



Nature's Chemicals: the Natural Products that shaped our world

Richard Firn

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Natural Products (NPs) is the term used to describe the hundreds of thousands of chemical compounds or substances that are continually produced by living organisms (plants and microbes). Hundreds of millions of tons of these chemicals are generated annually, and the trade in just a few of these has dominated human economic activity for thousands of years. Indeed the current world geopolitical map has been shaped by attempts to control the supply of a few of these compounds. Every day of our lives each human spends time and money trying to procure the NPs of their choice. However, despite their overwhelming influence on human culture, they remain poorly understood. Yet a knowledge of NPs can help in our search for new drugs, further the debate about GM manipulation, help us address environmental pollution, and enable a better understanding of drug trafficking.

Nature's Chemicals is the first book to describe Natural Products (NPs) in an evolutionary context, distilling the few simple principles that govern the way in which organisms (including humans) have evolved to produce, cope with, or respond to NPs. It neatly synthesizes a widely dispersed literature and provides a general picture of NPs, encompassing evolution, history, ecology, and environmental issues (along with some deeper theory relevant to biochemistry), with the goal of enabling a wider section of the scientific community to fully appreciate the crucial importance of Natural Products to human culture and future survival.

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