Contact Dermatitis 1977: **3**: 276

Letter to the Editor

Dear Sir,

The following note refers to the article "Allergic contact dermatitis from Croton (*Codiaeum*)" by H. Schmidt & Ølholm-Larsen 1977 (*Contact Dermatitis 3*, 100).

The common names "Croton" or "Crotons" are applied to the ornamental garden plants belonging to the genus *Codiaeum* (with approximately 15 species), in particular of the species *Codiaeum variegatum* (L.) Blume, of Western Pacific origin. In the literature there is no record (except those cited by the above authors) that this plant yields an irritant oil or agent. On the other hand, croton oil, a name applied to a powerful purgative drug, is extracted from the seeds of *Croton tiglium* L., a species native to Southeast Asia and belonging to the genus *Croton* (with approximately 750 species). The two genera, *Codiaeum* and *Croton*, belong to the Euphorbiaceae (Bailey 1943, Pax 1896, Willis 1973). It should be pointed out also that the primary irritant activity of *Croton tiglium* seed oil is due to the occurrence of 12, 13-diesters of the tetracyclic diterpene phorbol (Hecker & Schmidt 1974).

The binomial *Codiaeum tiglium* used in the communication by Schmidt and Ølholm-Larsen does not exist in the literature and no plant has ever been referred to under that name (Index Kewensis 1895–1971). Obviously, these authors confuse the generic name *Croton* for the common name croton: the word "croton" in croton oil has been derived literally from the generic name *Croton*, and not from the common name Croton (= *Codiaeum variegatum*). Thus, it is apparent that Schmidt and Ølholm-Larsen were addressing their remarks concerning the allergic contact dermatitis effect of "Croton (= *Codiaeum*)" to *Croton tiglium*, and not to *Codiaeum variegatum*.

We hope that this note clarifies the confusion.

Yours sincerely,

Djaja D. Soejarto, A. Douglas Kinghorn and Norman R. Farnsworth
Department of Pharmacognosy and Pharmacology, College of Pharmacy, University of Illinois at the Medical Center, 833 S. Wood Street, Chicago, Ill. 60612, USA

References

Bailey, L. H. (1943) The Standard Cyclopedia of Horticulture, vol. 1 (A–E): 815–819, 902. The Macmillan Co., N.Y.

Hecker, E. & R. Schmidt (1974) Phorbolesters – the irritants and cocarcinogens of *Croton tiglium* L. In *Progress in the Chemistry of Organic Natural Products* 31: 377–467. Editors: W. Herz, H. Grisebach and G. W. Kirby. Springer-Verlag: Vienna, Austria.

Pax, F. (1896) Euphorbiaceae. In A. Engler and K. Prantl, *Die Natürlichen Pflanzenfamilien 3*(5): 39 *(Croton tiglium)*, 85 *(Codiaeum variegatum)*.

Willis, J. C. (1973) A Dictionary of Flowering Plants and Ferns, ed. 8. Cambridge: University Press.

Index Kewensis, vols. 1 and 2 (1895) and Supplements 1–15 (1906–1971).