



# THE ROOTS OF CIVILISATION

A handpicked selection of plants that changed the way we live

BY JOHN NEWTON

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**FROM MEDICINAL PLANTS TO POISONOUS ONES AND APHRODISIACS, THIS STUNNING BOOK IS A CULTURAL HISTORY OF PLANTS AND AN ODE TO THEIR MANY WONDROUS USES**

They feed us, shelter us, clothe us, cure us and clean the air that we breathe. *The Roots of Civilisation* takes a closer look at these plants that most of us just take for granted, but which have changed the world, for better and for worse.

The story of these plants is also the story of human survival and ingenuity, the invention of agriculture, the greed of men and their rulers, and the founding of trade routes and empires. Advances in science and medicine are charted and there are the new frontiers such as genetic modification and the plants grown by NASA in outer space.

***During all that time we have relied on plants for food, shelter, clothing, medicine, to change our consciousness, to clean the air that we breathe and to sustain the life of our planet. We have used them to poison our enemies and to control our fertility, to navigate the oceans and to build houses and bridges. They are the most important elements in the cycle of life.***

*The Roots of Civilisation* looks not only at the better known world-changers like opium, tobacco, cotton and the orchid, but also at the humbler flora that have quietly but profoundly shaped human civilisation.

***It's a safe bet that we moderns are not the first to be obsessed with more, bigger and better sex. In the seemingly endless quest for a truly effective aphrodisiac, we've tried and enthusiastically endorsed everything from aubergines to avocados, saffron to tomatoes, valerian to Viagra.***

John Newton is a freelance writer, journalist and novelist. For Murdoch Books, John has written *A Little Taste of Spain* and *Beppi: A Life in Three Courses*. John's awards for food writing include the Golden Ladle for Best Food Journalism in the 2005 World Food Media Awards. John lives in Sydney and recently raised his first broad beans, tomatoes and strawberries in his inner city courtyard.

**\*Cover images are available on our website at [www.murdochbooks.com.au](http://www.murdochbooks.com.au)\***

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