

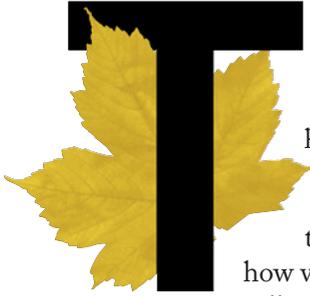
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# Editorial. Plants in Places



**PLANT PERSPECTIVES 3/1 - 2026: 5–10**  
doi: 10.3197/whppp.63876246815920  
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This issue of *Plant Perspectives* provides further testimony to the generative range of research emerging from interdisciplinary approaches to plants. Despite conceptual and methodological variations, the work collected here reflects an intensive focus on place – broadly defined – from the microcosmic to the macrocosmic. Underscoring how vegetal life is always geographically and topographically embedded, the articles, poems and reviews advance a reexamination of place in terms of flora, human-vegetal relations and botanical futures. Accordingly the issue aligns with recent anthropological research on collaborative human engagements with plants in creating – and dwelling in – place (Alkan and Calkins 2025).

Through plants' sessile anchoredness in a habitat – whether wild, suburban or urban – space becomes place. If space is deficient in social connections, values and meanings – as a nondescript abstraction or geometric *tabula rasa* – then plants are essential to transforming space into place. Consider, for instance, how botanical life began to populate and reclaim Chernobyl's exclusion zone just three years after the nuclear catastrophe (Thompson 2019). As this example of floristic flourishing reveals, place emerges as someone – human or more-than-human – attributes meaning to a space, infusing it with the vibrant affects and memories held by individuals and communities.

Sense of place arises from a distinct feeling for a place as minds, bodies, sensoria and experiences converge. As this issue demonstrates, a sense of place through flora – redwoods, jacarandas, mulberries, cannabis, wax palms and Öro pines – is fundamental to belonging and identity. Sense of place intensifies through actions, exertions and recollections underlain by the manifold sensory faculties of vision, audition, olfaction, gustation, somatosensation, proprioception and thermoception. For writers such as Henry David Thoreau, sense of place is a corporealized – palpable and tasted – spatiality (Ryan 2015). In turn, sense of place engenders topophilia, an abiding attachment to place predicated on affection and devotion, as theorised by geographer Yi-Fu Tuan (1977) and philosopher Gaston Bachelard (1994).

From street trees to household plants, from mustard fields to kelp beds, the vegetal world is integral to place perception. Aristotle conceptualised place in terms of time, motion and locomotion, or what he called *change of place*. For Aristotle, place imparts form and shape to bodies within the parameters of length, breadth and depth (Barnes 1991: 52). In other words, place is ‘the boundary of the containing body at which it is in contact with the contained body’ (Aristotle in Barnes 1991: 57). According to this conception, place pulsates with respect to the body – or bodies – enclosed within its demarcations. Philosophy categorises this theory of place as *phenomenological* – entailing sensory apprehension of the world’s complexities – and *phytophenomenological* vis-à-vis the experience of plants. Neologisms such as *floratopaesthesia* attempt to particularise the sense of place manifesting through iterative engagement with plants over time and seasons (Ryan 2012: 307).

In geography, anthropology and cognate disciplines, studies of place have been marked by an alternation between upholding the value of sense of place and critiquing the ubiquity of senseless space. Proposed by social scientist Marc Augé (2008), the concept of *non-place* points to locations of excessive information and space – warehouse-size supermarkets, megastores, hub airports, motorways and skyscrapers. Yet what happens when plants encroach upon the nothingness of non-places? At Singapore’s Changi Airport, for instance, a lively cohort of bamboos, cacti, orchids, sunflowers and water lilies divert visitors’ attention away from the cold emptiness of the structure’s interiority (Seo 2021). In these settings – if only transiently – plants nurture a sense of place, countering what geographer Edward Relph (1976) termed *placelessness* as a feeling of disorientation in response to homogenised natural and cultural environments devoid of character – from loblolly pine plantations to central business districts.

