

EXPLORER PLANTS!

BRISTLECONE PINE

These plants can survive for over 5,000 years, making them the oldest living organisms in the world. Today, scientists study the rings inside their trunks for clues to the planet's history.

TEA PLANT

Legend holds that Chinese Emperor Shennong discovered tea when a leaf accidentally fell into boiling water, and he enjoyed the invigorating drink.

SUGAR CANE

This grass has a stem full of sugar! People living on New Guinea began eating the wild sugar cane long ago. Today, the plants are usually boiled and refined to produce sugar.

TOBACCO

Local people from the Andes chewed the leaves of this plant because of the addictive chemical nicotine they contained. Today, smoking tobacco is responsible for hundreds of millions of deaths every year.

FARMING

Around 10,000 years ago, people began growing plants themselves for food. Farming has allowed human societies to support much bigger populations ever since.

CHILLI PEPPER

The fruits of this plant produce a chemical which causes a painfully hot sensation when eaten. People in ancient Peru and Ecuador developed a taste for their spicy kick.

HEMP

For thousands of years hemp's strong fibres have been used for making cloth. But today, growing and consuming the plant is illegal in many countries.

HEMLOCK

This plant's poison causes paralysis and even death. It was used in Ancient Greece for the ultimate punishment – the philosopher Socrates was executed with hemlock because of his revolutionary beliefs.

GRAPE VINES

Ancient peoples across the Mediterranean fermented grapes to create wine, originally as medicine. Grapes are found naturally covered in fermenting yeast, which may have led to the discovery of wine.

COTTON

The white fibres that develop around the fruit of this plant catch on the fur of passing animals, helping to disperse its seeds. Humans use the fibres to spin into thread for cloth.

BARLEY

This grass was one of the first plants grown by humans when they settled in one place and abandoned their roaming lifestyles over 10,000 years ago. Humans bred plants to produce larger grains and to survive harsher conditions.

