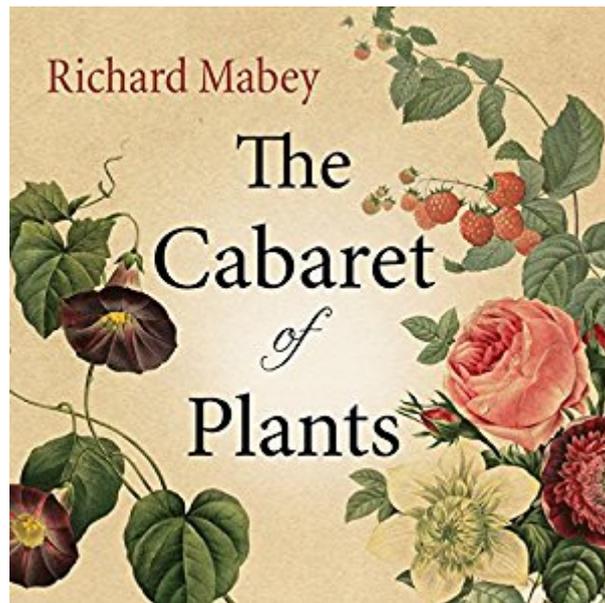


The book was found

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



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

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 our 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.

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