11 discusses people-plant interactions in gardens, focusing on the importance of garden elements and design that work with humans and potentially serve as a psychosocial route to better mental and physical health. The chapter on turf grass in public gardens is a text by Professor Laurie Trenholm adapted to this book. The writing in this chapter is much more technical in comparison with the rest of the book; the chapter addresses some of the concerns of the expanding turf grass acreage in the United States. The last two chapters touch upon two important issues—funding for maintaining public gardens and career opportunities in public gardens. The epilogue describes clearly the purpose of the chapters in these two volumes, which is mainly to provide background information to assist in the creation of new and ingenious landscape designs for public enjoyment. These two volumes will make an excellent addition to library collections and would also be useful as coffee table books in academic departments dealing with landscape architecture.

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Messages from the Gods: A Guide to the Useful Plants of Belize
Michael J. Balick and Rosita Arvigo
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Oxford University Press (New York, New York, USA) and New York Botanical Garden (Bronx, New York, USA)

This book provides (in three chapters) a brief overview of Belizean ethnobotany, together with a 421-page account of the Belizean flora as it is used for food and medicine. My interest in this book arose from making it the basis for a lecture in an ethnobotany course, but its real value will lie in its usefulness for anyone traveling in Belize, or working with specimens from that country, who is also interested in ethnobotany, traditional healing, or drug discovery.

For pedagogical purposes, the book, like Belize itself, is especially valuable because of the light it sheds on the relationship between people and the plants they find around them where they live and work. Belize is particularly important in this regard because of the way its geography and history have conspired to make it a more or less politically stable enclave, within which more than one culture has found room to exist and interact peacefully with others. The authors refer to a population of 333,000 that comprises Maya, Afro-Creole, Garifuna, South Asian, Chinese, Lebanese, European, and mestizo, and write that a “… purist would only find disappointment in searching for ‘true’ Maya healing among today’s practitioners.” Instead, they describe at some length the process by which the discovery of the therapeutic properties of plants is still taking place. For example, they describe how, when in 1988 the first patients with HIV/AIDS returned to Belize for care by their families, Belizean traditional healers had little to offer them. Ten years later, the scene had changed, and healers were using treatments made from local plants to relieve the symptoms of these patients.

After describing the origins, objectives, and methodology of the Belize Ethnobotany Project, the authors go on to provide a knowledgeable discussion of different aspects of Belizean ethnobotany, including a description of how forest conversion and habitat loss have reduced the availability of many plant species, making it necessary for
healers to go further and further to reach sites at which they can still collect the plants they use. This second chapter also includes a profile of the Mayan healer Don Eligio Panti, who was the teacher of Rosita Arvigo. It was her interest in documenting Don Eligio’s knowledge that led her to collaborate with Michael Balick, and this, in turn, led to the larger Belize Ethnobotany Project. In the third chapter, the authors present 11 more healers, representing different backgrounds, traditions, and practices. They then provide edited transcripts of conversations with eight of these healers that let the reader see, in their words, the different ways in which they understand their work.

The account of the useful plants in the Belizean flora in the fourth chapter is arranged taxonomically in four sections (ferns and fern allies, gymnosperms, monocotyledons, and dicotyledons), following the arrangement of the earlier checklist of the flora (Balick et al., 2000). Flowering plant family alignments follow Angiosperm Phylogeny Group III. Families, genera, and species are arranged alphabetically. The authors attempt to provide at least one illustration (most of which are excellent color photographs) for each genus. Species treatments vary in length, according to the number of uses listed. Under each species, the lead for each ailment or other use is set boldface, making it easy for the reader to see the variety of uses and range of detail available. References to voucher specimens and to the relevant literature are provided. What I did not find was a consistent indication of which species are introduced in Belize. Some are obvious, like the food plants introduced by Europeans (e.g., breadfruit, coconut, rice). This is too bad, as it would be interesting to see the extent to which healers have taken advantage of cosmopolitan weeds and other introduced species. Evidently, the interest is there, as one healer, the late Percival Hezekiah Reynolds, asked Balick for dandelion seeds.
The remaining two chapters are found online, together with three appendices, at the publisher’s website (http://global.oup.com/us/companion.websites/9780199965762/). Chapter 5, by Robert Heinzman and Conrad Reining, with Michael J. Balick, describes the timber and non-timber forest products of Belize in historical, statistical, and economic, as well as botanical detail. Chapter 6, by Gordon M. Cragg and David J. Newman, is a report on Belizean plants evaluated by the U.S. National Cancer Institute as part of its approach to the discovery and development of new drugs for the treatment of cancer and AIDS. This chapter concludes with its authors’ reflection on the HIV and anti-tumor assay results. Only a small fraction of the species documented showed appreciable anti-tumor activity, and only one species was shown to contain compounds (guttiferones) with known anti-HIV activity. The authors note the difficulty of inferring therapeutic potential from ethnobotanical data when the diseases in question, like cancer and HIV, are generally outside the diagnostic and therapeutic experience of traditional healers.

The book concludes with a literature cited section and a 21-page index in fine print. Overall, it is a wonderfully balanced work that respects the healers and others who shared their knowledge with the authors and, at the same time, respects the scientific traditions in which the authors operate, one as an ethnobotanist and the other as a naprapathic practitioner. This is important, because we should recognize that the reason why the authors attach so much importance to the role of their book in helping Belizeans preserve their traditional knowledge is that, when Belize is able to provide adequate modern health care to all of its citizens, their dependence on traditional therapies is likely to diminish. This is as it should be, because so many illnesses have their origins in interactions with bacteria, viruses, and parasites, or in pathologies resulting from accumulated genetic mistakes or environmental insults, all of which are best understood in a scientific context. North Americans and Europeans, the majority of whom have ready access to sophisticated medical interventions, forget this at their peril—witness the needless recent death of the child whose parents chose to treat his meningitis only with herbal remedies.

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**Literature Cited**