"A FIELD GUIDE TO THE NATIVE EDIBLE PLANTS OF NEW ZEALAND"


Reviewed by R.O. Gardner

This book is the first in the prestigious Collins Field Guide series to deal with a part of the native flora. The author, a newcomer to New Zealand botany, became interested in edible wild plants through a concern about survival in the bush. What he has written, though, is much more than a bushcraft manual - it is a careful and comprehensive survey with special attention given to the use made of each plant by the pre-European Maori. Students, teachers (and librarians in "project" season) will find it a handy and reliable book, and archaeologists and anthropologists might well get from it a good idea or two.¹

What seems to be all the edible native higher plants (including eleven ferns!) are examined as are quite a number of seaweeds and fungi. A few common adventives are included too and there is a short chapter on poisonous plants. Students would probably have appreciated more detail on the four food plants introduced and cultivated by the Maori.

Mercifully little culinary information is given, most N.Z. food plants apparently being 'unpalatable' or 'unsatisfying' (and the native truffle, alas, is both rare and hard to find).

The reference list shows how conscientious the author has been in his historical research, and he corrects several mistakes copied through the popular literature.

Two taxonomic errors are noted below.² Taxonomists are well repaid by the suggestions (Crowe, Colenso respectively) that Maori cultivars of Calystegia sepium and Arthropodium cirratum should be searched for.

Within the main section of the book the plants are arranged rather eccentrically - a family by family treatment according to one of the modern systems where phytochemistry carries weight would have facilitated discussion of edibility and toxicity. Also, family names appear only incidentally, which compels repetition in the text and is not helpful to students.

It is perhaps a mistake of the publishers not to have commissioned more sophisticated illustration. Nevertheless this is adequate for identification and has the virtue of being all the author's own work.

One can readily imagine a companion work on the wider topic of non-food uses of plants by Maori and settler. Such a future Field Guide has been set a good standard.

1. Why did the Maori make so little use of the palatable coastal plants Apium prostratum, Lepidium oleraceum, Salicornia australis and Tetragonia tetragonioides?

2. The native Oxalis with large yellow flowers (as in Plate 16) is the dune and coastal cliff plant O. stricta sensu auct. N.Z., not O. corniculata (the small-flowered plant of p.101).

And (p.94) it probably was the native form of Geranium solanderi whose fleshy radish-shaped root was eaten by the Maori, not the diffuse-rooted adventive G. dissectum.
This New Zealand classic has remained in print (and continually updated) for almost 40 years, selling almost 40,000 copies courtesy of four different publishers. The book, now in its 23rd printing, is "based on the experiences of the author whose interest in the subject lead him to spend 10 days in the bush in February 1974 without any food supplies...Â The survival manual he took for this impressive adventure is a guide to New Zealand's native edible plants, that describes over 190 trees, shrubs, herbs, ferns, mushrooms, lichens and seaweeds, giving detailed information on which part is edible and when, how plants have been utilised, particularly by Maori, their nutritional value, and where they can be found. ...more. A go-to, illustrated field guide of edible native New Zealand plants, including a section on poisonous plants. In this useful and attractive book, over 190 trees, shrubs, herbs, ferns, mushrooms, lichens and seaweeds are described in detail with information on which part is edible and when, how plants have been utilised (particularly by Maori), their nutritional value, and where they can be found. In a separate section, Andrew Crowe also describes important poisonous plants that are native to New Zealand or are likely to be confused with the edible plants. Illustrated with line drawings and co The native flora of New Zealand is unique as it evolved in isolation for millions of years.Â About 10â€“15% of the total land area of New Zealand is covered with native flora, from tall kauri and kohekohe forests to rainforest dominated by rimu, beech, tawa, matai and rata; ferns and flax; dunelands with their spinifex and pingao; alpine and subalpine herb fields; and scrub and tussock. Beech forest. New Zealand's beech forests are made up of five species of southern beech.