



Definitions and Scope of Ethnobotany

DEFINITIONS

Modern definition by Nancy Turner in 1996:

“Ethnobotany is the Science of people’s interactions with plants”

The first person to define ethnobotany was John Harshberger in 1895; his definition is as follows:

“Ethnobotany is the study of plants used by primitive and aboriginal people”

Problem with this definition:

Many find this definition far too narrow and elitist. Turner’s definition is thus preferred. Do you feel anything is wrong with Harshbergers’ definition? If so, what?

SCOPE

Ethnobotany is an interdisciplinary science, which includes aspects of both the sciences and humanities. Ethnobotany can therefore serve as a gateway to many disciplines. The following disciplines are often included within the study of ethnobotany:

DISCIPLINE

- Botany
- Anthropology
- Sociology
- Ecology

- Medicine
- Chemistry

- Agriculture
- Horticulture
- Forestry
- Agroforestry

- Archeology
- Economics
- Religious Studies
- Linguistics

- Systematics

RELEVANCE TO ETHNOBOTANY

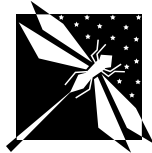
The study of plants
The study of how different cultures use plants
The study of plant uses in various societies
How human interactions with plants and ecosystems affect plant ecology
Study of medicinal uses of plants
Study of the composition of substances and active chemicals in plants, especially medicinal plants
Study of human domestication and management of plants, especially traditional agriculture systems
Study of management of useful plants (fruits, vegetables, ornamentals) in home gardens or orchards
Study of human management of forests and forest trees
Study of land management for the simultaneous production of food, crops and trees
Paleoethnobotany – how ancient cultures used plants
Economic Botany, study of economic uses of plants
Ritual uses of plants by different cultures and religions
Study of linguistic terminology for plants and plant parts by people of different language groups
Study of folk-taxonomy, how different people classify plants

Other disciplines and sub-disciplines related to Ethnobotany:

- Some people make a distinction between ethnobotany and economic botany. Economic botany is a subdiscipline of ethnobotany, but it looks specifically at plants and plant products that have any sort of economic market in the modern world, for example citrus fruits, cotton, coffee, orchids etc.
- Ethnobiology is a broader term and includes the study of people's interactions with organisms and ecosystems. In addition to ethnobotany, ethnobiology includes studies of:
 - Ethnozoology – studies the complex relationships between people and animals, can include the study of human relationships with and use of domesticated animals, and management of wild animals for hunting and other uses.



- Ethnoentomology – the study of relationships between people and insects. This can include studies of useful insects and their products (honeybees, silkworms etc.) and how people interact with and control insect pests.



- Ethnoecology – the study of people and ecosystems, looks at how people use and manage abiotic (soils, water) and biotic (plants, animals) aspects of their ecosystems and how their interaction effects the natural ecosystem process.

