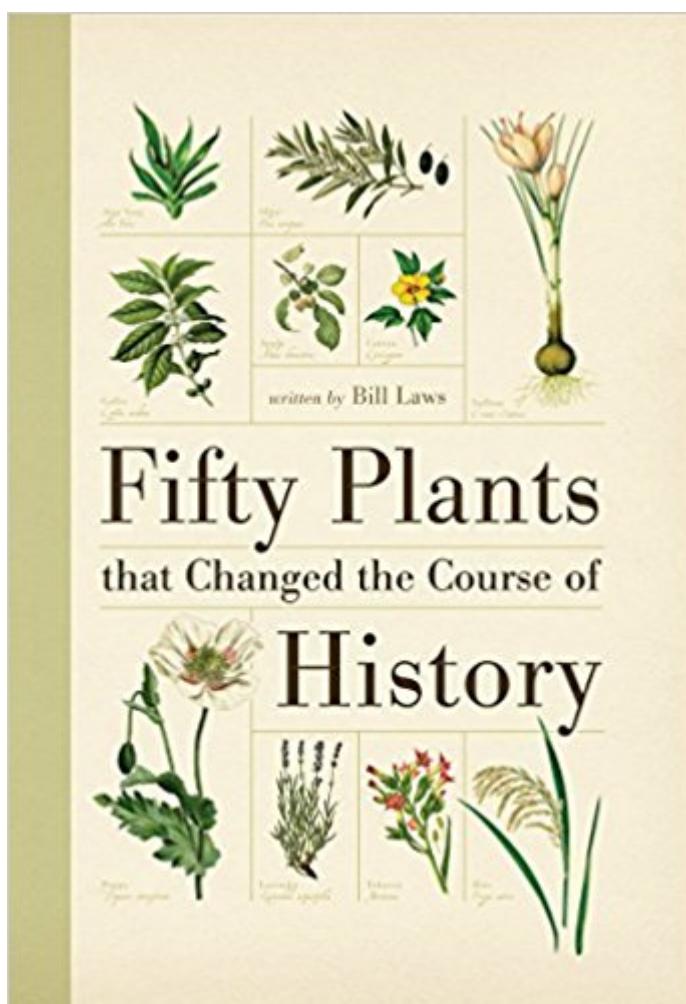


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# Fifty Plants That Changed The Course Of History (Fifty Things That Changed The Course Of History)



## Synopsis

"This book will mesmerize plant-lovers and non-gardeners alike." --American Gardener "This marvelous collection of tales deserves to be read and enjoyed." --Chicago Botanic Garden Fifty Plants that Changed the Course of History is a beautifully presented guide to the plants that have had the greatest impact on human civilization. Entries feature a description of the plant, its botanical name, its native range and its primary functions--edible, medicinal, commercial or practical. Concise text is highlighted by elegant botanical drawings, paintings and photographs as well as insightful quotes. Many of the plants are well known, such as rice, tea, cotton, rubber, wheat, sugarcane, tobacco, wine grapes and corn. However, there are also many whose stories are less known. These history-changing plants include: Agave, used to make sisal, poison arrows, bullets, tequila and surgical thread Pineapple, which influenced the construction of greenhouses Hemp, used for hangman's rope, sustainable plastics, the Declaration of Independence and Levi's jeans Coconut, used for coir fiber, soap, margarine, cream, sterile IV drips and coagulants Eucalyptus, used in mouthwash, diuretics, vitamins, honey, underwear and fire-resistant uniforms Sweet pea, which Gregor Mendel used in his research on genetics White mulberry, used to feed the caterpillars that make silk English oak, used for fire-resistant structures, dyes, leather tanning, charcoal, casks and ships White willow, used in the manufacture of aspirin, cricket bats, hot-air balloon baskets and coffins. This attractive reference provides an innovative perspective on both botanical and human history.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

