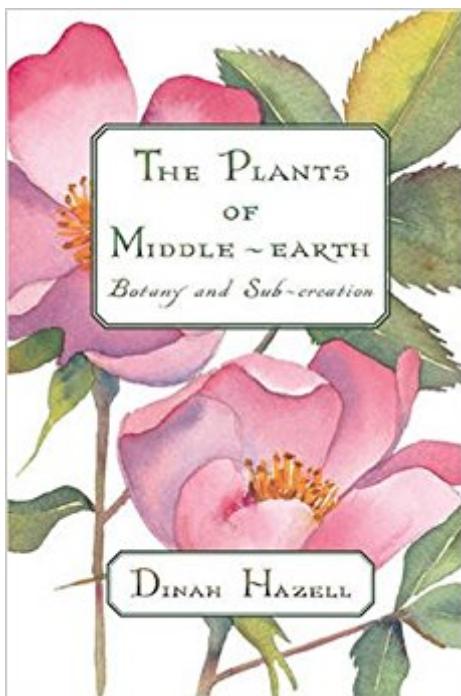


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The Plants Of Middle-Earth: Botany And Sub-Creation



Synopsis

A new path for exploring the culture and values of Tolkien's Middle-earth "Rather than inventing an alien world into which human and familiar characters are introduced, as in science fiction, Tolkien created a natural environment that is also home to 'supernatural' beings and elements, as in medieval works like Beowulf. The Shire is always the touchstone to which the hobbits return mentally and against which they (and we) measure the rest of Middle-earth. By creating a sense of familiarity and belonging early and then in each of the cultures encountered, we can meet 'others' without feeling estranged." --from the Introduction

Beautifully illustrated with dozens of original full-color and black-and-white drawings, *The Plants of Middle-earth* connects readers visually to the world of Middle-earth, its cultures and characters and the scenes of their adventures. Tolkien's use of flowers, herbs, trees, and other flora creates verisimilitude in Middle-earth, with the flora serving important narrative functions. This botanical tour through Middle-earth increases appreciation of Tolkien's contribution as preserver and transmitter of English cultural expression, provides a refreshing and enlivening perspective for approaching and experiencing Tolkien's text, and allows readers to observe his artistry as sub-creator and his imaginative life as medievalist, philologist, scholar, and gardener.

The Plants of Middle-earth draws on biography, literary sources, and cultural history and is unique in using botany as the focal point for examining the complex network of elements that comprise Tolkien's creation. Each chapter includes the plants' description, uses, history, and lore, which frequently lead to their thematic and interpretive implications. The book will appeal to general readers, students, and teachers of Tolkien as well as to those with an interest in plant lore and botanical illustration.

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Customer Reviews

"Rather than inventing an alien world into which human and familiar characters are introduced, as in science fiction, Tolkien created a natural environment that is also home to 'supernatural' beings and elements, as in medieval works like Beowulf. The Shire is always the touchstone to which the hobbits return mentally and against which they (and we) measure the rest of Middle-earth. By creating a sense of familiarity and belonging early and then in each of the cultures encountered, we can meet 'others' without feeling estranged."

Dinah Hazell specializes in medieval English literature and cultural studies and has published several articles on the subject. An independent scholar, she has designed curricula for a number of courses taught at San Francisco State University, including one on Tolkien. She lives in Menlo Park, California, and is an avid gardener.

I am an avid M.E. and Tolkien fan and a student of permaculture and edible forestry. This being said, I definitely had my doubts about the book. The author does give a fair bit of background information into the LOTR text, but I really didn't mind the references and review at all. The plant references were extremely helpful, especially for those gardeners who want to incorporate these into their existing landscape. The author did a great job, but as a reader (and gardener) I was left asking for more information, implementation, and practical application. What I appreciated about the author is that she referred to Tolkien's work in a research paper format, which really validated the piece for me. On a practical note, I would have liked to see more plant information, instead of merely listing them at points. In addition, it would have been extremely interesting to read how to plant a garden specifically based off of the geographical regions in Tolkien's work. This book was a great read and I sincerely hope there are others like it produced in the future.

This book is beautifully written and illustrated. It also has a floral scent; literally smells like flowers.

Good study material!

Love this book!

The book was very informative and for a LOTR geek like me will help me plant an middle earth garden.

I purchased a copy of this book for a friend of mine who loves both plants and the Lord of the Rings, and was delighted to find that it not only met but exceeded my expectations. The premise of the book that one may explore the world of Tolkien through its flora, and this is demonstrated marvelously. Other than having (several years ago) read Tolkien's work, I did not have any particular foundation in either Middle-earth or botany, and yet I found the book engrossing and easy for a non-initiate to both understand and appreciate. About 100 plants are mentioned, a few of them fictional but most taken from real life. For the latter variety, the author discusses plant lore and historical symbolism, and continues by showing how this significance is reflected in Tolkien's writing. Plot events from his Middle-earth stories are described in detail, and in many cases the author uses these as a framework to introduce new plants. She also makes connections to other aspects of Tolkien's life, such as biographical information, short stories, artwork, and letters. Aside from the writing, the book has absolutely exquisite illustrations reminiscent of Tolkien's own art. They range from flowing watercolor to delicate line drawings, and from the splendid cover art to the depictions of individual plants throughout. The binding under the dust jacket is quite nice - green cloth with gold lettering down the spine. At the end of the book (after the five main chapters) are two appendices, thorough citations, a bibliography, information about the illustrators, and an index. On the whole, this is a wonderful book. The coverage is thorough, and I suspect even the most knowledgeable can find within its pages new material about Middle-earth and botany. The next time I read The Lord of the Rings, I will be sure to keep this book - and what it has taught me - in mind.

