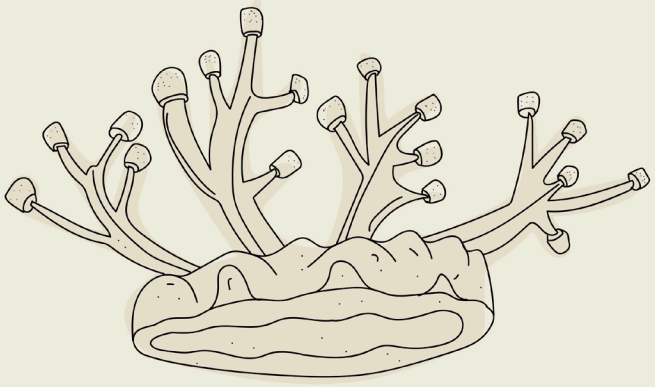


Upside-Down Jellyfish

Thomas Lamarre

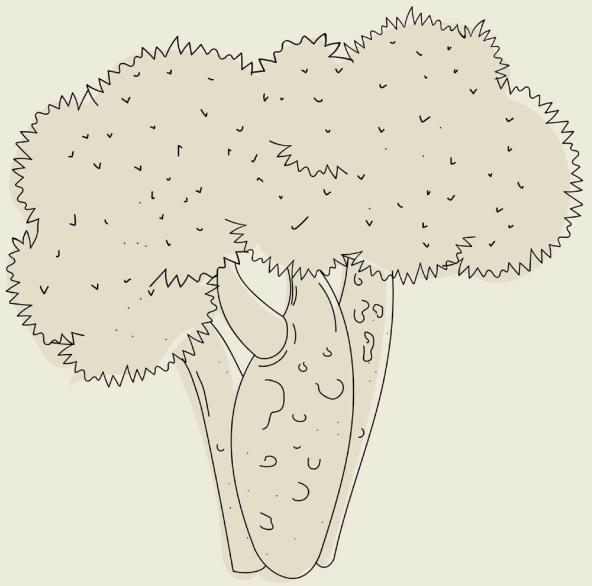
Although in common usage the term “plant” usually refers to vascular plants, it is sometimes used more broadly to encompass photosynthetic organisms, which emboldens me to introduce a character with whom I used to work, the jellyfish *Cassiopea xamancha*, whose tentacles host photosynthetic algae. This jellyfish is characterized as being upside down because its tentacles reach sunward, while its downward-facing umbrella allows it to rest on the bottom. Apparently, endosymbiosis goes with an inversion that makes the jellyfish as much benthic as pelagic, as if tending toward the rootedness of a vascular plant, with tentacles spreading like foliated branches to increase the surface for exposure to sunlight.

Illustrations by Silvia Neretti

Bladderwort

Stacey Moran

Utricularia is cultivated for its beautiful flowers, which are often compared to the snapdragon and orchid. Yes, *Utricularia* is carnivorous, the largest genus of carnivorous plants in fact, using its sophisticated bladder structure to capture small aquatic organisms (mostly insects and their larvae). But are they also cannibals? *Utricularia* has also been called a "vegetarian plant," since it digests not only animals, but also other plant species (especially planktonic algae and cyanobacteria). There are terrestrial and aquatic species of *Utricularia*; in both types, the main part of the plant remains below the surface, except for flowers and stems. The plant has no true roots; many aquatic species float freely on the surface of ponds—some are lithophytic and adapt to rapid streams and waterfalls. Some surmise that *Utricularia* adapted to cannibalism to acquire the nutrients without a root system.



Tsubaki

Michael Fisch

We are Tsubaki, or *Camellia japonica*. We are evergreens and members of the tea family. Some say that we are the most famous tree of Japan! Indeed, we now inhabit all that nation's islands, from Okinawa to Hokkaido. But pay attention because we have many forms and at least two so-called types—Northern and Southern. Our trunks can grow thick and stout, or thin and spindly and intertwined in a dense understory thicket, and our leaves can be smooth or serrated. The oil that can be extracted from our fruit was once used for many things but today is found mostly in hair and skin products for human animals. Most importantly, we are creatures of transitional spaces, occupying the boundaries between land and sea, and heaven and earth. You will find us stretched along the coastlines, our roots wrapped around the rocky shore and our leaves licking the ocean mist. You will find us around old gravestones as well, providing shade for the dead and a symbol of rejuvenation for the living.

