



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

By Thor Hanson

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Winner of the 2016 PNBA Book Award

A finalist for the 2016 AAAS/Subaru SB&F Prize for Excellence in Science Books, Young Adult Science Book category

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 story-teller 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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Editorial Review

Review

“Written in an engaging style, the book flows nicely; each chapter leads into the next, so the book is hard to put down.”

—*Choice*

“Hanson's cinematic accounts of his own research and his interactions with the experts behind his stories set this apart from other era-hopping historical narratives.”

—*The American Gardener*

“Hanson does his job well. And in the end becomes one of my favorite kind of writers – the kind who can take something so seemingly (and perhaps deceptively) simple and so often overlooked and make it not only relevant, but fun.... People who want to get students more interested in science would do well to read *The Triumph of Seeds* and take note: tell stories, combine science and technology with pop culture, art, and literature, have a sense of humor, be enthusiastic.”

—*Catherine Ramsdell, Pop Matters*

“A beautifully written story of seeds. The author has a gift for explaining science in an engaging manner. Despite this lightness of touch, the book is deeply researched and explores a breadth of horticulture, history and ecology.”—*Garden News*

“[A] delight. Composed in charming and lively prose, the book introduces readers to a variety of quirky figures – biologists, farmers, archaeologists and everyday gardeners – who have something profound to say about a seemingly mundane topic: those little kernels that, against tremendous odds, have managed to take root all around us.... *The Triumph of Seeds* is a remarkable, gentle and refreshing piece of work that draws readers further into the wide arms of the world and makes them grateful for it.”

—*BookPage*

“Conservation biologist Hanson's new book showcases an even more approachable style than his 2011 *Feathers*. Using a personalized viewpoint derived from his backyard lab and dissertation research in Costa Rica with the almendro tree, as well as visits with specialists worldwide, he describes how seeds nourish, unite, endure, defend, and travel.”

—*Library Journal*

“[F]ast and fascinating prose.... Hanson, who has also chronicled feathers and gorillas, is a conservation biologist and Guggenheim fellow, and an ace dot-connector: He can draw a line between all the grain panics and crises and the tiny, miraculous structure of the seeds themselves, because he dives deeply into botany, economy and history. Also, he's just plain fun.”

—*Denver Post*

“[*The Triumph of Seeds*] successfully blends natural history, personal anecdotes, and ‘proper’ science and ties them all together seamlessly with lovely writing. Although often over-used, I think *Seeds* can be summed up appropriately in one word: Charming.”—*Nigel Chaffey, Annals of Biology blog*

“[A]n intriguing look at the acorns that grow into oaks, the orchid beans that flavor vanilla extract, and other

ordinary seeds that affect the world, often in extraordinary ways.... [*The Triumph of Seeds*] is a mix of lively stories, adventure, natural history, botany and ecology.... Hanson's book isn't a 'how-to,' but it is a 'don't miss' for naturalists, from amateurs to experts, or for anyone who enjoys growing plants from seeds.”
—*HGTVGardens.com*

“How do you summarize a book that traverses every continent, plumbs the depths of human and paleontological history and skims both the ocean waves and the dead silence of outer space? *The Triumph of Seeds* does just that, tracing the journey of seeds and making a case that the world as we know it is saturated with, and impossible without, seeds.”
—*Deseret News*

“[A] rip-roaring read.”
—**Robert Krulwich, *National Geographic's* Curiously Krulwich blog**

“With light, engaging prose Hanson shows how the little spheroids we tip out of a packet are in fact supremely elegant genetic time capsules. *The Triumph of Seeds* takes you past the casing into the extraordinary inner workings of objects without which our landscapes, dinner plates, and gardens would be unrecognisable. You will never be able to look at an orange pip or a sunflower seed in the same way again.”
—*New Scientist*

“[An] engaging book.... What makes *The Triumph of Seeds* more than a routine pop botany book is the way Mr. Hanson teases out the resonances between the ways that plants and humans use seeds.... [A] lively and intelligent book.”
—**Richard Mabey, *Wall Street Journal***

