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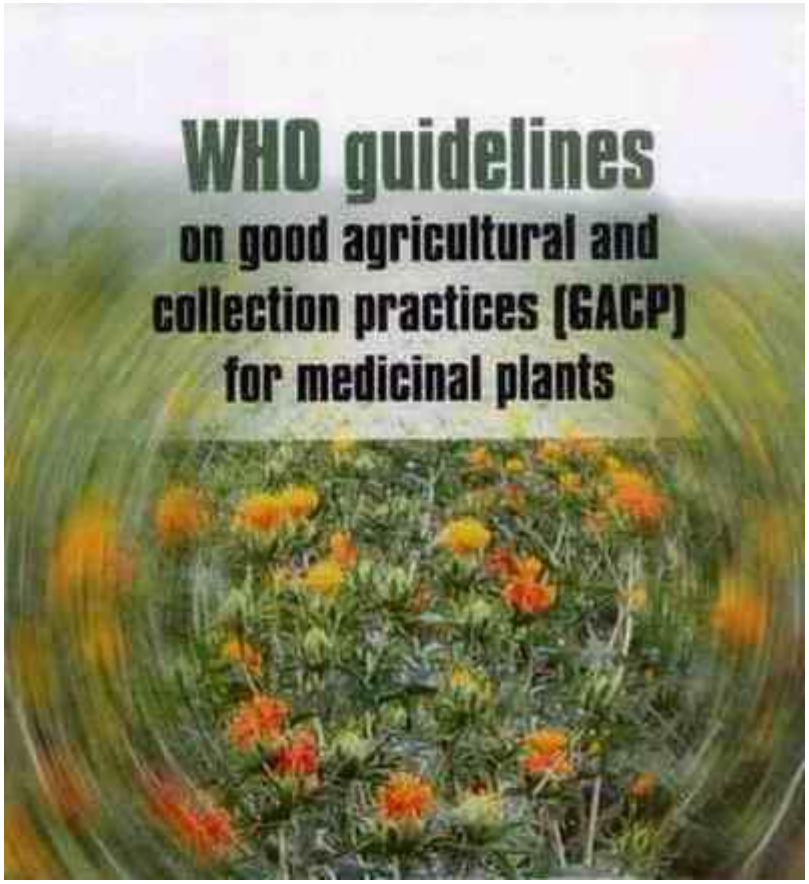
Book Reviews: Popular Books Section

A USEFUL REFERENCE BOOK

WHO guidelines on good agricultural and collection practices [GACP] for medicinal plants , Paperback, 8.0" x 11.5".
World Health Organization, Avenue Appia 20, 1211 Geneva 27, Switzerland, Publication Date 2003, i-vi + 72 pages, ISBN 92 4 154627 1, LC/NLM Classification: SB 293: Price - $18.00

WHO's Catalogue of Publications

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The World Health Organisation publishes an excellent series of books on medicinal plants from different geographical areas, some of which have been reviewed in this journal (Guidelines for the Appropriate Use of Herbal Medicines, Medicinal Plants in China, Medicinal Plants in Vietnam, Medicinal Plants in the Republic of Korea and Medicinal Plants in the South Pacific). This present volume covers farming aspects and lays down guidelines for good agricultural and collection practices.

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The safety and quality of the raw material is paramount in herbal medicine. Inadvertent contamination by microbial and chemical agents can occur at any stage. Contamination by other species or plants can have unforeseen consequences. There is also a need to prevent depletion of wild populations of medicinal plants.

With the increasing demand for herbal medicines, especially in the developed countries, there is a need for such guidelines not only to ensure the safety of the products but also to protect the environment.

One of the major problems with herbal products is, being a natural product, the quantity and quality of the active ingredients can vary widely and therefore standardisation can be difficult. Non-standard products may not be efficacious or worse, cause harmful effects.

The main objectives of the WHO guidelines are:

- Quality assurance of medicinal plant materials used as a source for herbal medicines.
- Guide the formulation of national/regional GACP guidelines.
- Encourage sustainable cultivation and collection of medicinal plants.

The book is of course a multinational effort and according to the acknowledgements appears to be the result of a consultation and working group meetings held in Geneva in October 2003.

Following a general introduction complete with a glossary this book then covers good agricultural practices, good collection practices and common technical aspects. These chapters could be considered to be the main aspect of the book. There is also a short section on "Other relevant issues" and a short bibliography. The rest of the book is divided into six annexes. These include The Agricultural Practice for Traditional Chinese Medicinal Materials, People's Republic of China and similar guidelines for Europe and Japan.

As the title implies this is a book of guidelines and throughout the book the emphasis is on quality assurance and safety.

It is to be hoped that these guidelines will be accepted and implemented by producer countries to ensure the reliability and public acceptance of herbal remedies.



-Gyan Fernando
Dr Gyan C. A. Fernando is a native of Sri Lanka and is familiar with plants used in Ayurvedic remedies. He now works as a Forensic Pathologist in Devon, England.

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