



An Orchard Invisible: A Natural History of Seeds

Jonathan Silvertown

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The story of seeds, in a nutshell, is a tale of evolution. From the tiny sesame that we sprinkle on our bagels to the forty-five-pound double coconut borne by the coco de mer tree, seeds are a perpetual reminder of the complexity and diversity of life on earth. With *An Orchard Invisible*, Jonathan Silvertown presents the oft-ignored seed with the natural history it deserves, one nearly as varied and surprising as the earth's flora itself.

Beginning with the evolution of the first seed plant from fernlike ancestors more than 360 million years ago, Silvertown carries his tale through epochs and around the globe. In a clear and engaging style, he delves into the science of seeds: How and why do some lie dormant for years on end? How did seeds evolve? The wide variety of uses that humans have developed for seeds of all sorts also receives a fascinating look, studded with examples, including foods, oils, perfumes, and pharmaceuticals. An able guide with an eye for the unusual, Silvertown is happy to take readers on unexpected—but always interesting—tangents, from Lyme disease to human color vision to the Salem witch trials. But he never lets us forget that the driving force behind the story of seeds—its theme, even—is evolution, with its irrepressible habit of stumbling upon new solutions to the challenges of life.

"I have great faith in a seed," Thoreau wrote. "Convince me that you have a seed there, and I am prepared to expect wonders." Written with a scientist's knowledge and a gardener's delight, *An Orchard Invisible* offers those wonders in a package that will be irresistible to science buffs and green thumbs alike.

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