

# The Botany Of Desire Summary

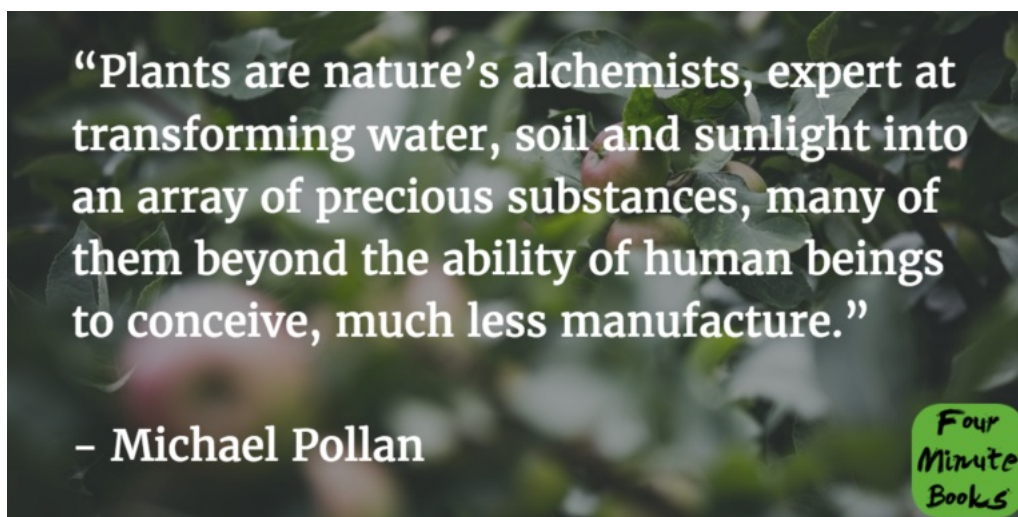
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 [fourminutebooks.com/the-botany-of-desire-summary](https://fourminutebooks.com/the-botany-of-desire-summary)

**1-Sentence-Summary:** *The Botany Of Desire describes how, contrary to popular belief, we might not be using plants as much as plants use us, by getting humans to ensure their survival, thanks to appealing to our desires for beauty, sweetness, intoxication and control.*

**Read in:** 4 minutes

**Favorite quote from the author:**



Michael Pollan writes great books about food. He's incredibly thorough in his research and never fails to tell interesting stories, in which he wraps up and embeds the important points he wants to get across to the reader.

His most popular book is *The Omnivore's Dilemma*, which has been showered with praise for its critical depiction of how the industrial revolution has changed the way we eat. *In Defense of Food* then shows us how to go back to more natural ways.

But *The Botany Of Desire* is different. Published in 2001, it's one of his oldest books, and it proposes a *very* intriguing idea: that plants use and control us as much as we use and control them.

Here are 3 lessons that will change how you look at plants forever:

1. Plants use humans and animals because they can't move.
2. The apple used its sweetness and one particular guy to spread itself all across America.
3. Our brain contains a place that's specifically designed to respond to cannabis.

Wanna know how the apple got its "green" card? Sure, here we go!

## Lesson 1: What if plants use you to spread their seeds? They might do so because they can't move on their own.

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The story we're always told in school is the one of the birds and the bees, explaining how plants depend on bees to spread their pollen, and offer their nectar in exchange. It's always a story of the "poor plants," who can't survive on their own and always need others to help.

This makes it natural for us to think of plants like *objects* and humans and animals like *subjects*. We're the active ones, we "do" stuff, and if we don't choose to include plants in our plan, well, they get left out.

**But what if the plants are in charge? What if *they're* the subjects, getting us to do stuff *for* them?**

If you think about it, the only reason that makes us think of plants as helpless creatures is that they can't move on their own. Fine, so they can't go anywhere and replicate, but if that's the only handicap they have, then all they have to do to overcome it is get others to come to them and do it for them.

And boy, are they doing a great job. By producing things that speak to our basic desires, specifically those for sweetness, beauty, intoxication and control, they might really be the ones controlling us.

Let's look at sweetness and intoxication in particular.

## Lesson 2: By being sweet the apple got one particular guy to spread it all across America.

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When you visit the US, apples abound. The east coast has an entire apple industry, with many popular tourist activities being apple picking, learning how to make apple cider, and of course visiting apple farms.

It might come as a shock to you then that there's only one kind of apple native to North America: the crabapple, and it's barely edible. Being most noteworthy for giving its name to a Simpsons character, you might now ask: "Well, where do all the apples come from then?"

As it turns out, one man is largely responsible for America's "appleness", and that man's name is Johnny Appleseed. Really named John Chapman, he got his nickname for contributing to the growth of millions of apple trees across 1,200 all throughout the country from 1800 to 1845.

European settlers had tried to introduce the apples they brought with them to America for decades, but they were unsuited for the new climate. Johnny realized that every apple's seeds contain a different set of genes, so by simply planting a lot of them, eventually some would

flourish. He traveled wherever America would expand next to, planting new trees and helping the new settlers abide by the government's rule that 50 apple or pear trees had to be planted on new land.

Of course, if Johnny and the people hadn't loved apples, none of this would've worked. But **by being a cheap, sweet, nourishing food in a time when sweet foods were rare and sugar was a luxury**, the apple got Johnny to spread itself all across an entire continent.

## Lesson 3: There's a place in our brains that's specifically designed to respond to THC, the substance in marijuana.

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**Note:** *None of this is medical advice, the below is purely informational. Be sure to follow your local laws and consult a professional before using marijuana, even if it's legal where you live.*

How do you think humans discovered that cannabis could make you high? I mean, it's not like someone just walked up to a plant, looked at it and thought: "Hey, let's dry this, roll it up, light it on fire and inhale the smoke, that should be a great idea!"

Pollan says that chances are we saw someone else *being* high near the plants and thus deduced that they could alter our state of consciousness. That "someone" was a bird. Yup, pigeons love to snack some cannabis.

Of course a long time went by between that and the late 1800s, when marijuana started becoming popular as a recreational drug. Until the mid 1930s, doctors even prescribed cannabis as a painkiller. But by 1937, the possession of marijuana was made illegal in the US, as the government felt it wasn't researched well enough.

Throughout the 20th century, several surprising discoveries were made:

1. The psychoactive substance that causes the "high" is called THC – *delta-9-tetrahydrocannabinol*.
2. **Our brain has receptors, specifically designed to react to THC**, just like it has receptors for serotonin and endorphins, for example.
3. Our brain also manufactures its *own* version of THC, a cannabinoid called anandamide.

We still don't know everything about cannabis, but the fact that our brains are designed to deal with it alone reveals how powerfully the plant uses its capacity to intoxicate to control us.

## The Botany Of Desire Review

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The only complaint I have about *The Botany Of Desire* is that the title is misleading. I had it sit in my library of blinks for a while, thinking it had something to do with how plants influence sex, for example explaining aphrodisiacs. This was a total surprise, and a great one. A very powerful exercise in first principles thinking.

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## What else can you learn from the blinks?

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- How many kinds of apples originally existed
- Why it's important to psychiatrists that you like flowers
- The year in which one tulip was worth more than a house
- How making marijuana illegal made it a lot better
- Why there are THC receptors in the female uterus
- How the potato gave us control over our lives

## Who would I recommend The Botany Of Desire summary to?

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The 16 year old hobby gardener, whose favorite subject in school is biology, the 29 year old Californian painter, who regularly smokes marijuana for inspiration, but doesn't know much about its biological powers, and anyone who thinks plants are just "things."