

# **Ethnobotany of South America**

**Ingrid Roth**



Berichte aus der Biologie

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### Preface

Because I was a woman, the chief professor of the Botanical Institute of Munich (Germany) could not 'take over the responsibility for my habilitation' in the years after the Second World War. For this reason, I had to go abroad, although I had worked like a professor giving lectures and practica, as well as examinations for 12 years in the Botanical Institute.

At this time, I had already published about 20 scientific full papers. Professor Geßner from the Botanical Institute recommended me 1960 for a professorship in Botany at the 'Universidad Central de Venezuela' in Caracas.

I was not prepared to go alone to a five - million city with Spanish as the main language, unable to drive a car, without friends to begin a new life. A colleague picked me up at the harbour and brought me to a hotel.

My first lecture was at 14h at 35°C for ca 300 students, the air condition was broken, and water streamlets ran about my face. The Dean of the Faculty and the Rector of the University received me very friendly well dressed in tropical coats, and the salary was the 20 fold from Germany. The first trip was to the Botanical Garden which was an attraction.

The interesting flora with its magic power (*Espeletia*), the many questions which are still to solve, were a great challenge for me, to stay in Venezuela, and after 20 years living and teaching in this fascinating environment I began to write this book.

I decided to describe the active live of the Indios with their plants. I studied profoundly the tropical world of wonders, beginning with the sweetening wonder (*Stevia*) up to the 'winter coat' plant *Espeletia*. The Indios could use all these plants and even improved their utility. They wanted to give these accomplishments to the white man, but the white man killed the red skins, who painted their bodies red with *Bixa orellana*, a skin curing substance which protects also from the aggressive solar rays.

This book tries to make acquainted the reader with the acquisitions of the Indios, of which we take advantage or which we like and enjoy, but which we would not know, if the Indios would not have been such an intelligent and productive nation.

Unfortunately, the South Americans are the least studied nations concerning Ethnobotany.

I thank to my son, Dr. Günter Roth-Glück, for transforming my manuscript into the digital media. To Dr. Christiane Högermann, I thank for permanent interest during the development of the book. She was involved with me to study the Venezuelan medicinal Plants. Even so, I thank to Prof. Dr. Neuffer for her Interest on this work.

## Ethnobotany of South America

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