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“This is the kind of accessible science writing that keeps readers engrossed, never realizing how much knowledge they're picking up along the way. Who knew that seeds could be so fascinating? Hanson's narrative voice and personal anecdotes make for easy and enjoyable reading—and learning.”
—**Judges' citation, 2016 PNBA Book Award**

“San Juan Island conservation biologist Hanson explores the easily-overlooked but fascinating key to much of life on Earth, from coffee beans and the nut in Almond Joys to ancient grasses and sticky burdock seeds, which inspired Velcro”
—*Seattle Times, Best Books of 2015*

“Combining personal anecdotes with rich historical examples, conservation biologist Thor Hanson delves into the origins and evolution of seeds, explains their unique ability to equip new plants with the nutrients they need to gain purchase in their respective ecosystems, and describes their host of formidable defenses. Drawing connections between, for example, coffee beans and the Enlightenment and wheat shortages and the Arab Spring, Hanson deftly shows how seeds have also played an important role in human history.”
—*Science*

“[T]he genius of Hanson's fascinating, inspiring and entertaining book stems from the fact that it is not about

how all kinds of things grow from seeds; it is about the seeds themselves. Hanson...takes one of the least-impressive-looking natural objects and reveals a life of elegance and wonder.... Although he is a storyteller by nature, he also charms us with an infectious enthusiasm. The reader feels that Hanson cannot wait to tell us what comes next.... Like all good writers, he understands narrative — that a book, at its best, is a story, and that this one is built by spinning stories within stories. They are fun, sometimes they are funny, and they are always fascinating and readable.... [An] engaging book.”

—**Mark Kurlansky, *New York Times Book Review***

“Hanson delivers botanical information with wit and imagination. How seeds nurture themselves with starch, proteins, and oils may be a prosaic affair, but Hanson enlivens the explanation of their diverse nourishment strategies by examining the components of an Almond Joy candy bar: coconut palm, cacao beans, almond, corn.”

—**Orion**

“Hanson, a wide-ranging naturalist and writer, explores, chapter by chapter, the many faceted aspects of seeds.... And throughout, he weaves his own tales from his gardening. I loved this book and learned a lot.”

—**Carol Savonen, *Statesman Journal***

“For the past fifty seven years I have relied on seeds for food and, throughout much of my horticultural career for earning a living. This new book has re excited my fascination for these wonderful living structures.... [I]nformative, yet readable.... [A] fascinating book.”

—**Chris Allen, *The Gardening Times (UK)***

“In *The Triumph of Seeds*, Thor Hanson offers the reader a smorgasbord of the science and lore of seeds.... Hanson, following the recipe developed in his acclaimed book *Feathers*, breathes life into the sometimes dry topic of seed biology by weaving a colorful tapestry of stories that entertain as well as inform.... *The Triumph of Seeds* is eminently readable. Hanson is a great story teller and writes in a conversational style, so reading the book is like having an extended conversation with an entertaining friend.... *The Triumph of Seeds* is a thoroughly fun read, perfect for anyone wanting an introduction to seeds or for those who enjoy lively natural history.”

—**Douglasia (Washington Native Plants Society journal)**

“Hanson's highly readable *The Triumph of Seeds* is replete with fascinating facts, including the development of caffeine in coffee beans.”

—**Texas Gardener's Seeds**

“Thor Hanson has taken the history and science of these little marvels and drawn out a fascinating account of seed culture. We should not forget the importance of seeds in the liquor cabinet, as well. From rye whiskey, to wheat vodka, to barley beer, it would be a lot harder to get drunk without our friends in the grain world.”

—**Home Wet Bar blog**

“[Hanson's] luck for finding then writing about the magic in something common continues with *The Triumph of Seeds*.”

—**Seattle Times**

“Lest you get the impression that Hanson's book is all academic grit and gruel, be advised that he has thoroughly leavened his narrative with odd facts and fascinating digressions.”

