

Raffauf, R.F.: **Plant alkaloids: A Guide to Their Discovery and Distribution.** - Food Products Press and The Haworth Press, New York - London 1996. 279 pp. ISBN 1-56022-860-1

Plant alkaloids have provided many important drugs, still of value in modern medicine. The search for new drugs of this type in unexplored corners of the plant kingdom continues to engage the attention of investigators. Professor Raffauf has made a very broad screening of plants for the presence of alkaloids. Here he sets down the results obtained on 19 000 individual plant species (positive indications for the presence of alkaloids were obtained in about 3 600 species), from many countries and regions, including the rain forests of South America and Africa. The data for various plant families are arranged in alphabetical order. In listing the test results, positives representing known alkaloidal plants are given first, followed by a list of new species and these in turn by those which were negative. One extremely valuable feature of the presentation is the recording of those plant specimens that gave negative tests for alkaloids.

Various methods for the screening of large numbers of plant samples for alkaloids have been used more or less successfully. Most of the results reported herein were obtained by simple methods described by Prof. Raffauf earlier. This screening method was one that gave maximum coverage, whether in settled areas or on remote forest trails. It involves spotting a droplet of expressed plant sap on filter paper and applying a droplet of Dragendorff's reagent; the development of a red-orange colour indicates the presence of alkaloids.

According to the title of the book, I would expect a list of the plants and alkaloids present in these plants, but this is only screening if the alkaloid is present or not. Main references to plant sources of the known alkaloids are added.

The sheer number of species examined gives a deep insight into the alkaloid status of some 300 plant families and will be a valuable point for every chemist, phytochemist, botanist, and pharmacologist concerned with investigations involving alkaloids.

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