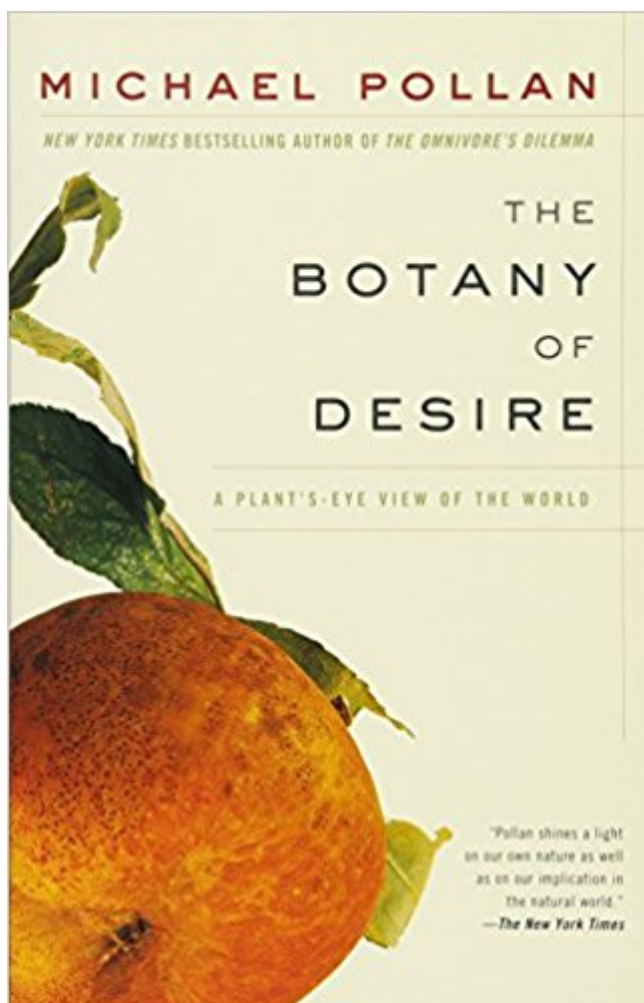


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# The Botany Of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View Of The World



## Synopsis

The book that helped make Michael Pollan, the New York Times bestselling author of *Cooked* and *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, one of the most trusted food experts in America. Every schoolchild learns about the mutually beneficial dance of honeybees and flowers: The bee collects nectar and pollen to make honey and, in the process, spreads the flower's genes far and wide. In *The Botany of Desire*, Michael Pollan ingeniously demonstrates how people and domesticated plants have formed a similarly reciprocal relationship. He masterfully links four fundamental human desires—sweetness, beauty, intoxication, and control—with the plants that satisfy them: the apple, the tulip, marijuana, and the potato. In telling the stories of four familiar species, Pollan illustrates how the plants have evolved to satisfy humankind's most basic yearnings. And just as we've benefited from these plants, we have also done well by them. So who is really domesticating whom?

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Working in his garden one day, Michael Pollan hit pay dirt in the form of an idea: do plants, he wondered, use humans as much as we use them? While the question is not entirely original, the way Pollan examines this complex coevolution by looking at the natural world from the perspective of plants is unique. The result is a fascinating and engaging look at the true nature of domestication. In making his point, Pollan focuses on the relationship between humans and four specific plants: apples, tulips, marijuana, and potatoes. He uses the history of John Chapman (Johnny Appleseed) to illustrate how both the apple's sweetness and its role in the production of alcoholic cider made it

appealing to settlers moving west, thus greatly expanding the plant's range. He also explains how human manipulation of the plant has weakened it, so that "modern apples require more pesticide than any other food crop." The tulipomania of 17th-century Holland is a backdrop for his examination of the role the tulip's beauty played in wildly influencing human behavior to both the benefit and detriment of the plant (the markings that made the tulip so attractive to the Dutch were actually caused by a virus). His excellent discussion of the potato combines a history of the plant with a prime example of how biotechnology is changing our relationship to nature. As part of his research, Pollan visited the Monsanto company headquarters and planted some of their NewLeaf brand potatoes in his garden--seeds that had been genetically engineered to produce their own insecticide. Though they worked as advertised, he made some startling discoveries, primarily that the NewLeaf plants themselves are registered as a pesticide by the EPA and that federal law prohibits anyone from reaping more than one crop per seed packet. And in a interesting aside, he explains how a global desire for consistently perfect French fries contributes to both damaging monoculture and the genetic engineering necessary to support it. Pollan has read widely on the subject and elegantly combines literary, historical, philosophical, and scientific references with engaging anecdotes, giving readers much to ponder while weeding their gardens. --Shawn Carkonen