Concerted attention to place weaves through this issue’s six articles. Thomas Storey examines the entwinement of arboreality and technology in Richard Powers’s *The Overstory*. In the eight years since its publication, the novel has become a significant object of study for its narrativisation of plant cognition research endowing trees with expressive agencies. While affirming popular writing’s ability to inform a wider audience about tree percipience, Storey argues that technological determinism is an inescapable element of the work, reflecting the interpenetration of global ecologies and digital infrastructure. The craft

of Powers's fiction, however, is its reconciling of the technological and the arboreal where the digital is not an antagonist but rather a vector of interdependence.

From the old-growth forests of California and the Pacific Northwest to the jacarandas of Australia, Elizabeth Oriel's contribution continues the textual and discourse emphasis central to Storey's approach but within a very different context. Although native to south-central South America, jacarandas have been planted worldwide as vegetal agents transforming colonial ambitions into contemporary placemakings. Adopting a generous temporal purview, Oriel assessed accounts of jacaranda blooming cycles published in Australian newspapers between 1900 and 2023. Inspired by Edward Casey's place studies, the article characterises jacaranda as an affective actant, moulding societies and mirroring attitudes towards the land while traversing the gulf between human culture and sylvan nature. Oriel's analysis of news content reveals how the colours, forms, sensations, fragrances and atmospheres of jacaranda flowering intersect with local place-generative processes fortifying identity and belonging.

Turning from Australia to the Central Virginia region of the United States, Alissa Ujie Diamond elucidates the cultural history of white mulberry in conjunction with the racial-capitalist legacies of Charlottesville and the author's own genealogy. The colonial impetus to initiate a silk industry introduced mulberry to Virginia from England and also attracted Diamond's European ancestors to North America. The article's nuanced narrative approach entails a genealogical co-tracing between personhood (the author), neighborhood (Charlottesville) and plant-hood (mulberry). The outcome is an 'entangled genealogy' mingling heterogeneous epistemological forms – from the historical, spatial and place-based to the arboreal, subjective and scholarly.

Shifting from rural Virginia to urban California, Magaly Ordoñez explores Latinx relationships to cannabis through a queer, feminist, interdisciplinary and ethnographic methodology. The model of cannabis research delineated therein presents high potential for application to communities outside Ordoñez's Los Angeles focus. The article problematises both the racial politics surrounding cannabis since the early twentieth century and the plant's more recent commodification within the mainstream American cannabis industry. The underside of decriminalisation is the dilution of ethnobotanical traditions centralising the

species as a healing medium. As the United States, Uruguay, Thailand and other countries legalise the plant for recreational and/or medical purposes, Ordoñez's approach offers timely insight into the social implications of cannabis as a vegetal ally.

In the context of South America, Diego Molina probes the history of the wax palm, enshrined in 1985 as Colombia's national tree. Native to the country's Andean forests, the species is the world's tallest palm. A Special Issue of *Plant Perspectives* on palms is forthcoming. Molina's foray highlights wax palm conservation efforts necessitating desecularisation – specifically a movement away from the traditional harvesting of young leaves for the Catholic observance of Palm Sunday. This social and religious transformation has demanded interaction between conservationists, botanists, news media and local communities to reinforce the tree's biocultural significance as Colombia's arboreal ambassador. Molina's analysis identifies the tension rising between the production of vegetal icons for nationalist objectives and the conservation of botanical life for the future of ecological wellbeing.

In her arts-based research on the pines of southwestern Finland, Annette Arlander articulates the potential of the 'undisciplinary method' of talking with trees. The project *Pondering with Pines* resulted in video-based works and podcast episodes in which pine trees participated as voiceful subjects in their own right. Featuring transcripts of her conversations, the article weighs the possibilities and impossibilities of conversing with plants as a research technique. Arlander's emplaced contribution offers a segue into the poems 'Betula Papyrifera' by Nicholas Robinette and 'the plants to live by' penned by Pujita Guha. The issue concludes with Heather Martin's review of Amitav Ghosh's *Smoke and Ashes: Opium's Hidden Histories* and Ximena Sevilla's review of Diego Molina's *Planting a City in the Tropical Andes: Plants and People in Bogotá, 1880 to 1920*.

Now in its third year, *Plant Perspectives* accepts and publishes submissions on a rolling basis, ahead of their compilation into issues. On behalf of the editorial team, I encourage you to consider the journal as a potential home for your work.

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