Bamboo

Yangquiao Lu

I was preparing bamboo shoots for a rib stew when it occurred to me: though I don't keep bamboo among my dozens of houseplants, I am entangled with bamboo more so than all of them. Bamboo (subfamily *Bambusoideae*), subfamily of tall treelike grasses of the family *Poaceae,* comprising more than 115 genera and 1,400 species. Bamboos are distributed in tropical and subtropical to mild temperate regions, with the heaviest concentration and largest number of species in east and southeast Asia and on islands of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Bamboos are typically fast-growing perennials, with some species growing as much as 30 cm (1 foot) per day; therefore they are often considered "invasive." Bamboos are used for a great variety of purposes. The seeds of some species are eaten as grain, and the cooked young shoots of some bamboos are eaten as vegetables, especially in Chinese cuisines. I love cooking and eating bamboo. It is in my main dish, side dish, hot sauce, and snacks. I eat and cook with it (bamboo chopsticks and steamers). Growing up in China, I learned to appreciate bamboo for its symbolism of integrity and nobility, but bamboo is by no means aloof. Quite the contrary, its versatility makes bamboo a social plant. As a child, I slept on a bamboo cooling mat and used bamboo curtains. Their touch and smell are still imprinted in my memories.

Buzz Buttons

Isabel Kranz

Acmella oleracea, sometimes called “buzz buttons” for its pungent taste, provides nourishment to humans. The tingling herb can be added in salads or cooked in stews. As an extract, jambú (its Brazilian name) is used in cosmetics, supposedly reducing wrinkles by working as a kind of mild botox (something I have yet to try). However, it is because of another name that *Acmella oleracea* is the plant that links my interest in reading and writing and the vegetal. In the 19th-century books on the sentimental language of flowers that I started my plant research with, paracress (yet another vernacular name) is sometimes called “the alphabet plant.” Letters are supposed to appear in the flower buds, transmitting a message to anyone inaugurated in this kind of plant communication. As much as this phantasmagoric idea of writing coming out of the plant body intrigued me, it made me realize that treating plants merely as motifs does not do justice to either literature or plants. This is why, in my research, I try to be specific about the plants and the texts I work on, to learn more about vegetal ways of being, but also to always localize and historicize the plant knowledge that I am trying to tease out from literary and botanical texts.

Moreton Bay Fig

Vicki Kirby

A native to parts of Australia, the Moreton Bay Fig (*Ficus macrophylla*), or *birra birra* in Gadigal language, is massive and imposing, a recognized elder among the arboreal clan. You might think you've encountered a grove of trees, but the sense of many is deceptive; there's just the one. Its branches can produce stringy clusters of aerial roots that gather nutrients from the air, only to thicken and become branch-like buttress supports when they reach the ground. There are many of these trees in Sydney—indeed, near where I live—and I often observe their effect on passers-by who break their stride and come to a standstill in reverent appreciation. The tree is a thoughtful designer, an architect who anticipates the leverage and strength its load dispersion will require and restructures itself accordingly. The flowers, perversely, are inside the fruit, which involves the fig in an amorous, cross-species flirtation. Its favored love object is a wasp, and their queer relationship has been enduring and reproductively successful. Finally, these figs don't grow from seeds in the ground but start their life high up in the branches of a host tree from which they draw sustenance and slowly strangle. Nature can be murderous in its calculations!

Goldgelbe

Christina Jauernik

Pisum sativum, the Goldgelbe: a modest plant, not very selective regarding its growing sites. These ones, 7mm grain-sized seeds, are acquired from the seed archive in Schiltern, Austria. Goldgelbe are a tall-growing, early-maturing, robust type with white, remarkably large flowers. The pea is one of the oldest cultivated plants; it has been grown for 10,000 years. At one time viewed as a symbol of fertility, at another as food for the dead, it pursued a career as a scientific plant model. But it is the plant's movement vocabulary, its work with momentum and sensorial interest in surrounding support structures, that make it a curious research companion to study collective perceptual modalities as forms of a living, working sensoria.

Alpine Pennygrass

Adam Nocek

Found primarily in Europe, the *Thlaspi caerulescens*, or alpine pennygrass, is a member of the Brassica family and is a heavy metal hyperaccumulator, which has been the object of intense research in plant biology since the late 19th century. Essentially, *Thlaspi caerulescens*, along with a limited number of other plant species, is not only able to tolerate high levels of toxicity in the soil but it's also able to accumulate heavy metals—such as nickel, zinc, cadmium, and cobalt—in its shoots. In recent years, the phytoremediation capabilities of *Thlaspi caerulescens* have been transformed into design technologies to remediate polluted urban landscapes.

Sporophyll of Wakame

Jun Mizukawa

和布蕪 or Sporophyll of Wakame (*Undaria Pinnatifida*), popularly cultured on the Sanriku coast. Though customarily known as the 'root' of Wakame, it is a common misnomer for I have no root. I also capture carbon from the atmosphere, so we should be friends (if not already). I am rich in alginic acid, fucoidan, and unsaturated fatty acid, which makes me slimy to the touch. I am scrumptious whether consumed raw, cooked, or sun-dried.