

# Book and Media Reviews

***Adaptogens in Medical Herbalism: Elite Herbs and Natural Compounds for Mastering Stress, Aging, and Chronic Disease* by Donald R. Yance, CN, MH, RH (AHG)**

ISBN 978-1-62055-100-4, September 2013  
 Hardcover: \$50.00, 672 pages, 8.5x11  
 Also available as an e-book  
 Imprint: Healing Arts Press  
 Reviewed by James Duke, Ph.D.

My copy of *Adaptogens in Medical Herbalism* bears an inscription from the author: “To Jim, I hope and pray you find this book inspiring and like a bible. I have written it with my heart, mind and soul. And I thank you for you and thank God as well. Donald.”

That’s the first thing I read when I was blessed to receive this expansive and useful book. I have long been impressed with the natural cancer protocols developed by Donald R. Yance, and I have been corresponding productively with him about his adaptogen studies for the past few years. All of these have been especially interesting to me at age 85, enduring those conditions for which adaptogens are made: aging, chronic neuropathy, disease and stress, if not trivial cancer. Yance’s monographs are treasures in themselves and impress me with the dogged scholarship of this man, at once “adaptogenologist,” herbalist, musician, oncologist, and theologian.

What, exactly, is an “adaptogen”? There are many definitions, and among them, I fear there is no unanimity. Adaptogen authority Israel Brekhman describes them as follows:

- 1) Safe, with no significant side-effects or contraindications

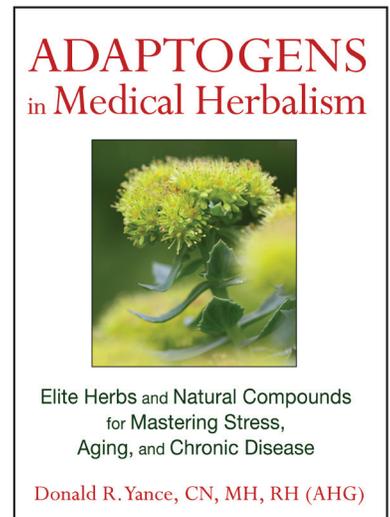
- 2) Have a general nonspecific action to improve resistance to stress
- 3) Have a balancing, normalizing effect on body functions, regardless of the origin of disruption or the direction of the homeostatic disturbance.

To these, Yance adds the qualification of clinical proof. His definition, as given in his new book’s introduction: “The word ‘adaptogen’ refers to the nonspecific endocrine-regulating, immune-modulating effects of certain plants that increase a person’s ability to maintain optimal balance in the face of physical or emotional stress.”

I grew uncomfortable reading Yance’s clarifications on pp. 104 and 105. Clinically he distinguishes three main categories, not too well defined:

- 1) Primary adaptogens.** These meet the classical definition given by Brekhman above. By regulating the hypothalamic pituitary adrenal axis (HPA), primary adaptogens:
  - a) Increase and modulate the flow of energy
  - b) Decrease feelings of stress
  - c) Increase endurance
  - d) Support mental alertness
  - e) Promote deep, restful sleep

- 2) Secondary adaptogens.** These meet most of the criteria mentioned above, but lack sufficient scientific validation. Among other actions, many may have immunomodulating, immunostimulant or immunotonic properties useful especially for the elderly and immunocompromised, but also for the



physically fit. I have to say to this point that I am fairly well convinced after years of compiling data (but no clinical experience), that all plant species will modulate the immune system. Among the thousands of biologically active phytochemicals they contain, there are probably hundreds if not thousands of phytochemicals in each plant species that modulate the immune system. If I may quote myself from the introduction of David Winston and Steven Maimes' *Adaptogens: Herbs for Strength, Stamina and Stress Relief* (Healing Arts Press, 2007), "All plants contain adaptogenic/tonic compounds because plants have to contend with a good deal of stress." And it seems that stressed plants are more adaptogenic/tonic than pampered plants. Tantalizing question for which I have no answer: Would stressed, wild *Panax quinquefolius* (American ginseng) be more adaptogenic than pampered, cultivated Chinese *Panax ginseng*?

**3) Adaptogen companions.** These may not meet all the traditional criteria, but enhance the actions of herbs in the first two categories.

*Adaptogens in Medical Herbalism* offers 17 chapters by way of various introductory clarifications, most of which are useful in understanding Donnie's complex interpretation. Chapter 3, "Vital Energy and the Neuroendocrine System," frames the body's energetic and protective functions in terms of the Eclectic Triphasic Medical System (ETMS) model that breaks down life force into three energies: vital force (cellular energy), vital essence (neuroendocrine system), and vital spirit (spiritual energy). He says lack of energy is the most frequent complaint of his patients, and cites studies reflecting the same for other practitioners. Adaptogens, like tonics, are energizers. In Chapter 5, "Adaptogens, the Ultimate Evidence-Based Medicine," he notes that adaptation can be broadly classified into two categories: that which helps an organism

survive, and reproductive adaptation, that assures that the genes are passed on. Later chapters discuss adaptogens specific to cardiovascular health, the immune system, cancer, aging, the brain, and weight management, among others.

Yance's materia medica of adaptogens include a lot of species considered by the Chinese to be Qi and Yang tonics as well as ones that appear in Ayurvedic rasayana formulas. But I must say that I am confused by his list of "Adaptogens and Adaptogen Companions with an Affinity for Improving Insulin Utilization" (p. 138). Clearly he calls all these antidiabetic plants adaptogens or adaptogen companions, but does not include them in his main materia medica. Are they adaptogens or not?

For reasons that elude me, Yance calls black pepper *Piper longum*, which is a closely related but different species often used exactly like black pepper (*Piper nigrum*) and likewise a source of the bioactive piperine. *Piper longum* is more commonly called long pepper.

There's a lot of useful healing information filling these pages based on Yance's years of clinical experience. I like a sturdy big reference book like this, with Part 1: Adaptogens and Part 2: Materia Medica. I think I would be better served, though (if my adaptogens keep me alive long enough), if the two parts are printed as two separate paperback volumes, should there be another edition in my time. I thank the author for his kind and learned words and for sending me a copy of the book, with all its useful information, well researched.