MAIZE

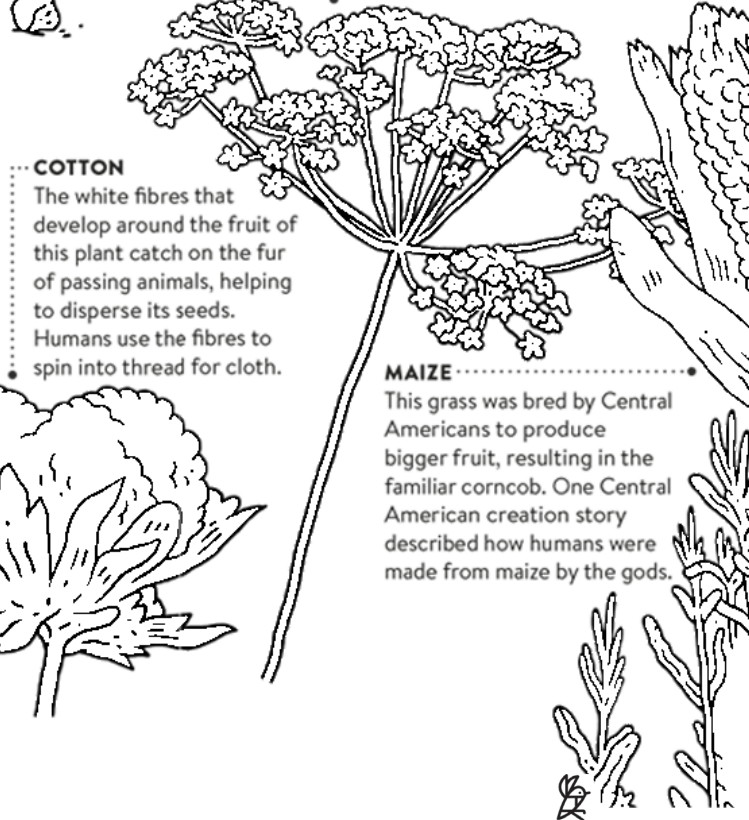
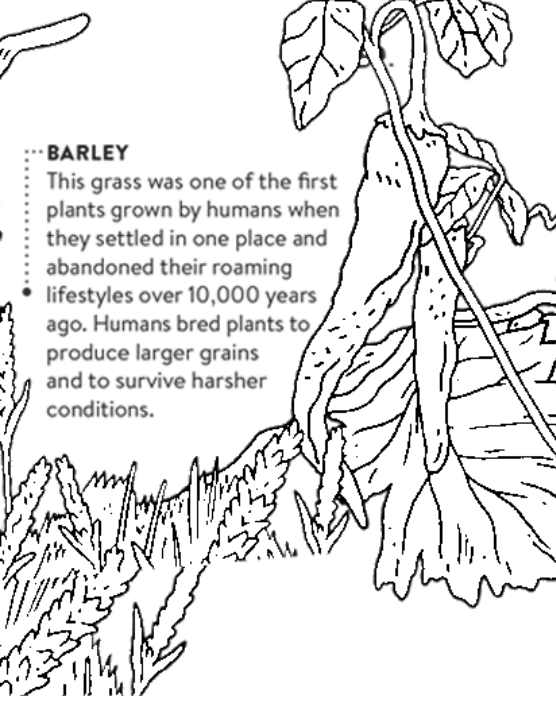
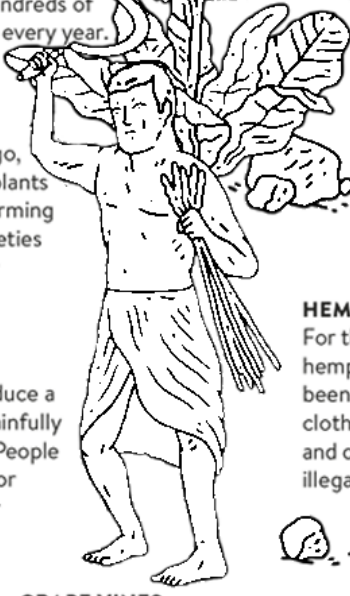
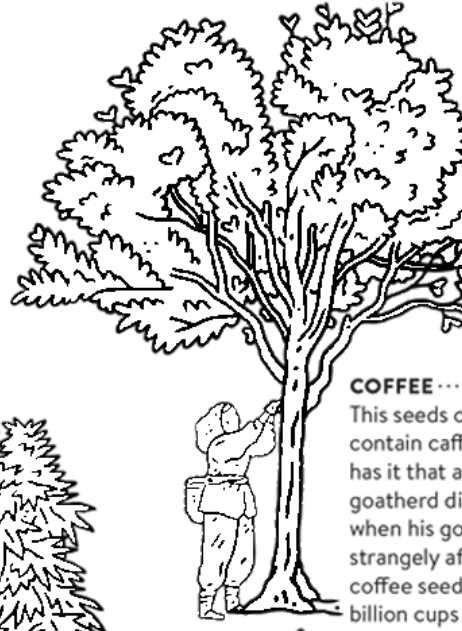
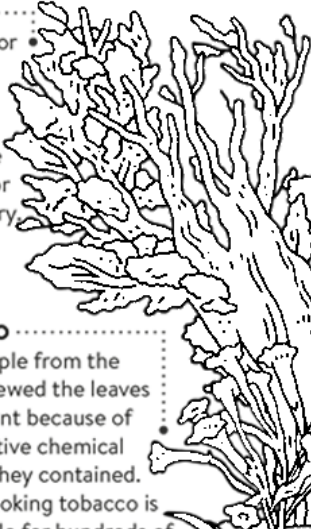
This grass was bred by Central Americans to produce bigger fruit, resulting in the familiar corn cob. One Central American creation story described how humans were made from maize by the gods.