A refreshing look at the works of J.R.R. Tolkien from a botanical point of view, The Plants of Middle Earth gives us unique insights into Tolkien's use of plants to create images of his fantasy world in the Hobbit / Lord of the Rings series. Author Dinah Hazell begins by pointing out Tolkien's use of plant names in naming various female hobbits. Naming female children after flowers is not unique to hobbit culture, but Tolkien's conscious application of the practice, combined with a few unusual instances such as Asphodel, Primula, Gilly(flower), and Pippin (here a male name) are happy reminders of Tolkien's efforts to create a modern-day Arcadia. Ms. Hazell fills us in on some of Tolkien's reasons for choosing such names. Of particular interest is Lobelia Sackville-Baggins, named after Vita Sackville-West, landscape architect of Sissinghurst Castle. Given the

predominantly masculine character of the Lord of the Rings, this bit of feminine socio-genealogy lends an important sense of balance to the story in general. Leaving Hobbiton and the Shires, with little more in the way of botany than a few orchards, turnip patches and sunflowers, we set out on a journey that leads us through various and sundry landscapes, which Tolkien illustrates with a wide variety of trees and flowers, some real, some imagined. We first go to Whithywindle, then to Weathertop, Rivendell, Lothlorien, Isengard (interestingly devoid of plant life), Dol Baran, Emyn Muil, the Dead Marshes, the Gates of Moria, Cirith Gorgor, the Haunted Pass, and finally to Ithilien. At each stop along the way, Ms. Hazell sheds light on the plants we find and their significance. The next chapter describes Ithilien, the land of elves. The hobbits arrive in March, greeted with familiar fragrances and hues. Heather, broom and dogwood delight our senses, as do a host of herbs and spices. Hazell depicts this as among the richest of forests in Middle Earth. Over thirty trees, shrubs, flowers and other plants are described by Tolkien in the style of a medieval catalog: fir, cedar, cypress, terebinth, olive, bay, juniper, myrtle, filbert, oak and ash. Here Hazell informs us of Tolkien's affinity with William Morris and Gertrude Jekyll, whose works tend to inform Tolkien's imaginary landscape. While Tolkien dabbled in earlier sketches, Ithilian is his master achievement of woodland creation. Hazell devotes an entire chapter to the meaning of trees and forests, supplementing her findings with bits and pieces of woodland lore that she has picked up along the way. Several of Tolkien's letters provide evidence that he was aware of this lore. The first significant stop is Mirkwood, inhabited by menacing orcs and spiders. (Tolkien's seeming obsession with giant spiders can be explained by the fact that he was bitten by a type of tarantula, when he was a child.) The trees in the Old Forest have mobility and intelligence, focused on Old Man Willow. Here dismal flora such as nettles, thistles, hemlock and wood parsley grow. Here also Tom Bombadil and Goldberry seek to maintain balance and harmony in nature. In Lothlorian the past seems to live in the present, but trees here have no independent personality; they house the elves. The charm of the place derives from its inhabitants, not from its flora, as in Ithilien. Fangorn Forest is the home of the Ents, those dangerous and powerful trees that both walk and talk (they were taught to speak by the elves). As we tour the four forests, Hazell details the lives of beeches, oaks, willows, and rowans, before delving into a final section of lore called "the power of trees and nature." Here we are treated to more of Tolkien's private thoughts by way of his letters, before going on to Hazell's thematic recapitulation. Drawing thematic conclusions, the author connects botany to Tolkien's themes of a new age. Sauron's evil force has resulted in the destruction of plant life, represented in the Withered Tree; Gandalf finds a sapling near the dead White Tree of Gondor, which when planted in the Court of the Fountain in Minas Tirith offers renewed hope. Hazell points out how the restoration of flora is

one of the most visible symbols of victory over the power of evil. The hobbits, who play no small part in bringing about the Fourth Age, return to the Shire, where recovery begins and surpasses all expectations and hopes. Galadriel's parting gift to Sam is a gift of earth, which aids in the renewal of crops and other decorative and symbolic flora in the Shires. Tolkien defined recovery as the gain of a renewed view of things that have become stale or were taken for granted. Frodo's wounds can never heal, but his character becomes better as a result of his pain. Although the appendix is somewhat informative, it begins to lead us, if not directly then indirectly, into a realm that is somewhat more on the occult side than Tolkien originally intended. If indeed he consciously downplayed religious allegory, as Hazell says, why would we consciously upgrade a more primitive belief in plant superstition? By and large, this book makes a good aide for casual students or fans of Tolkien. I do not think it could qualify as an academic study; it is more the work of an excellent well-informed amateur. Richly illustrated by Linda Logan and Marsha Mello, among others, *The Plants of Middle Earth* makes a welcome addition to any garden-lover's bookshelf.

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