader unfamiliar with the Caribbean would hardly know it after reading this book. Even with these shortcomings, the list of plants and their uses is extensive and irreplaceable given the recent environmental changes on the island. This book will be useful to researchers working in the Caribbean region and will make an important contribution to the ethnobotanist's library.

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