

Book Review

Prabhakaran Nair, K.P. **The Agronomy and the Economy of Cardamom: “The Queen of Spices”**. The Icfai University Press, Hyderabad, India 500 082, 412 pages, First edition, 2008, Price: US\$ 25.5.

Here is a book on cardamom (*Elettaria cardamomum* Maton) popularly known as the “Queen of Spices”, which is the second most important spice crop in the world, after black pepper (*Piper nigrum*). I wonder why the title of the book is restrictive - The Agronomy and the Economy of Cardamom: “The Queen of Spices” – even though intensive efforts have been put in by the author to compile most of the literature available on cardamom, turning it into a virtual monograph. Fifteen chapters with separate sections on tables, figures, references and a subject index at the end are the highlights of the book. Written in a lucid style, the book makes easy reading except for the chapter on nutrient buffer power concept, which needs a sound knowledge of soil physical chemistry. In this chapter, the author through his own experiments has proved the applicability of ‘Nutrient Buffer Power Concept’ on cardamom nutrition through which much saving in potassium fertilisers is possible. He also hopes that proper application of this concept can result in saving on other fertilizers also, especially phosphorus. Starting with the historical development of cardamom as a spice from the *Vedic* period, the author builds up the tempo by telling the reader how India, despite being the producer of best quality cardamom and the world leader in production, has been relegated to the second position by inferior Guatemalan cardamom through cheaper price, free trade, and smuggling. Other topics included are cardamom production and productivity, botany, varietal improvement, biotechnology, organic chemistry deciding flavour and quality, agronomical aspects, diseases and insects, harvesting and processing, and the economy of cardamom production. There is a very interesting section on cardamom pharmacopoeia. Future of cardamom has been thoroughly discussed with the acumen of a scientist with social concern. The role of organic farming, diversifying the use of cardamom and its products, value addition, development of stress-, insect- and disease resistant varieties, modern

marketing tools etc. have been discussed thoroughly. Another highlight of the book is the provision of separate chapters on some other species which have been mimicked as low grade and cheaper cardamoms like large cardamom (*Amomum subulatum* Roxb.) and false cardamoms (*Aframomum* sp., *Amomum* spp., *Elettaria* spp.). The author has not lost sight of the emerging importance of cardamom in other parts of the world hitherto unaccustomed to its use. Important references totalling 641, starting from the earliest times to the recent ones up to the time of manuscript preparation, have been included. Indexing could have been more thorough and exhaustive. Also, repetitive statements like “excessive requirements of potassium nutrition” and “Indian Institute of Spices Research is under the administrative control of Indian Council of Agricultural Research” could have been avoided. Inclusion of photographs, sketches and drawings of the cardamom plant and its various parts, different varieties, species and other cardamoms would have definitely increased the appeal and value of the book. The author may take special care to correct the spelling mistakes, notations/symbols, subscripts etc., while revising the book for second edition. The book can be a useful reference manual for students, teachers, research workers, enterprising farmers, industrialists, and decision makers. This book is not only focussed on the Indian readers but also those from outside the country by addressing their concerns and giving currency ratings in US dollars. The book can be readily included among the new purchases to be made in all the agricultural libraries.

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