

the
botany
of desire

2 x 60



PBS
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CONTACT

Tom Koch, Vice President
PBS International
10 Guest Street
Boston, MA 02135 USA

TEL: 617-300-3893
FAX: 617-779-7900

jtkoch@pbs.org
pbsinternational.org

The Botany of Desire—based on Michael Pollan’s bestselling book of the same name—tells the story of our relationship with plants, from the plants’ point of view. The seeds for the documentary were first sown on a mild May afternoon, when Pollan was planting potatoes in his garden near a flowering apple tree that was fairly vibrating with bees. He began to wonder whether there was any real difference between his role in his garden and that of the bumblebee.

The film tells the utterly original story of four everyday plants and the way they have domesticated humankind. In 1983, Pollan and his wife left New York City to make a new home on an abandoned dairy farm. Pursuing a childhood fascination with gardening and an old-fashioned hubris about his ability to control nature, Pollan set about creating a garden. He had no way of knowing that it would eventually lead him to an original and provocative re-interpretation of the relationship between plants and people.

One of the great conceits of human civilization is to put itself outside nature—constantly shaping and re-shaping the wild for its purposes. We divide the world into subjects and objects, and in the garden—as in nature generally—we are the subjects. But what if that line of thought is all wrong? After all, a bumblebee would probably also regard itself as a subject in the garden, and he’d see the bloom he’s plundering for its nectar as an object. The truth of the matter is that the flower has cleverly manipulated the bee into hauling its pollen from blossom to blossom.

It is easy to believe that the history of agriculture is the history of human efforts to domesticate plants. But what if, at the same time, the plants are exploiting very real human desires to fulfill their most primal genetic goal: to make more copies of themselves? The question therefore arose in Pollan’s mind: had he chosen to plant these potatoes, or did the potato make him do it?

This two-hour documentary begins in the author’s garden and roams the world—from the potato fields of Peru and Idaho to the apple orchards of Kazakhstan— from the tulip markets of Amsterdam to the medical marijuana grow rooms of the United States. It explores the natural history of four plants— the potato, the apple, the tulip and marijuana—and the human desires that link their destinies to our own.

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CREDITS

Producer, Director: Michael Schwarz

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