

BOOK REVIEW

Feast on Phytochemicals: Natural health-boosting compounds in fruit, vegetables, herbs and spices, including Australian bush food plants

By Paul Williams

Vegetation Management Science, 2019, Malanda Queensland, 276 pp.
Paperback

In an age of chronic diseases that are associated with fast food and poor lifestyle choices, there appears to be a 'turn in the wheel' which focuses on food as medicine and the science behind the phytochemicals found within the plant kingdom. The author of *Feast on Phytochemicals*, Paul R. Williams (PhD), demonstrates how empirical knowledge of the health benefits of various foods is now being backed by science. Paul is a plant ecologist focused on fire and weed management, who has also developed a strong interest in bush foods and the value of plants in human nutrition. His scientific integrity and passion for food as medicine shines throughout the book. Reading his book is an enjoyable journey through the history of chemical compositions; and why a plant's ecological system makes phytochemicals that can be used to promote health benefits.

The benefits of eating a variety of healthy foods and their relationship to good health is not necessarily a new topic. For decades, many books and information sources on healthy eating have not always been married with scientific knowledge or current technologies; they have been based on information available at the time, often anecdotal or lacking scientific foundations. Further, marketing strategies are often the basis of health information for the broad society, which can by nature often be biased and lack substantial scientific explanations or evidence. The analytical mind asks why these campaigns are allowed to be conducted in the first place, or who in the food industry was benefiting from these heavily funded initiatives. In the current era of social media featuring 'fake news', opinionative blogging and promotion by famous people of their eating routines, it is difficult to identify trustworthy sources or be confident in the science behind the public information. Contrastingly, Hippocrates and Avicenna wrote many historical texts long before the common era (BCE) and were regarded as great scientists of their time. They both outlined the importance of

eating healthy foods and maintaining a balanced lifestyle, and many of their findings in these fields are still applicable today.

Paul Williams' book takes you on a journey through history, to explain the evolution of why we need to think about the foods we eat. It is not a narrative about any specific dietary advice, eating plans or calorie counting, all of which is made very clear. *Feast on Phytochemicals* is a book about rethinking the food basics and the chronic diseases associated with inflammatory markers in the body. He explains the scientific evidence of phytochemicals well and outlines why eating an array of colour on our plates, obtaining a variety of fresh foods and eating the required amount of fibre is important in our daily life. All the chapters in his book are scientifically current and pertinent topics for today.

The chapter on Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders' bush foods will be of interest to anyone who lives in Australia or has an interest in ethnobotany. The study of bush foods is an emerging field, and it is becoming more common to find various products on the supermarket shelves. In the previous millennium, explorers and early settlers documented their gratitude for bush medicines that saved their lives, or at least helped them overcome illness or injury. Dr Williams describes the plants' demographics, traditional use and the phytochemical information available. The chapter is sure to appeal to the Society's own Professor Ray Specht, Life Member, who has shown an intense interest in Indigenous use of plants during his 70-year-long research career.

Dr Williams' ability to convey his scientific message in an easy-to-read manner will be enjoyed by many audiences and become an integral part of many people's libraries. He relays a strong message on the importance of food as a healer. The practical advice given throughout the book is backed by scientific evidence.

The book does not necessarily need to be read from front to back: the reader can enter at any chapter, in any order depending on initial interests and still follow the core messages; however, reading the book in its entirety will give perspective, as well as the many practical tips that seem so simple once they have been read. An example of a practical tip is that chopping garlic and letting it sit for a few minutes will activate the constituents needed for greater health benefits. The book really makes one think about what foods need to be put into the mouth to prevent chronic health conditions.

Feast on Phytochemicals is comprehensive. It has

an easy-to-read glossary at the front which helps understand terms not already known to the reader. The diagrams and tables throughout are a quick reference to the information within. In each chapter the author reiterates a need to go back to food basics and reassess what goes into our mouths because what we eat affects our biochemistry. The bibliography is also comprehensively referenced.

This book can be recommended as a university text for food science and nutrition students, as well as for a general audience of persons with an interest in food to enhance their health. It is scientifically detailed and is easy to read and comprehend.

REVIEWED BY NITA SHARP

Feast on Phytochemicals may be purchased from the book's website: <https://phytochemicalfeast.com/>