[Review of hardcover edition:] This book will mesmerize plant-lovers and non-gardeners alike. (American Gardener 2011-07-01)[Review of hardcover edition:] (reviewed with Fifty Animals that Changed the Course of History) These two volumes from Firefly uncover some of the most interesting stories of how animals and plants have impacted human civilization in economic, political, and industrial history. This is an original approach that links the biological sciences to the social sciences and students and general readers will find many interesting stories within these pages. (Shannon Graff Hysell American Reference Books Annual 2012 2012-04-01)[Review of hardcover edition:] This attractive and fun natural history of plants showcases fifty species that have influenced human history in significant ways. Each entry features color illustrations and photographs, interesting fact sidebars and information about distribution and growing conditions. Narratives detail the importance of each plant and range from ancient remedies and poisons to crop plants that formed trade and economic networks around the globe to bases for modern technological advances. The volume is designed for easy reference and includes information on further readings and Internet resources. (Book News 2011-12-01)[Review of hardcover edition:] Fifty Plants That Changed the Course of History offers capsule summaries of the culinary, medicinal, commercial, or practical significance of 50 familiar plants. Some will be obvious (wheat, wine grapes), but Laws manages to throw in some interesting and little-known history about each. For example, the 17th-century French Benedictine monk Dom Perignon, who helped develop still wines in the region of Champagne, is sometimes credited with first sealing a wine bottle with a stopper made from cork oak; and pharmacist Wilbur Scoville devised a test for rating the heat of a chili pepper in 1912. (George M. Eberhart C and RL News (Association of College and Research 2011-10-01)[Review of hardcover edition:] How wonderful are plants! That is the theme of this compilation of stories of the usefulness of 50 remarkable plants. Attractively illustrated, the text contains short essays on plants that provide sustenance, medicine, fragrance, spice, color, clothing, and much more. Lest we forget, the common sweet pea provided the means for establishing the scientific field of genetics. This marvelous collection of tales deserves to be read and enjoyed. (Marilyn K. Alaimo Chicago Botanic Garden 2011-06-30)[Review of hardcover edition:] Much more than a "plant book," this is a beauty packed with historical detail and art that will feed your eyes, your mind and your spirit as you learn about plants in a way you've never experienced. Fifty Plants that Changed the Course of History is by Bill Laws, who intends the book to be an encyclopedia of "plants that have had the greatest impact on human civilization," according to the book jacket. But he has made his encyclopedia so much more. It's chock-full of life, art, typography, history and

botany, and I've never been more pleasantly surprised with a "plant book" than this one.... Beautiful art reproductions, classy typography and eye-catching design work together to present a gathering of the history behind these 50 plants that will keep you coming back for a good look (and read) over and over. (Karen Gallagher Dayton Beach News-Journal 2011-04-16)[Review of hardcover edition:] Covering economic, political and industrial history, Bill shows how the plants' uses have changed over time. Recognizing both common as well as those plants whose roles are less well known, Bill provides an innovative perspective on both botanical and human history. Gardeners and social historians will find this book fascinating to read. (Fifty-Five Plus 2012-09-30)[Review of hardcover edition:] Beautifully illustrated with botanical drawings, paintings, and photos, this fascinating reference offers insights into both botany and social history. (Liz Grogan Good Times 2011-06-30)[Review of hardcover edition:] It is a very useful guide to the basic fifty plants that humans had cultivated from the beginning of agriculture. For each, there is a description of the plant, the botanical name, its native range, and its primary function... There is also a lot of cultural and social history for each plant: Laws explains why it is in the Top Fifty (many plants get two pages here; corn gets six pages). This text is complemented by botanical drawings, paintings and photographs, and quotes from deep thinkers... There's a bibliography for further reading... Audience and level of use: the historically curious, foodies, reference libraries, schools of hospitality and cooking... Well-priced, and it comes with a ribbon bookmark. (Dean Tudor gothicepicures.blogspot.com 2011-03-17)[Review of hardcover edition:] Bill Laws brings trivia buffs a treasure trove of quirky facts about fifty plants that made a difference in the world. It matters not whether you're a gardener or that you simply enjoy learning obscure information -- this is a book for the curious sort. (Kylee Baumle Horticulture 2011-04-20)[Review of hardcover edition:] We can't live without plants. They provide oxygen, food, clothes, medicine and shelter. From great lists of all-important plants, social historian Bill Laws brings us the fascinating stories of 50 that have actually altered civilizations. Among them: black pepper, which led to a need for banking; sugar, which fueled the slave trade; and white willow, used to make aspirin, cricket bats, hot-air balloon baskets and coffins. You might want to pick up two copies of this beautifully illustrated, fun read--one for the gardener on your list and one for you. (Kathy Huber Houston Chronicle 2011-12-16)[Review of hardcover edition:] If the origin of plants interests you, and learning more about the history behind their uses, a new book by Bill Laws is well worth a read. Fifty Plants that Changed the Course of History provides insight into the way plants used as fuel, food, weapons and medicines have had an impact on civilizations. (David Hobson Kitchener Record 2011-04-01)[Review of hardcover edition:] This is a handsome book. A delight to look at and a

