



The Triumph of Seeds: How Grains, Nuts, Kernels, Pulses, and Pips Conquered the Plant Kingdom and Shaped Human History

Thor Hanson

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We live in a world of seeds. From our morning toast to the cotton in our clothes, they are quite literally the stuff and staff of life, supporting diets, economies, and civilizations around the globe. Just as the search for nutmeg and the humble peppercorn drove the Age of Discovery, so did coffee beans help fuel the Enlightenment, and cottonseed help spark the Industrial Revolution. And from the Fall of Rome to the Arab Spring, the fate of nations continues to hinge on the seeds of a Middle Eastern grass known as wheat.

In nature and in culture, seeds are fundamental—objects of beauty, evolutionary wonder, and simple fascination. How many times has a child dropped the winged pip of a maple, marveling as it spirals its way down to the ground, or relished the way a gust of wind(or a stout breath) can send a dandelion’s feathery flotilla skyward? Yet despite their importance, seeds are often seen as a commonplace, their extraordinary natural and human histories overlooked. Thanks to Thor Hanson and this stunning new book, they can be overlooked no more.

What makes *The Triumph of Seeds* remarkable is not just that it is informative, humane, hilarious, and even moving, just as what makes seeds remarkable is not simply their fundamental importance to life. In both cases, it is their sheer vitality and the delight that we can take in their existence—the opportunity to experience, as Hanson puts it, “the simple joy of seeing something beautiful, doing what it is meant to do.” Spanning the globe from the Raccoon Shack—Hanson’s backyard writing hideout-cum-laboratory—to the coffee shops of Seattle, from gardens and flower patches to the spice routes of Kerala, this is a book of knowledge, adventure, and wonder, spun by an award-winning writer with both the charm of a fireside storyteller and the hard-won expertise of a field biologist. A worthy heir to the grand tradition of Aldo Leopold and Bernd Heinrich, *The Triumph of Seeds* takes us on a fascinating scientific adventure through the wild and beautiful world of seeds. It is essential reading for anyone who loves to see a plant grow.

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Robert Baxter:

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