



Messages from the Gods: A Guide to the Useful Plants of Belize

Michael J. Balick, Rosita Arvigo

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Despite its small size, Belize is one of the most ecologically and culturally diverse nations in Central America. Over 3,400 species of plants can be found here, within a diversity of ecological habitats. Because of this, Belize is paradise for ecotourists, hosting over 900,000 visitors annually, who enjoy the natural habitat and friendly people of this nation. Many of the plants of Belize have a long history of being useful, with properties that have served traditional herbal healers of the region as well as those who use plants as food, forage, fiber, ornament, in construction and ritual, along with many other purposes. With *Messages from the Gods: A Guide to the Useful Plants of Belize*, Drs. Michael Balick and Rosita Arvigo give us the definitive resource on the many species of plants in Belize and their folklore, as well as the natural history of the region and a detailed discussion of bush uses of plants, including for traditional healing and life in the forest, past and present. Both Balick and Arvigo bring important perspectives to the project, Balick as ethnobotanical scientist from The New York Botanical Garden, and Arvigo as a former apprentice to a Belizean healer and an experienced physician. The book has been decades in the making, a culmination of a biodiversity research project that The New York Botanical Garden and international and local collaborators have had in motion since 1987. Drs. Balick, Arvigo and their colleagues have collected and identified thousands of plants from the region, and have worked extensively with hundreds of Belizean people, many of them herbal healers and bushmasters, to record uses for many of the species. This collaboration with local plant experts has produced a fascinating discussion of the intersection of herbal medicine and spiritual belief in the area, and these interviews are used to compliment and contextualize the numerous species accounts presented. The book is both a cultural study and a specialized field guide; information is provided on many different native and introduced plants in Belize and their traditional and contemporary uses including as food, medicine, fiber, in spiritual practices and many other purposes. Richly illustrated with over 600 images and photographs, *Messages from the Gods: A Guide to The Useful Plants of Belize* will serve as the primary reference and guide to the ethnobotany of Belize for many years to come.

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