—**Natural History**

“This is a charming book, inspired by Hanson's forays into seed identification and dispersal with his young, seed-obsessed son.... Hanson's twist of looking at human interactions with plants in their embryonic stage is new.... *The Triumph of Seeds* will engender thoughtful consideration of our joint future.”

—*Nature*

“Hanson's writing is lively, inquisitive, and knowledgeable. He draws on his own knowledge and that of a wide field of experts, writing a clear, comprehensible book that covers a wide range of topics.”

—*Fangirl Nation*

“[Hanson is] jocular and entertaining in his dispensing of remarkable facts about these little vessels of life-to-be.... From high-tech, high-security seed banks bracing for climate change to the story of the gum extracted from guar seeds that is used in everything from ice cream to fracking, this upbeat and mind-expanding celebration of the might of seeds is popular science writing at its finest.”

—*Booklist, starred review*

“[A] delightful account of the origins, physiologies and human uses of a vast variety of objects that plants employ to make more plants.... A fine addition to the single-issue science genre.”

—*Kirkus Reviews*

“Hanson writes in that breezy, enthused, confident way of good American science writers, scattering stories and analogies like dandelion seed-puffs.... [*The Triumph of Seeds*] is a good example of extrovert nature writing, weaving together biology, human history and ‘juicy seed lore’.”

—*British Wildlife (UK)*

“Who knew that seeds could be so thrilling and dangerous? Thor Hanson is a lively storyteller, a lyrical writer, and a quick wit. *The Triumph of Seeds* is more than an engrossing work of natural history. It's a compelling and highly entertaining journey, populated by scientists and historians, criminals and explorers, aviators and futurists. Following Hanson's global voyage is the best sort of armchair travel, because it is filled with wonder, poetry, and discovery.”

—**Amy Stewart, author of *The Drunken Botanist: The Plants That Create the World's Great Drinks*, a New York Times Bestseller**

“This beautifully written book is a magnificent read. Every page is full of surprises and illuminating insights, illustrating the fascinating evolution of seeds, and their extraordinary impact on humans, past and present. A master storyteller, Hanson has created a first-rate natural history. When you reach the end of this page-turner, you will wish there were more ... and you will never look at seeds in the same way.”

—**Eric Jay Dolin, author of *Leviathan: The History of Whaling in America* and *When America Met China: An Exotic History of Tea, Drugs, and Money in the Age of Sail***

About the Author

Thor Hanson is a conservation biologist, Guggenheim Fellow, Switzer Environmental Fellow, and winner of the John Burrough Medal for excellence in nature writing and natural history. The author of *Feathers* and *The Impenetrable Forest*, Hanson lives with his wife and son on an island in Washington State.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Irene Gwyn:

Book is definitely written, printed, or illustrated for everything. You can understand everything you want by a reserve. Book has a different type. As we know that book is important factor to bring us around the world. Beside that you can your reading expertise was fluently. A publication The Triumph of Seeds: How Grains, Nuts, Kernels, Pulses, and Pips Conquered the Plant Kingdom and Shaped Human History will make you to always be smarter. You can feel considerably more confidence if you can know about almost everything. But some of you think which open or reading a new book make you bored. It is not necessarily make you fun. Why they might be thought like that? Have you searching for best book or acceptable book with you?

Connie Pauls:

The guide untitled The Triumph of Seeds: How Grains, Nuts, Kernels, Pulses, and Pips Conquered the Plant Kingdom and Shaped Human History is the publication that recommended to you to read. You can see the quality of the publication content that will be shown to you actually. The language that article author use to explained their ideas are easily to understand. The article writer was did a lot of exploration when write the book, so the information that they share to you personally is absolutely accurate. You also could possibly get the e-book of The Triumph of Seeds: How Grains, Nuts, Kernels, Pulses, and Pips Conquered the Plant Kingdom and Shaped Human History from the publisher to make you more enjoy free time.

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