

## BOTANY

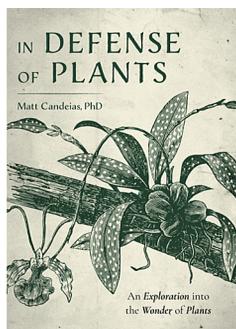
**In Defense of Plants: an Exploration into the Wonder of Plants**

By Matt Candeias. 2021. Mango Publishing Group. 280 pages, 20.00 CAD, Hardcover. Also available as an E-book or Audiobook.

Written by the creator of the long-running (2015–present) podcast and blog of the same name, this semi-autobiographical work is an extension of the author’s goal that the reader “see plants, even if for a moment, how I see plants” (p. 9). As the author of various print and online articles under the “In Defense of Plants” name, Candeias has considerable experience writing and talking about plants for a broad audience. Far from a dry textbook style, the writing comes alive through the author’s obvious passion for plants and their ways.

Physically, this book is an odd size—at 13.5 cm wide and 19 cm tall, this is not your typical hardcover. It uses a small font which some readers may find challenging. The book is also printed on thin paper that allows type or images on the reverse side of a page to show through, giving it a grey tone and an almost newsprint-like feel. Combined with the small font, the paper transparency makes it a tougher than average read. (I have good eyesight and still found it a bit challenging in lower light.) The greyscale photos make for a mixed experience—several are very effectively balanced but some are not well suited to greyscale and appear overly dark, washed out, or murky.

Most chapters consist of a series of examples under a theme, typically accompanied by a few photos of the plants under discussion. The tone is very informal; often the author writes directly to the reader, using



the first person and offering personal reflections and opinions. This casual tone is not a writing style that will appeal to all readers, but it does add personality to the writing. Following an oddly defensive Preface, the bulk of the work is interesting facts about various plants. Candeias explores a diversity of life stages and strategies, from pollination by seedsnipe birds to seed dispersal by fish. A personal favourite: bat pollination facilitated through specialized banner petals on the sea bean flower, adapted as a nectar guide for the frequency of the nectar feeding bat’s echolocation. The really fun part is that once the flower has been visited, the banner petal shape changes and bats learn not to revisit spent nectar sources, thus increasing cross pollination (pp. 90–94). The final chapter, The Problems Plants Face, is a brief treatise on the various threats to plant diversity and populations accompanied by actionable steps readers can take to help.

Overall, *In Defense of Plants* has the feel of listening to someone really interested in plants tell you all about them, a sort of highlight reel of weird and wonderful facts organized around a theme by chapter. While the intended audience is the broad public, this book will likely appeal most to those who already hold an interest in plant ecology, diversity, life histories, cultivation, etc. Although I found it tougher to get through than I anticipated, if your eyesight is good and you enjoy learning new things about the world around you, this book is a solid collection of interesting plant miscellany written by an author who knows their stuff.

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