



most connected with Kew Royal Botanical Gardens, contributed to this project. The “book” is actually a nicely illustrated clamshell box containing a paperback book and a stack of 40 size-A4 sheets of reproductions of historically hand-colored botanical artwork that correspond to the 40 chapters in the book, each highlighting a particular plant. The prints are of fine quality, on ivory paper, and would be suitable for matting and framing for home or office decoration. There is a fabric ribbon thoughtfully built into the box for marking one’s place in the stack of prints while reading the book.

The book inside the treasury is of matching size (A4) and is filled with more artwork in the chapter for each of the 40 plants. This includes other historical color plates, black-and-white historical photographs, published articles, and even handwritten correspondence. So this book, on its own, is a lovely collection of botanical visual art.

The contributing authors’ texts are printed in a very small font (maybe 6 point). For many readers, bright light and magnification will be needed. I would have preferred a larger font, made up for by less space between the lines. To say that the focus of the book is on the artwork is an understatement. The text pieces provide some human and historical context to support the artwork representing the plants.

Botanists might wonder why some plants were not included in the collection. Rice feeds more people on Earth than any other plant and has a graceful appearance. Bamboo has been put to an amazing array of uses and has been a subject for artwork over thousands of years. Parasitic plants have a fascinating life history and can be exceedingly attractive. The potato revolutionized

agriculture in the 19th century, but its susceptibility to a waterborne mold contributed to the starvation deaths of about a million people and the massive Irish diaspora. The World Health Organization named tobacco the single leading cause of preventable human death, yet its flowers are fragrant and beautiful. The cotton that clothes us and was a participant in the triangle trade, alongside which botanical exploration occurred, was excluded from this selection. Not one timber tree was selected, even though the book and prints are on paper.

The 40 plants chosen for the treasury, out of the quarter- to half-million known species, were probably selected, in part, on the basis of available artwork in the Kew collection. As would be expected in lifting up antique artwork, the modern text uses a mixture of older and newer taxonomic nomenclature while describing the discovery, distribution, historical use, and economic value of each plant. Although the Introduction mentions the inclusion of nonplants in the historical realm of botany, the 40 species chosen for this treasury are all true plants (Viridiplantae) but are limited to flowering plants (angiosperms) and three gymnosperms: *Encephalartos* (cycad), *Ginkgo*, and *Welwitschia*.

The 40 plants include some used for food (corn, wheat, citrus, grape, sugarcane, coconut, bromeliads) and for medicines (angelica, cinchona, datura, ginkgo, poppy). But others were chosen for their utility (pandanus, mulberry), interesting human history (tulip), sublime beauty (protea, datura, lotus, peony, orchids, bird-of-paradise), or spectacular natural history (corpse flower, welwitschia, passion flower, monkey cups, baobab). Also prominent in the text are the names, stories, and contributions of many famous 18th- and 19th-century botanists and explorers. Reading their writing style and seeing their personal handwriting and signatures is a special treat for modern biologists.

In summary, this treasury is indeed a compendium of beautiful antique artwork and interesting biological history of 40 fascinating plants. The prints are suitable for framing. The treasury would make an attractive and interesting book for a coffee table, but you may need a magnifying glass and bright light to read the text or to examine some of the details in the photographs and artwork. At the current pricing, this book is an outstanding value.



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PLANTS

The Botanical Treasury: Celebrating 40 of the World’s Most Fascinating Plants through Historical Art and Manuscripts. Edited by Christopher Mills. 2016. University of Chicago Press. (ISBN: 978-0-226-36934-1). 176 pp. Cloth, \$35.00.

What appears to be a slightly oversized book is reasonably titled a “treasury.” Over 20 authors,