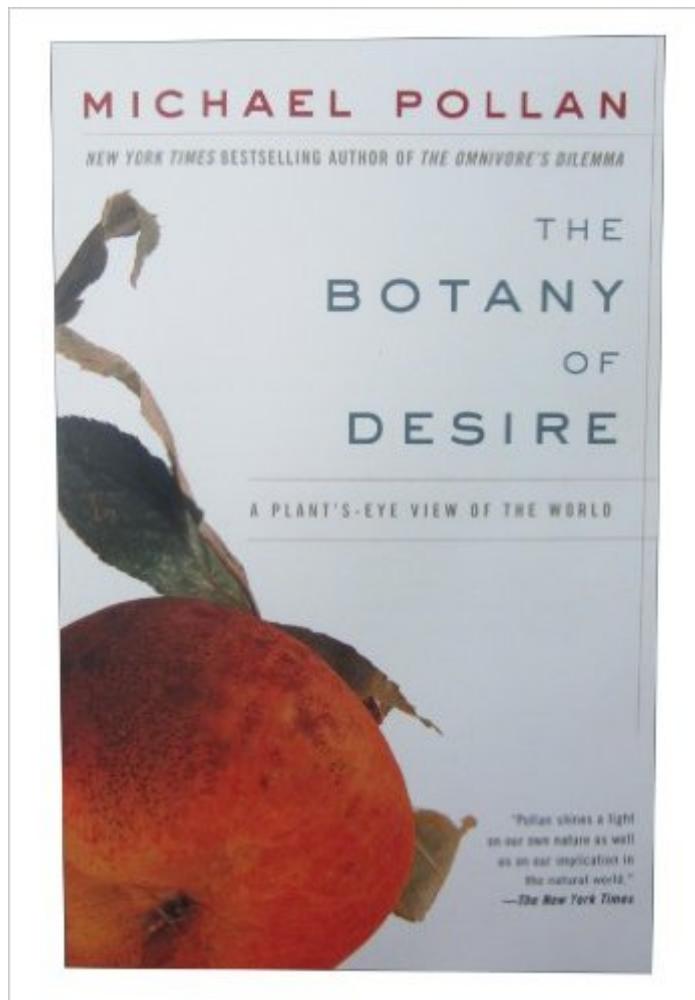


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# The Botany Of Desire: A Plant's-Eye View Of The World



## 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 flowers' 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

Paperback: 271 pages

Publisher: Random House Trade Paperbacks (May 28, 2002)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0375760393

ISBN-13: 978-0375760396

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 0.7 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 9.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 stars (See all reviews) (404 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #8,849 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #11 in Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Botany #15 in Books > Science & Math > Biological Sciences > Ecology #20 in Books > Crafts, Hobbies & Home > Gardening & Landscape Design

## Customer Reviews

"What existential difference is there between the human being's role in this (or any) garden and the bumblebees?" "Did I choose to plant these potatoes, or did the potato make me do it? With profound questions like these, Michael Pollan pollinates your mind with a new world view of our relationships with plants, one in which humans are not at the center. The book focuses on four primary examples of how plants provide benefits to humans that lead humans to benefit the plants (apples for sweetness, tulips for beauty, marijuana for intoxication, and the potato for control over nature's food supply). You will learn many new facts in the process that will fascinate you. The

book's main value is that you will learn that we need to be more thoughtful in how we assist in the evolution of plant species. The book builds on Darwin's original observations about how artificial evolution occurs (evolution directed by human efforts). So-called domesticated species thrive while the wild ones we admire often do not. Compare dogs to wolves as an example. Mr. Pollan challenges the mental separation we make between wild and domesticated species successfully in the book. The apple section was my favorite. You will learn that John Chapman (Johnny Appleseed) was a rather odd fellow who was actually in the business of raising and selling apple trees. He planted a few seeds at the homes where he stayed overnight on his travels. Mr. Chapman had apple tree nurseries all over Ohio and Indiana, which he started 2-3 years before he expected an influx of settlers. Homesteading laws required these settlers to plant 50 apple or pears trees in order to take title to the land. And these apples were for making hard apple cider, not eating apples. He was the "American Dionysus" in Mr.

Read this book and you may never eat a conventionally grown potato again. I know I won't. If I hadn't been a dedicated organic gardener for over 40 years, I would become one after reading THE BOTANY OF DESIRE. I find it incredibly puzzling that more people haven't bitten the organic bullet. I truly believe a diet of conventionally grown food can shorten your life and bring on all sorts of aches, pains, and illnesses you might not otherwise suffer. Organic gardening works and the stuff you grow is better for you. If you can't grow it, for goodness sakes, hustle on down to your closest Whole Foods store and buy it. Organic food may be more expensive than conventional foods, but in the long run you will save on medical bills. Michael Pollen's book is simply the best set of gardening essays I've read in a long while, maybe ever. And that's saying a lot because I am a big fan of gardening books (I've reviewed over 100 of them for ). I haven't read something so enjoyable since Henry Mitchell's columns and books. It's not often a book of garden essays can make you laugh (misadventures with Mary Jane), make you cry (one million Irish dead of starvation), make you angry (one million Irish dead), and make you smile (is there any tulip so lovely as 'The Queen of the Night'? Pollan covers four plants, Apples, Tulips, Marijuana, and Potatoes. His first chapter on apples, disabused me of all my notions about Johnny Appleseed. I had read Anna Pavord's book THE TULIP, so the tulip section of Pollan's book was the least interesting for me, although he added some interesting anecdotal information. The best section of this book as far as I am concerned is the chapter on Marijuana. My husband is a substance abuse counselor and I recommended the chapter to him.

Pollan makes the rather striking point in the Introduction that we and our domesticated plants are involved in a coevolutionary relationship. We use them and they in turn use us. The bumblebee thinks that he is the "subject in the garden and the bloom he's plundering for its drop of nectar" is the object. "But we know that this is just a failure of his imagination. The truth of the matter is that the flower has cleverly manipulated the bee into hauling its pollen from blossom to blossom." (p. xiv) And so it is with us. There is no subject and no object. The grammar is all wrong. We plant and disperse the apple, thinking we act from our volition, yet from the apple's point of view, it has enticed us through its bribe of sweetness to further its propagation. It has played upon our desire. The same can be said of every other plant "domesticated" by humans. As Pollan points out, from a larger point of view our farms and gardens are just another part of the "wild" environment. And we, too, are part of that environment--increasingly a most significant part. The plants, and of course the cows, the ants, the roaches, the dogs and the cats, adjust to the environment, or they don't. The ones that do will flourish. Those that don't, the mighty oak, perhaps, the hard wood trees of equatorial jungles, the tigers and the condor, that cannot, will go the way of the dodo. This idea is not original with Pollan, of course, but nowhere have I seen it presented so convincingly. In a sense we are not the doer, we are the done. Pollan illustrates his thesis in four chapters on the apple, the tulip, cannabis, and the potato. In the chapter on tulips and the tulip mania we learn that we are probably hard-wired to love flowers. Why? Because "the presence of flowers..."

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