

The Incredible Journey of Plants

Stefano Mancuso

Grisa Fischer, Illustrator

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Silent and stationary, mired in dirt: such is life of plants. Not the most appropriate station for the entity primarily responsible for sustaining life on Earth. But humility reigns in the plant world, while we humans shovel on ever more disrespect, devoting far fewer resources to seeking to understand plants than we do to animals. Indeed, we still don't have a decent idea of how many plants exist. Even so, progress is being made, and sophisticated research technology is showing us just how sensitive, communicative, and important to the exquisite balance of the universe plants are.

In *The Incredible Journey of Plants*, Stefano Mancuso celebrates the evolved genius of dozens of plant species—coconuts, palms, the surviving weeping willow 1,214 feet from ground zero in Hiroshima, spruces, and acacias among them. In his preface, he sets the tone by cautioning that we “will never be able to understand plants if we look at them as if they were impaired animals. They are a form of life that is different, neither simpler nor less developed, than the animal form of life.”

He further advises that we reconsider the entrenched idea that plants are immobile: “Although plants are not able to change places over the course of their individual lives, they are able, from generation to generation, to conquer the most distant lands.” Whether their seeds or spores are dispersed by wind, water, animals, insects, or countless other methods, plants exemplify life's relentless drive to expand and colonize most every environment on Earth.

Sprightly and engaging, Mancuso is a leading authority on plant neurobiology—signaling and communication—from his perch at the University of Florence.

MATT SUTHERLAND (March / April 2020)

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