



*Fijian Medicinal Plants*: a comprehensive guide to Fiji's traditional herbal medicines.

## A learned look at herbalism

Next time you have a fever, migraine, cough, or indigestion, you might like to try *Terminalia catappa* L, in preference to your cabinet full of conventional remedies.

The leaves and bark of this tropical Asian timber tree are used in Fiji, Samoa, Tonga, Tahiti, New Guinea and the Philippines to treat an amazing array of ailments.

These ailments, and their respective treatments, are listed in a new book called *Fijian Medicinal Plants*, written by Dr Con Cambie and Dr Julian Ash and published by CSIRO Information Services.

*Fijian Medicinal Plants* gives the botanical description, medicinal uses and chemical constituents of 450 plants that are either endemic or have been introduced to Fiji. Further references are included for each species.

The origin and dispersal of Fiji's medicinal species and their significance in the local culture are outlined in the book's introduction. Many of the herbal remedies recorded in the book are still used today.

Colour photographs or water-coloured engravings illustrate many of the plants described. The engravings by WH Fitch, first published in 1861, have never before been reproduced in colour.

For botanists and pharmacologists seeking knowledge about the use of plants in medicine, *Fijian Medicinal Plants* is essential reading. The book's uncomplicated style and attractive presentation may also tempt readers with a general interest in the subject.

Contact: CSIRO Bookshop, PO Box 89, East Melbourne, Victoria 3002, (03) 418 7217, fax (03) 419 0459. The book costs \$95.

## Yoghurt: a treat for ulcer patients

We all know that an apple a day keeps the doctor away, yet people with gastro-intestinal ulcers might soon be advised to opt for yoghurt as their daily diet staple.

A range of yoghurt cultures is being investigated for therapeutic applications by researchers at CSIRO and Monash Medical Centre. The results of their clinical trials are expected to be available at the end of the year.

Dr Ron Hull of CSIRO's Division of Food Science and Technology says if the trials prove successful, it is possible that a regular serve of the right yoghurt, in conjunction with simple antibiotic treatment, may cure an ulcer patient without recourse to surgery or complex drug therapy.

Probiotics is the name given to any bacterial cultures which have beneficial effects when humans eat them. They are found in most fermented foods and produce a range of substances that inhibit or kill pathogens and other bacteria that cause spoilage.

Milk is rich in nutrients and spoils relatively quickly, even when refrigerated. When milk is fermented to produce yogurt it is preserved due to the effects of acidity produced by the bacteria and their other inhibitory substances.

Of all fermented food products, yoghurt

appears to be one of the most effective probiotics media. It is thought that the milk contributes to the effectiveness of the probiotics it supports. Dr Hull says it is possible that the probiotics break down milk into particular peptides which produce beneficial effects. The exact role milk plays is not yet known.

In commercial, mass production of yoghurt some of the probiotics do not survive to the supermarket shelf.

'When yoghurt is produced in tonnes at a time and according to a factory's schedule, many of the beneficial bacteria don't survive,' Hull says. 'This has led to an increase in the sale of probiotics through health stores which stock a range of probiotics in powder and tablet forms.'

Associate professor John Lambert of Monash University and Mornington Peninsula Hospital is working with Hull on the development of probiotics for use in treatment of stomach and duodenal ulcers. Their research is being supported by funding from the Dairy Research and Development Corporation.

Nine hundred people die each year in Australia from duodenal ulcers. The research team hopes that by eradicating the bacterium



Dr John Lambert and Dr Ron Hull are researching the use of probiotics to treat stomach and duodenal ulcers.

responsible for ulcers (*Helicobacter pylori*) from the gut, many such deaths can be prevented.

Hull has identified two yoghurt probiotics which kill *Helicobacter pylori*. These are species of Lactobacilli and Bifidobacteria. The mechanism by which they kill the ulcer-causing bacterium is being studied.

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