



The Encyclopedia of Psychoactive Plants: Ethnopharmacology and Its Applications

By Christian Rätsch, Albert Hofmann (Foreword)

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The most comprehensive guide to the botany, history, distribution, and cultivation of all known psychoactive plants

- Examines 414 psychoactive plants and related substances
- Explores how using psychoactive plants in a culturally sanctioned context can produce important insights into the nature of reality
- Contains 797 color photographs and 645 black-and-white illustrations

In the traditions of every culture, plants have been highly valued for their nourishing, healing, and transformative properties. The most powerful plants--those known to transport the human mind into other dimensions of consciousness--have traditionally been regarded as sacred. In *The Encyclopedia of Psychoactive Plants* Christian Rätsch details the botany, history, distribution, cultivation, and preparation and dosage of more than 400 psychoactive plants. He discusses their ritual and medicinal usage, cultural artifacts made from these plants, and works of art that either represent or have been inspired by them. The author begins with 168 of the most well-known psychoactives--such as cannabis, datura, and papaver--then presents 133 lesser known substances as well as additional plants known as "legal highs," plants known only from mythological contexts and literature, and plant products that include substances such as ayahuasca, incense, and soma. The text is lavishly illustrated with 797 color photographs--many of which are from the author's extensive fieldwork around the world--showing the people, ceremonies, and art related to the ritual use of the world's sacred psychoactives.

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Editorial Review

Review

“. . . this superb academic reference is the first comprehensive work devoted to psychoactive plants. Rätsch, an anthropologist, ethnopharmacologist, . . . includes more than 400 traditional and modern substances that ‘affect the mind or alter the state of consciousness’ . . . Each major monograph contains the plant’s scientific and common names, chemical structure, history, distribution, cultivation, appearance, preparation and dosage, ritual and medicinal uses, commercial forms and regulations, and effects, as well as research literature references. . . . This book offers something for everyone. . . . Highly recommended.” (Andy Wickens, *Library Journal*, August 2005)

“Rätsch’s Encyclopedia is massive in scope, exhaustively researched, heavily referenced, user-friendly, authoritative, and beautifully illustrated. It belongs on the bookshelf of everyone with an interest in psychoactive plants--from those with only a casual interest to veteran researchers.” (Rick Strassman, M.D., *University of New Mexico School of Medicine, and author of DMT: The Spirit Molecule*)

“It is a truism in anthropology that virtually all cultures utilize plants and mushrooms for their psychoactive effects. The impulse to achieve altered states of consciousness is universal. Several previous books on psychoactive plants have become classics on this subject. While valuable historic additions to the library, they must now move over. This encyclopedia is truly destined to be the most authoritative reference on natural psychoactive substances for years to come.” (Mark Blumenthal, *founder and executive director of the American Botanical Council, and editor of Herbs for Health*)

“In the realm of psychoactive plants, Christian Rätsch is the world’s most knowledgeable person. Here is his magnum opus--a veritable treasure trove of information about the most fascinating members of the plant kingdom. As the “teachers” and the gatekeepers to the spirit world, psychoactives help us cleanse the lenses of perception. No one interested in natural ways to expand consciousness should be without this magnificent volume.” (Ralph Metzner, PH.D., *psychologist, author of Green Psychology, and coauthor of The Psychedelic Experience*)

“Christian Rätsch’s remarkable *Encyclopedia of Psychoactive Plants* is an essential and comprehensive work that explores not only the expanse of plants that affect human consciousness but the genetic necessity for humanity to experience wide-ranging flexibility in consciousness. The plant world is basic to us, the foundation of our food, clothing, and shelter. But Christian’s book reminds us that human/plant interactions reach much deeper than these three needs; plant intelligence reaches deep within us and teaches us to see, hear, and understand the deep meanings in the world, meanings that we need, and are meant, to encounter in order to remain human.” (Stephen Harrod Buhner, *author of The Secret Teachings of Plants and The Lost Language of Plants*)

“. . . the granddaddy of all drug books.” (Charles Hayes, *High Times*, Nov 2005)

“A premier work, and important to have and refer to if you have any relationship to the world of psychoactive plants.” (Mark Stavish, *Institute for Hermetic Studies*, April 2006)

“This encyclopedia is a large and somewhat intimidating book, but the format is friendly and embellished by many beautiful photographs and drawings. . . . this is a major work that will be an essential reference to those

interested in cultural and historical aspects of psychedelics." (*Herbalgram, No. 79, Aug - Oct 2008*)

"This book covers pretty much every psychedelic/psychoactive plant out there, including several that people may not realize have psychoactive properties...For anyone interested in learning more about psychoactive plants this book will likely answer all your questions and more. It's a great complement to other books on the subject as well as a stand-alone book for your education on this expansive and important topic."

