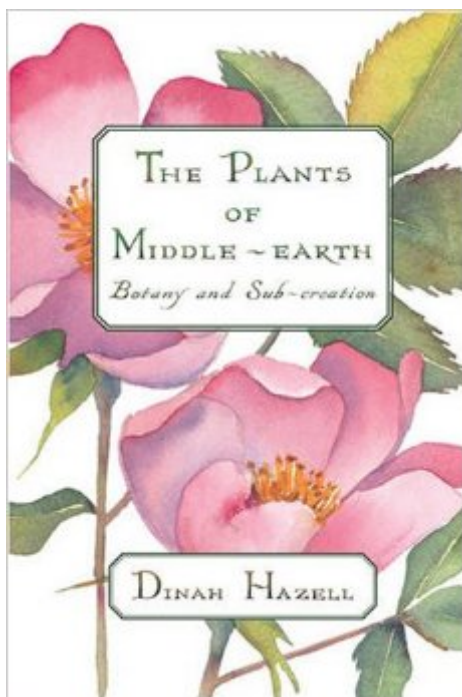


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The Plants Of Middle-Earth: Botany And Sub-Creation



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.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a very nice book about important items in Middle-earth. Apart from some typical middle-earth plants like elanor, athelas and mallorn, all the flora from Middle-earth can be found in your average plant determination book. They help you feel at home in Middle-earth. Dinah Hazell explores this aspect of Tolkiens world. She links the plants also to biographical information on Tolkien, to other authors well-known by Tolkien like William Morris and William Shakespeare, to old literature, and to British folklore. The book has five chapters. The first is about the names of female hobbits, which are all related to plants (Rosie and Lily Cotton, e.g.). The second chapter takes you on a botanical trip from Frodo's garden to the crossroads. Ithilien gets a chapter of its own, as it has a very detailed description of its mediterranean vegetation. Also woods and trees get their own chapter. The last chapter is on destruction and recovery, both symbolised by botanical life. The destruction of plants is one of the dominant manifestations of evil (the Two Trees, Isengard, rowan trees in Fangorn). The book has beautiful illustrations, b/w drawings and watercolours. One point of criticism is that Dinah Hazell only talks about plants in The Lord of the Rings. She refers to other books, but she did not take the time to reread even The Hobbit on extra botanical information, let alone Unfinished Tales or HoME. And that is a pity.

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.

Hazell does a wonderful job with plant lore, and the early chapter on the Shire is a delight. But past that, the book is largely padding. For one thing, she recapitulates the plot of *The Lord of the Rings* to an entirely unnecessary degree. How many people would pick up this book without being familiar with Middle-Earth? For another, she goes beyond plants to analyses of Tolkien's thought and intentions that not only seem unconnected to her theme of "botany and sub-creation" but offer only rare moments of insight beyond her many sources. However, her writing is enjoyable and the illustrations are wonderful.

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.

I received this book for Christmas - it was on my wish list - and I have to say I was somewhat disappointed. The title made me think it would be an in-depth look at how Tolkien used botany to further his sub-creation, and to make it more believable in our world. The reality was that this book just talks about the plants he uses in Middle-earth, without reference to anything else. It's a gardener's handbook, that's all. One whole chapter was devoted just to the flower names of hobbit women. Interesting, yes, but does it actually increase your knowledge and/or understanding of

Tolkein's mythos? Another chapter determines that Treebeard is most likely an elm. Also interesting, but again, does knowing that actually increase your enjoyment or understanding of the LotR? I regret to say that I found this book to be very superficial (I was hoping for something more in line with Verlyn Flieger's works) despite its intriguing title.

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