pleasure to hold. It is also a pleasure to read, not just because each page is beautifully illustrated but also because of the unusual, unexpected and fascinating histories it charts.... Each page is packed with facts. The Latin names and common names of each plant, a brief outline of its importance to us, the history of its uses and misuses, and countless small details...all give the reader a lot to absorb, but everything is presented in a humorous, easy-going way laced with plenty of curious anecdotes.... Bill Laws weaves together strands of ecological, political and agricultural history. His scope is worldwide and it ranges from the words of early herbalists to the discoveries of modern science. He draws inspiration from myth and legend, and, occasionally from the early philosophers. And the illustrations come from art, history, old magazines and modern botanical photography. Altogether, Laws has done a fine job. (Ann Skea Midwest Book Review 2011-04-01)[Review of hardcover edition:] The illustrations are from other works, but, honestly, I hardly looked at them because the prose packed such a wallop. (Linda Yang North American Rock Garden Society ([www.nargs.org](http://www.nargs.org)) 2012-01-31)[Review of hardcover edition:] A fascinating compendium that covers edible medicinal commercial and practical species. (K. Reka Badger Santa-Barbara News Press 2011-03-26)[Review of hardcover edition:] Bill Laws provides a concise profile of each of the plants included in his well-designed book. These informed entries are enhanced by botanical drawings and other illustrations. The entries make for entertaining reading. Even so, my favorite chapter feature was the sidebar box. Inside these brief newsy boxes the reader gets a peek outside the box of the normal. It's a peek at the wildcards that have emerged from the shuffled deck of human experience with plants. (William Scheick Texas Gardener's Seeds 2011-03-02)[Review of hardcover edition:] This is a surprisingly easy, and good, read. The subject changes faster than a kaleidoscope image within each chapter, and there are insights into most of the large cultures of the globe.... It is a useful read for adults, and it practically begs to be given to one's acquaintances of the early or mid-teen years who could use a look at the wider world. They will like it. With any luck, they will go out looking for more information on the subject presented in the brief, glittering flashes here. And, if you play your cards right, they will let you read it, too, when they are done with it. (Washington Gardener 2011-10-01)[Review of hardcover edition:] Fifty Plants that Changed the Course of History, by Bill Laws, presents interesting information and impressions about plants. (Joel Lerner Washington Post 2011-03-04)[Review of hardcover edition:] Fifty Plants That Changed the Course of History by Bill Laws is a perfect book for residents as well as visitors. Almost all the plants grow in Hawaii, and the short historical articles are beautifully illustrated with well-chosen color artwork. Coconut, pineapple, sugarcane and coffee are among the plants pleasantly presented. The built-in ribbon bookmark is a perfect touch for this small hardback. (Clear

Bill Laws is a social historian and the author of 10 books. He has contributed to such publications as the Guardian, the Daily Telegraph and BBC History magazine. He lives in England.

much effort was put into the production of this beautiful and interesting volume. I'm glad I bought it: information, color photos, color drawings, high quality paper, special fonts, and very affordable ! the only minus is the font size, a trifle too small. Even so, it's a winner. It also arrived earlier than promised and very well packaged. great service, too.

The facts for each of the plants were interesting and informative. Though I did find it hard to read sometimes, going back and having to re-read a section a couple of times. I believe this was because the author was also defining words in the sentence as well as trying to give you the information. By the time you got done reading what the word meant you had to go back a reread to know that the sentence was original saying.I will say again, that I found the information interesting, if not even intriguing. There were a couple of sections that I even marked pages, because I was so interested that I wanted to do further research into an area. There were some facts that I felt the author might have been grasping at straws. For example oranges being linked to malaria or coffee being linked to the Declaration of independence. But in the author defense, some of these facts could have been minor facts supporting or even in addition to the main connection to history.Even with what I feel to be minor setbacks, I quite enjoyed reading this book. Finding the facts intriguing enough to reiterate them to my significant other when I came across something I found interesting. I am also letting/recommending this book to my step father who enjoys books like these. More than likely I will be rereading this book again, and adding it to me "keep books".

Interesting reading!

This was a gift for the mom and she absolutely loves it! The stories are interesting and well written and the hardcover book was put together really well.

I wish the book had 100 wicked plants. It's fun for my niece who loves botany and for my nephew who loves history.

Nice pictures. Fine printing. Appropriate to inspire interest for the natural sciences like botany.

Descriptions of each plant are clear and concise. This book and the others in the series would be a great addition for a family library. Children and adults interested in science and horticulture will find this a quick and interesting read.

I wasn't expecting this to be a good book, but I realized this is one that is to be read cover to cover. The information about each plant (which is only a select few) is so fascinating that it's worth reading all the information about each one rather than skimming over the pages. There are a few photos and illustrations that accompany each plant, so it breaks up the text nicely.

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