Erudite, engaging and highly original, journalist Pollan's fascinating account of four everyday plants and their coevolution with human society challenges traditional views about humans and nature. Using the histories of apples, tulips, potatoes and cannabis to illustrate the complex, reciprocal relationship between humans and the natural world, he shows how these species have successfully exploited human desires to flourish. "It makes just as much sense to think of agriculture as something the grasses did to people as a way to conquer the trees," Pollan writes as he seamlessly weaves little-known facts, historical events and even a few amusing personal anecdotes to tell each species' story. For instance, he describes how the apple's sweetness and the appeal of hard cider enticed settlers to plant orchards throughout the American colonies, vastly expanding the plant's range. He evokes the tulip craze of 17th-century Amsterdam, where the flower's beauty led to a frenzy of speculative trading, and explores the intoxicating appeal of marijuana by talking to scientists, perusing literature and even visiting a modern marijuana garden in Amsterdam. Finally, he considers how the potato plant demonstrates man's age-old desire to control nature, leading to modern agribusiness's experiments with biotechnology. Pollan's clear, elegant style enlivens even his most scientific material, and his wide-ranging references and charming manner do much to

support his basic contention that man and nature are and will always be "in this boat together."

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Michael Pollan leads one through horticulture, culture, science, time, space, and even into the future in support of his intriguing theory about who we are, who we think we are, and our relationship with the natural world. The thesis is fascinating and the prose is brilliant -- at times I found myself savoring the language nearly at the expense of the ideas -- conversational and gentle, it is as if Michael is right there with the reader enjoying the moment as well. Each section begins from a wholly disparate point in time or space and then gradually carries the reader to the central point of the book. If the point of non-fiction is to provide one with a new and unique way of seeing the everyday, then Michael Pollan has succeeded beyond all measure. A terrific way to spend some hours this summer -- especially to the sights and sounds of summer. Have sent nearly every relative I have a copy -- some of their remarks have informed this review.

The Botany of Desire, A Plant's-Eye View of the World by Michael Pollan (270 pages) I borrowed this book and, after reading it, decided I needed to buy a copy, as it's a book I want to keep and have available to loan out. Environmental journalist Michael Pollan explores the relationship between humans and plants' coevolution. He presents intriguing chapters on desires: Sweetness -- the apple (Johnny Appleseed and the evolution of the apple to today's highly domesticated fruit); Beauty -- the tulip (Bred to the Turks' idea of beauty, the tulip took over and transformed Holland); Intoxication -- Marijuana (altered to satisfy human desires for intoxication, the marijuana plant has been bred to avoid detection. Small female clones are grown inside, under controlled conditions); Control -- the potato (Why the Potato Famine caused devastation in Ireland and dangers of genetic engineered Monsanto's NewLeafs. The NewLeafs are resistant to blight. The danger is that potato diseases resistant to today's chemicals will develop).

Arrived on time, in new condition, and is filled with interesting and profound text. A great buy for anyone interested in agro-economy, botany, and the relationships between plants and people.

Michael Pollan brings a unique perspective on nature, food, and animals. Very vivid imagery and inspires interesting conversation about our place in the world.

A true masterpiece. As informative as it is captivating. Pollan takes you through the ages connecting the dots of how mother nature and man interconnect in a brilliant display of his own marvels and startling revelations about the mother earth and our place among her. Delving deep into what this world has become with the absence of love and trust we once had in the Earth and how the true way.. the old way... was more ingenious.. emotionally and spiritually intelligent and connected ancestors were wider then the modern day, disconnected toxic profit driven mess we live in.

Pollan's books are generally very good. This starts the sequence for me. I find myself oft-quoting the lessons of this book. The next book, *The Omnivore's...*, is very important and readable, until the last hundred pages or so. Read *The Botany...* book, then the *Omnivore's...* book. Then watch the dvd *Food Inc.* and *The Vanishing of the Bees* dvd, and you will be reasonably up on the dangers besetting our food supply and environment. Among other things, I produce cows on our farm for discriminating nose-to-tail chefs. We are thereby rescuing the rarest American cow from extinction. If animals do not have a "job", and thereby a monetary value, they disappear. I find that the US is losing massive gene pools of all species and breeds, domestic and wild, fish, animal and fowl. And this may indeed end badly if left to continue. Unfortunately for all of us, most of the dire things you read about USDA, FDA, Monsanto, Big Agribusiness, etc. are indeed true. Trust me

This is an awesome, informative book. The audio book is also exceptional!. It is well written that is typical of Michael Pollen and full of his humor. The chapter on cannabis is enlightening, full of little known facts. But if touching on that subject is offensive to you, skip over it until you can revisit it with an open mind. You might find your opinion challenged in that chapter. I have listened to the book several times. It's one of my go to road trip listens.

This is a book that makes you think not just about food but about the nature of mankind, the power of what we call Nature and the element of chaos or unpredictability that drives the results in the course of human affairs. This was a very informative book that challenges me to look at how we fit into the overall pattern of living things on this planet. Well written, intimate and with a beguiling understated self depreciating wit the book was a pleasure and happy page turner. It should be as well for anyone with a good sense of curiosity about such things. Gave it to my daughter for her birthday when I saw that she was actually interested (for once) in one of the nerdy books I am always reading. She loved it.

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