



Handbook of Essential Oils. Science, Technology and Applications

by K. Hüsni Can Başer and Gerhard Buchbauer Eds.: CRC Press, Boca Raton, FL, USA, 2009, pp xii + 991, ISBN 978-1-4200-6315-8. Price: EUR 204.99, USD 229.95

Weighing in at just under 2 kg and with nearly 1,000 pages this would need an outsize pair of hands to accommodate it comfortably and I would define it as an encyclopedia rather than a handbook. The authors of several of the early chapters seek to define essential oils as volatile or semi-volatile compounds of plant origin which of course begs the question of the definition of “volatile” although Sell in Chapter 5 comes nearest to a rigorous definition by stating that the constituents of essential oils should be amenable to (steam) distillation at atmospheric pressure and have molecular weights under 400. Incidentally Sell points out that the word “essential” is a contraction of “quintessential” oil, a concept dating back to the ideas of the alchemists.

Nether of the editors is a native English speaker. In general, this presents no great problem although the language

is somewhat ponderous at times and occasionally the meaning is not completely clear as on page 29 where it states, “A very *pretentious* investigation has been presented by Kubeczka...”. I assume the author meant “comprehensive” or “thorough” but am pretty sure he didn’t mean pretentious, especially as he himself is the author of this chapter.

It is clear that all the authors are experts in their own particular aspects of essential oils and this book is a must for all those working with essential oils. The editors have done a thorough job in ensuring that all conceivable topics are covered. Having said this, a good book should be more than the sum of its individual parts and this volume is in great need of that extinct species, “the copy editor”. There is considerable overlap and repetition, for example Chapter 2 is a comprehensive historical review of the various techniques used for the analysis of essential oils but Chapter 6 by Mondello and his co-workers at the University of Messina is a first rate account of the more recent work on multidimensional GC. Chapter 9 is entitled “Biological Activities of Essential Oils” but several of the chapters before and after this one contain subjects such as metabolism of EOs and effects of EOs on

the central nervous system that seem to me to be part of biological effects. I am also doubtful if chapters on aromatherapy and the use of EOs in cuisine warrant inclusion in a scientific work to the extent that they have equal or more pages than the chapter on industrial uses of EOs. On a more mundane level a good copy editor would never have accepted the numerous muddy, over-exposed black and white prints in Chapter 4 where figures 4.21 and 4.22 could be photographs of a cattle shed in any part of Europe (this is not as far fetched as it sounds since I have seen a steam distillation unit set up in an agricultural building on a local farm). I am still trying to identify the abbreviations for all the countries listed in Table 3.9—most are obvious but one or two are not.

One could argue that a few rather poor figures and some overlap of content are unimportant overall and I would accept that they are, but the penalty is that in the end the purchaser has to pay (literally) for these deficiencies. However, as I pointed out earlier, if you are dealing with any aspect of essential oils this book must be, like the topic itself, essential, in spite of its many defects.

E.R. Adlard