



Tropical Forests and Their Crops (Comstock Book)

Nigel J.H. Smith, J.T. Williams, Donald L. Plucknett, Jennifer P. Talbot

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The tropics are the source of many of our familiar fruits, vegetables, oils, and spice, as well as such commodities as rubber and wood. Moreover, other tropical fruits and vegetables are being introduced into our markets to offer variety to our diet. Now, as tropical forests are increasingly threatened, we face a double-fold crisis: not only the loss of the plants but also rich pools of potentially useful genes. Wild populations of crop plants harbor genes that can improve the productivity and disease resistance of cultivated crops, many of which are vital to developing economies and to global commerce.

Eight chapters of this book are devoted to a variety of tropical crops?beverages, fruit, starch, oil, resins, fuelwood, fodder, spices, timber, and nuts?the history of their domestication, their uses today, and the known extent of their gene pools, both domesticated and wild. Drawing on broad research, the authors also consider conservation strategies such as parks and reserves, corporate holdings, gene banks and tissue culture collections, and debt-for-nature swaps. They stress the need for a sensitive balance between conservation and the economic well-being of local populations. If economic growth is part of the conservation effort, local populations and governments will be more strongly motivated to save their natural resources.

Distinctly practical and soundly informative, this book provides insight into the overwhelming abundance of tropical forests, an unsettling sense of what we may lose if they are destroyed, and a deep appreciation for the delicate relationships between tropical forest plants and people around the world.

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