(*Entheoradio, August 2013*)

From the Back Cover

REFERENCE / ETHNOBOTANY

In the traditions of every culture, plants have been highly valued for their nourishing, healing, and transformative properties. The most powerful plants--those known to transport the human mind into other dimensions of consciousness--have traditionally been regarded as sacred. When taken in a culturally sanctioned context, such plants can produce important insights into the nature of reality. In *The Encyclopedia of Psychoactive Plants* Christian Rätsch details the botany, history, distribution, cultivation, and preparation and dosage of more than 400 psychoactive plants. He discusses their ritual and medicinal usage, cultural artifacts made from these plants, and works of art that either represent or have been inspired by them.

The author begins with full monographs on 168 of the most well-known psychoactives--such as Cannabis, Datura, and Papaver--then presents minor monographs on 135 lesser known plants. He also explores plants used by indigenous people that have not yet been identified by modern botanists as well as plants and psychoactive substances known only from mythological contexts and literature, such as ephemeron, kykeon, and soma. He offers a thorough discussion (including 20 full monographs) of psychoactive fungi, referred to in ancient times as the "food of the gods" and used by shamans in many cultures for entry to the spirit world. He also covers psychoactive plant products from around the world--smoking blends, alcoholic beverages, snuffs, incense, and ointments. The author concludes with an analysis of the chemical constituents responsible for plants' psychoactive powers. He is careful to say, though, that the effects of isolated chemical substances are not identical to the psychoactive effects produced by whole plants. Each plant contains a synergistic blend of active constituents--from the shamanic point of view, the plant's spirit.

The text is lavishly illustrated with 670 black-and-white illustrations and 800 color photographs--many of which come from the author's extensive fieldwork conducted around the world. They show the people, ceremonies, and art related to the ritual use of the world's sacred psychoactives.

CHRISTIAN RÄTSCH, PH.D., is a world- renowned anthropologist and ethnopharmacologist who specializes in the shamanic uses of plants for spiritual as well as medicinal purposes. He studied Mesoamerican languages and cultures and anthropology at the University of Hamburg and spent, altogether, three years of fieldwork among the Lacandone Indians in Chiapas, Mexico, being the only European fluent in their language. He then received a fellowship from the German academic service for foreign research, the Deutsche Akademische Auslandsdienst (DAAD), to realize his doctoral thesis on healing spells and incantations of the Lacandone-Maya at the University of Hamburg, Germany.

In addition to his work in Mexico, his numerous fieldworks have included research in Thailand, Bali, the Seychelles, as well as a long-term study (18 years) on shamanism in Nepal combined with expeditions to Korea and the Peruvian and Colombian Amazon. He also was a scientific -anthro-pological advisor for expeditions organized by German magazines such as GEO and *Spektrum der Wissenschaften* (Spectrum of Sciences).

Before becoming a full-time author and internationally renowned lecturer, Rätsch worked as professor of anthropology at the University of Bremen and served as consultant advisor for many German museums. Because of his extensive collection of shells, fossils, artifacts, and entheopharmacological items, he has had numerous museum expositions on these topics.

He is the author of numerous articles and more than 40 books, including *Plants of Love, Gateway to Inner Space, Marijuana Medicine*, and *The Dictionary of Sacred and Magical Plants*. He is also coauthor of *Plants of the Gods, Shamanism and Tantra in the Himalayas*, and *Witchcraft Medicine* and is editor of the *Yearbook of Ethnomedicine and the Study of Consciousness*. A former member of the board of advisors of the European College for the Study of Consciousness (ECSC) and former president of the Association of Ethnomedicine, he lives in Hamburg, Germany.

About the Author

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