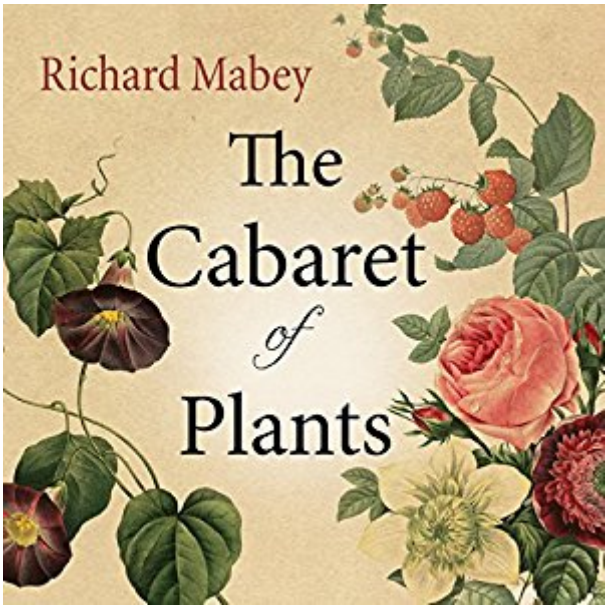
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The Cabaret Of Plants: Forty Thousand Years Of Plant Life And The Human Imagination



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Synopsis

A rich, sweeping, and compelling work of botanical history, The Cabaret of Plants explores dozens of plant species that for millennia have challenged our imaginations, awoken our wonder, and upturned our ideas about history, science, beauty, and belief. Going back to the beginnings of human history, Richard Mabey shows how flowers, trees, and plants have been central to human experience not just as sources of food and medicine but as objects of worship, actors in creation myths, and symbols of war and peace, life and death. Mabey takes listeners from the Himalayas to Madagascar to the to our own backyards. He ranges through the work of writers, artists, and scientists and across nearly 40,000 years of human history: Ice Age images of plant life in ancient cave art and the earliest representations of the Garden of Eden; Newton’s apple and gravity, Priestley’s sprig of mint and photosynthesis, and Wordsworth’s daffodils; the history of cultivated plants such as maize, ginseng, and cotton; and the ways the sturdy oak became the symbol of British nationhood and the giant sequoia came to epitomize the spirit of America.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

What a delightful book! I have been fascinated by all the great facts and history made so interesting by Richard Mabey. If you love nature, are interested in plants throughout history, and just enjoy a good read by a talented author, this is your book.There was one mistake that I found in the chapter on Cycads. Oliver Sacks DID write about cycads, but Mr. Mabey was incorrect in stating that the plant ingestion was associated with color blindness. Eating parts of the Cycad is associated with a neurological disease.I looked to forward to a great read every evening and hope to read more by the

author. I don’t understand the negative reviews at all! But I’ve got a lot of knowledge about plants, trees, and gardening, and I love reading about them.

I bought this for a vacation read, which was just right. The essays are the right length for a single sitting and don’t have to be read in sequence. The trip was over before I was done with the book, so I’ll save it for another time.

Amazing. Combines history, literature and science. You will never look at plants the same.

A delightful book that even a non plant lover can enjoy, covers History, literature , Science and trivia in a scholarly manner without being overwhelming to an average reader. This book does for Botany what Richard Homes did for 18th century Science in his book " The Age Of wondereven though the Author is British it would be of interest to other readers as well. Highly recommended. One need not be an anglophile to enjoy it, but it helps !

I write about plants, specifically chile peppers, and I found this book nearly impossible to read. There doesn’t seem to be any unifying organization for it, and Mabey wanders all over the map trying to describe the history of these random plants, but his examples are dense, and not particularly interesting in most cases. I guess I’m trying to say that this book is boring, even for a plant lover.

Before you start reading, realize what this book is: a collection of personal essays centering on plants. It is not a botany text (although Mabey is extremely knowledgeable about plants). It’s really botanical nature writing, by a master writer. It centers on Britain, although his essays have a wide scope. Note this part of the title: "...of plant life and the human imagination." That means the intersection of botany, plants, history and culture. If you like this kind of writing, this book is excellent and the writing is extremely good. If that does not appeal to you, you will not find this compelling. Me, I like it and highly recommend it. Here’s a sentence in which Mabey clarifies what he’s writing: "It’s a story about plants as authors of their own lives and an argument that ignoring their vitality impoverishes our imagination and out well-being."One gripe: that 40,000 years in the title is a bit of a stretch. There is a little about representations of plants, or rather the lack of representation, in ancient cave art; there’s more about the Neolithic revolution of domesticating plants, and of the classical era. Most however is the last few centuries.Here are some things that interested me. He

discusses trees and branches, as plants and as metaphor, such as family tree, tree of life, decision tree. Chapter 3 looks at trees with charisma, such as famed churchyard yews and the Fortingall Yew. Chapter 4 looks at the baobab in terms of evolution, some of its odder uses (graves, sacred space, water collection). Chapter 5 examines the sequoia in the same way. Chapter 6 looks at bristlecone pines and other old trees. Chapter 7 muses on cycads--muses is an appropriate word in this book--and Chapter 8 discusses oaks. Chapter 10 looks at "the vegetable lamb," that is cotton, and some persistent myths that once circulated. Chapter 12 discusses ginseng, and also explores the once-common doctrine of signatures. Chapter 13 looks at "the vegetable mudfish," samphire, which mystifies Americans. Chapter 14 looks at "Newton’s Apple."There’s more. There’s a lot of incidental information, which will fascinate some readers and perhaps bore others. Example: the worldwide orchid trade is worth almost ten billion dollars a year. There’s some discussion of what and how plants can sense and communicate.

Wonderful book.

Very interesting read!

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