

Book Review

THE CHEMISTRY OF ESSENTIAL OILS, 2nd Ed. David G. Williams (Weymouth, Dorset, UK, 2008), 408 pp. \$75.00.

The subtitle of this book is “An Introduction for Aromatherapists, Beauticians, Retailers and Students.” It accurately describes the intended audience, but it should not discourage professionals in the personal care or fragrance industry from exploring its contents.

Anyone seeking the ultimate comprehensive treatment of essential oils is inevitably drawn to Guenther’s six-volume magnum opus, *The Essential Oils*. Those settling for a slightly shorter classic will turn to Arctander, whose *Perfume and Flavor Materials of Natural Origin* sits on every perfumer’s shelf. The aromatherapy aspects are treated well in many books, with *The Illustrated Encyclopedia of Essential Oils* by Julia Lawless being a good primary choice.

Between the extensive treatments of the technical side and those treating the therapeutic aspects of the subject, there is a chasm expertly bridged by the current volume, the second edition of David G. Williams’ *The Chemistry of Essential Oils*. In fact, a collection of all the cited books would be an excellent library that would comprehensively embrace virtually every facet of the topic. Williams would serve as the friendly guide, sitting alongside the reader

rather than looking down from Guenther’s formidable heights.

There is a sense of comfort in exploring the subject with Williams. The writing is unusually good for a reference book, and indeed could be held as a model of what serious nonfiction for the general reader can be. The graphic design and presentation of the tables and figures is exemplary.

The first chapter is an introduction to basic chemistry, and even there connections are made to plants, genetics, and essential oils. The hydrocarbon chapter opens into a discussion of terpenes, and the functional group chapter is packed with useful information. The heart of the book has long chapters on the odor properties and quality control of the oils.

Williams considers isolates and synthetic aroma chemicals with an approach steeped in history rather than chemistry. The next two chapters deal with aspects of perfumery and again contain many fascinating background stories. The last chapter is a guide to studying the subject, including techniques for taking notes and studying for exams.

There is a long glossary at the end. There are enough exotic terms like “caramellic” and “inflorescence” to make it interesting to read through. This book is so full of useful information, imparted in graceful prose, that it can be recommended unconditionally and with pleasure.—STEVE HERMAN—*Diffusion LLC*

