Sturtevant's notes on edible plants

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STURTEVANT'S
NOTES ON EDIBLE PLANTS

EDITED
BY
U. P. HEDRICK

Report of the New York Agricultural Experiment Station for the Year 1919
II

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To the Board of Control of the New York Agricultural Experiment Station:

Gentlemen.—It gives me peculiar pleasure to transmit to you for publication a manuscript prepared from notes by Dr. E. Lewis Sturtevant, the distinguished first Director of this Station, the publication to be known as “Sturtevant’s Notes on Edible Plants.”

Dr. Sturtevant was one of that group of men who early espoused the cause of agricultural science in the United States, a field in which he became distinguished, his studies in economic botany being one of his notable achievements. When he retired in 1887 as Director of this Station, he left behind him a voluminous manuscript consisting of a compilation of existing knowledge on the edible food plants of the world, a piece of work involving a laborious and extended research in botanical literature. For twenty years this manuscript remained untouched, when Dr. U. P. Hedrick undertook its editing, a difficult and arduous task, well performed, in order that so valuable a collection of knowledge might become available to botanists and to students of food economics.

It is especially appropriate that such a volume should be issued at this time. Food problems are becoming more and more acute as the demand for food increasingly overshadows the supply. Primitive peoples depended upon food resources which are now neglected. Other sources of possible human nutrition have doubtless remained untouched, and the time may come when a comprehensive utilization of food plants will be essential to human sustenance. It is believed, therefore, that the information so ably brought together by Dr. Sturtevant cannot fail to become increasingly useful.

Very respectfully,

W. H. JORDAN

New York Agricultural Experiment Station

Geneva, N. Y.

June 1, 1919.
PREFACE

All who have attempted to study the origin and history of cultivated plants must have been struck with the paucity and inaccuracy of information on the subject. For nearly nineteen hundred years, to be written in Pliny was proof sufficient; yet much of Pliny's history is inaccurate though still repeated in periodicals and popular works. Linnaeus, the great systematizer, gave the origin of most of the plants he described; but of these, De Candolle, by long odds the best plant historian, says, "three out of four of Linnaeus' indications of the original home of cultivated plants are incomplete or incorrect." De Candolle, in his turn, usually accurate, is exceedingly scant, giving the origin of but 249 cultivated plants, not all edible, while Sturtevant, in the text in hand, puts down 2897 which may be used for food, most of which are cultivated.

The query at once comes to mind as to the respects in which Sturtevant adds new knowledge on an old subject. New knowledge may be found on the following subjects: (1) The original home of many esculents is given for the first time. (2) New landmarks in the histories of edible plants are pointed out. (3) An effort is made to mention all cultivated esculents. (4) Though the book contains much new information as to the history of the food plants of the Old World, it is especially full and accurate in the discussion of the esculents of the New World. (5) Sturtevant presents much new information on the variations that have been produced in plants by cultivation. (6) His book adds much to geographical botany. (7) He contributes much data for the study of acclimatization.

It is pertinent to inquire as to the qualifications and opportunities Sturtevant may have had to illuminate so vast a subject as that of edible plants. To answer this query, and for the added reason that a book can be used with greatest profit only when its author is known, a brief biography of Sturtevant follows this Preface.

Sturtevant's Notes on Edible Plants is a compilation from four sources, namely: the first seven reports of the New York State Agricultural Experiment Station; a manuscript of 1600 closely written imperial octavo sheets
entitled, *Notes on Edible Plants*, left at this Station by the author; a series of articles in the *American Naturalist* on the history of garden vegetables, running for four years beginning with 1887; and between forty and fifty thousand card index notes which belong in part to this Station and in part to the Missouri Botanical Garden. The material used was written previous to 1892, the author having spent at least a quarter-century in its preparation. The editor must now state what his task has been.

With so great a wealth of material much has had to be discarded. A great mass of cultural notes has not been used. Descriptions of many varieties of many species were discarded. Vernacular names in many languages and dialects were omitted. Botanical synonyms have had to be left out. Sturtevant’s discussions of edible fungi, while full for the time in which they were written, are, in the light of recent research, so scant and fragmentary that the editor, unable to revise or add to them, has with many regrets excluded them. The unused material amounts to several times that used.

After sorting the material, the next task was to arrange it for publication. This work fell into four well-defined divisions of labor:

First, some standard of botanical nomenclature had to be adopted that the many botanical names from the several hundred authors quoted by Sturtevant could be made to conform as far as possible to one standard. *Index Kewensis* was taken as the authority best suited for the work in hand; this standard has seldom been departed from even though departure seemed most necessary in the light of later botanical studies; to have begun making departures would have entailed too great a task.

Second, Sturtevant’s citations to literature, except in the series of articles in the *American Naturalist*, usually consist only of the name of the book and the author. Since a book such as this is almost worthless without full citations, these, as far as possible, have been completed and verified, a task requiring borrowed books from a dozen or more libraries and the labor of several persons for months. Even after great effort to insure fullness and correctness, no doubt many mistakes have crept into the citations.

Third, bibliographical information is given in detail, since to cite unknown authors is a worthless procedure. It seems a simple task to catalog a collection of books. But the difficulties, especially in the case of early books, were found to be many. Anonymous writers, *noms de plume*, cross-references, borrowed material, numerous editions, works of com-
mentators and editors bearing the names of original authors, all confuse and make the task of the bibliographer complex and difficult.

Fourth, the material had to be arranged. Sturtevant in his discussions of vegetables in the reports of this Station, in his card index of edible plants and in his *History of Garden Vegetables* in the *American Naturalist*, arranges the plants in accordance with the English vernacular names; but in his partly completed manuscript, undoubtedly written with the expectation of publishing, the plants are arranged alphabetically according to genera. The last plan seemed to suit the present work best and was adopted. The natural order of the genera is given; species are alphabetically arranged under each genus; while, to make them as prominent as possible, English vernacular names are printed in capitals after the species. The vernacular names are those used by the authorities quoted or are taken from standard botanical text-books.

While the changes and omissions made by the editor leave that which remains substantially as written by Dr. Sturtevant, yet there has been so much cutting and fitting that it would be unjust to hold Sturtevant responsible for infelicities that may appear. Despite the editor's efforts to retain the diction, style and individuality of Dr. Sturtevant, the quality of the work is no doubt marred by passing through hands other than those of the author.

The following acknowledgments must be recorded: The editor is grateful to Dr. Sturtevant's children for permission to publish their father's work; and to his associates in the Horticultural Department of this Station for assistance in reading the manuscript and proof of the book, especially to J.W. Wellington who has had charge of standardizing botanical names, verifying references and preparing the bibliography.

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