

(Read ebook) The Rose's Kiss: A Natural History Of Flowers

## The Rose's Kiss: A Natural History Of Flowers

Peter Bernhardt

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### THE ROSE'S KISS



*A Natural History of Flowers*

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**Peter Bernhardt : The Rose's Kiss: A Natural History Of Flowers** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised The Rose's Kiss: A Natural History Of Flowers:

2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Explaining flowers to city folk By Harry Eagar In this engaging and slightly didactic collection of essays, Peter Bernhardt laments that American higher education seems to have dropped botany from the menu of things a broadly informed person might want to know about. A hundred years ago, field botany, he says, was a regular feature of high school curriculums, at a level that would be impressive for an upper level collegiate course today. Of course, 100 years, a tenth of boys and girls went to high school, so the proportion of

Americans who had formal training in botany was not high. However, the proportion who knew a lot about flowers was high. Country people learn a great deal (not all of it accurate) about plants. One reason, I suspect, that plant-lore is less attractive to today's students (aside from the items Bernhardt cites, like a concentration on "useful" or instrumental courses) is that city folk - 98% - don't see much plant life. Even in suburbs, the selection of plants is restricted to horticultural favorites, mostly; and (as Bernhardt notes in one of the essays in his book "Natural Affairs") even city kids who go to botanical exhibits are seldom exposed to natural communities of plants - cactuses from all continents are mixed up together in one place, orchids in another. The country kid, if at all observant, sees the plants interacting through the seasons. In "The Rose's Kiss," Bernhardt, in his graceful fashion, surveys the many ways flowers attract pollinators, or, in some cases, rely on wind; and he explains the consequences for them - and us - of the strategies they choose. Humans eat mostly grass seeds, and grasses reproduce by wind-carried pollen (although a small fraction of successful gametes are helped by animal pollinators). Knowing something about pollination can be useful in daily life, even if you are not a farmer or gardener. For example, pollen is very sensitive to moisture. When wetted, the grains swell, burst and lose their ability to inseminate female sex organs. For this reason, the effective range of wind pollination is extremely short, a matter of a few score yards. Many millions of hours of fretting about GMO plants would be saved for more useful fretting if the anti-GMO crowd understood this characteristic of flowering. Likewise, habitues of natural food stores might like to know about bee pollen sold as an energy food. Bernhardt writes, "That may be so, but I've dissected pollen pellets, and I know they'll also give you bee lice and leg hairs." Understanding what bees do is remarkably recent. Less than 200 years ago, botanists thought bees were mere nectar thieves. Now, we understand that "bees are a flower's winged penis." Here we also learn why there are very few true white flowers - in ultraviolet light, which pollinators can see even if we cannot, the white parts have guide markings to lure insects (or birds, bats or rodents) to the sex chamber. In a too brief final chapter, Bernhardt summarizes our knowledge of the evolution of flowers. Only since the 1980s have many relevant fossils been discovered. They tend to be small, even microscopic. There are hints that the first flowers showed up even earlier than 225 million years ago, when the evidence starts firming up. Seeds go back at least 360 million years, but they were "naked," lacking the organs (petals, sepals etc.) that make flowers interesting. Most generalities about flowers have an exception somewhere. "Given enough time, Nature will humiliate a botanist," Bernhardt writes.

1 of 1 people found the following review helpful. A good botany introduction  
By Julia Miral was looking for a readable introduction to botany, and this is it. You can skim this for the highlights, or you can puzzle over the wealth of detail he gives as far as pollen grain size, the chemistry of flower scent, and how color helps pollinators. Yay!

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. A guide to story telling "A Natural History of Flowers"  
By Becky Friend As a naturalist I enjoyed the tid bits that want to make you stop and check out all the small things created around us. The first chapter has a writing from Albertus Mangus (ca. 1200-1280) - called the 'five brethren.' Something so small as the sepals under the rose are unique. Five brethren were born together. Two had beards and two had none, and the other had but half a one. The sepals have two with jagged edges, two with smooth, and one with half jagged edges. More stories from the jack n the pulpit, duckweed (smallest in the world) to the queen of the parasites (largest in the world). A great read for nature interpreters...

Flowers bring joy and beauty to our lives, from the smallest patch of daisies outside our window to the elaborate floral decorations on display at weddings, banquets, and funerals. As well as offering aesthetic benefits, they teach us much about how the world works - each blossom is a living factory that manufactures organs and compounds ranging from the flavonoids that make a rose red to the pollen that gives us hay fever. In *The Rose's Kiss*, botanist Peter Bernhardt rekindles our sense of wonder at the plant life all around us. He presents a fascinating and wide ranging look at the natural history of flowers - their forms and functions as well as their hidden interactions with the surrounding environment and the other living organisms they depend upon for survival. Using both familiar and exotic examples, he examines: flower architecture, including the wonderfully descriptive names of floral parts and their respective roles in a plant's life-cycle; the secret exchange between a bud and its environment that determines blooming time and the lifespan of individual blossoms; colors, scents, and other mechanisms that plants use to attract pollinators and keep them returning season after season; the incredible diversity of organisms that pollinate plants - cockroaches, flies, moths, parrots, hummingbirds, bats, and others; extinct plants and their fossil blossoms, showing the evolution of flowering plants over the past 125 million years; and much more. Delightfully interwoven with intriguing facts and stories from history, folklore, and mythology, *The Rose's Kiss* is a wonderful example of literary science writing at its best. It should hold wide appeal for nature lovers, garden enthusiasts, and anyone interested in learning more about the inner workings of the natural world.

From *Library Journal* In this skillful blend of art, literature, science, and scholarship, Bernhardt, an expert in the field of floral structure and the author of *Natural Affairs: A Botanist Looks at the Attachments Between Plants and People*, uses the rose as a starting point to describe the anatomy, embryology, morphology, and paleobiology of plants. As in his other books, he begins each chapter with a philosophical quote, a poem, or an excerpt from a wide variety of literatures, and his presentation of botanical information is woven with stories that clarify the scientific

concept. Writing not only for the botanist, Bernhardt is clear, precise, and witty. The book's current glossary of terms could be expanded, but this is still a wonderful read. Recommended for all libraries. AMichael R. Blake, Harvard Univ. Lib., Cambridge, MA Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc. This entertaining new book by Peter Bernhardt is a mine of information on the natural history of flowers.