

*WHO monographs on*  
***selected***  
***medicinal***  
***plants***

*Volume 1*



*World Health Organization*  
*Geneva*

WHO  
*monographs  
on selected  
medicinal plants*

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## Introduction

During the past decade, traditional systems of medicine have become a topic of global importance. Current estimates suggest that, in many developing countries, a large proportion of the population relies heavily on traditional practitioners and medicinal plants to meet primary health care needs. Although modern medicine may be available in these countries, herbal medicines (phytomedicines) have often maintained popularity for historical and cultural reasons. Concurrently, many people in developed countries have begun to turn to alternative or complementary therapies, including medicinal herbs.

Few plant species that provide medicinal herbs have been scientifically evaluated for their possible medical application. Safety and efficacy data are available for even fewer plants, their extracts and active ingredients, and the preparations containing them. Furthermore, in most countries the herbal medicines market is poorly regulated, and herbal products are often neither registered nor controlled. Assurance of the safety, quality, and efficacy of medicinal plants and herbal products has now become a key issue in industrialized and in developing countries. Both the general consumer and health-care professionals need up-to-date, authoritative information on the safety and efficacy of medicinal plants.

During the fourth International Conference of Drug Regulatory Authorities (ICDRA) held in Tokyo in 1986, WHO was requested to compile a list of medicinal plants and to establish international specifications for the most widely used medicinal plants and simple preparations. Guidelines for the assessment of herbal medicines were subsequently prepared by WHO and adopted by the sixth ICDRA in Ottawa, Canada, in 1991.<sup>1</sup> As a result of ICDRA's recommendations and in response to requests from WHO's Member States for assistance in providing safe and effective herbal medicines for use in national health-care systems, WHO is now publishing this first volume of 28 monographs on selected medicinal plants; a second volume is in preparation.

### Preparation of the monographs

The medicinal plants featured in this volume were selected by an advisory  
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