COFFEE

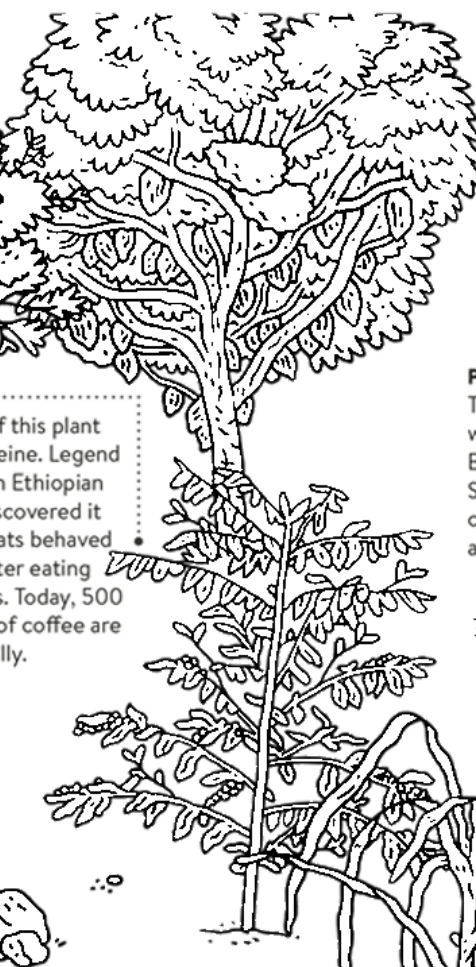
This seeds contain caffeine. It has it that a goat herder discovered when his goat ate a coffee seed. Today, over 2 billion cups of coffee are drunk annually.

RUBBER TREE

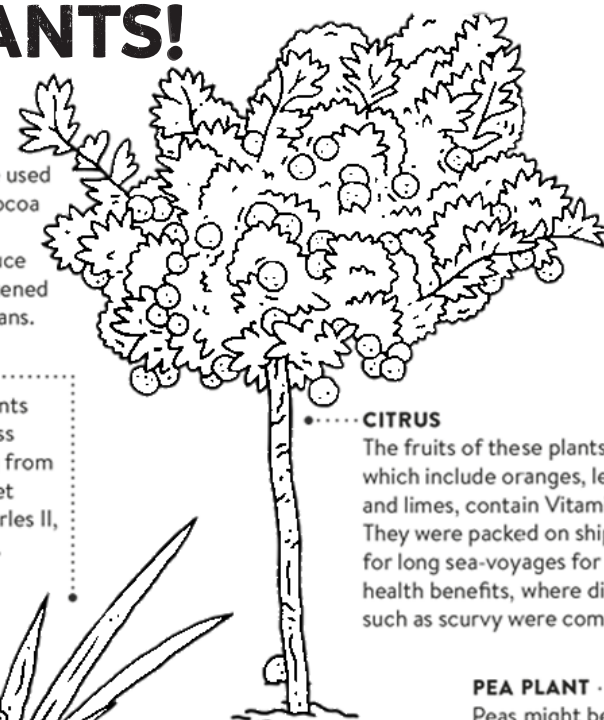
Rubber, made from the fluid of some plants, was first harvested in Central America to make balls for sport. Since then, rubber has been used to make waterproof clothes and machinery, among other things.



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••• CACAO
The seeds of this tree are used to produce chocolate. Cocoa 'beans' were first used in Central America to produce a bitter drink, later sweetened with sugar by the Europeans.



•••• CITRUS
The fruits of these plants, which include oranges, lemons and limes, contain Vitamin C. They were packed on ships for long sea-voyages for their health benefits, where diseases such as scurvy were common.

BANANA
Worldwide banana sales were nearly decimated in 1950 when a fungus wiped out the most popular variety. Originally grown in India and considered unusable, bananas are now an important snack across the globe.

PINEAPPLE
The unusual fruits of these plants were presented to rulers across Europe by explorers returning from South America. At one banquet organised by English King Charles II, a pineapple took centre stage.



PEA PLANT
Peas might be on your dinner plate tonight, but Austrian monk Gregor Mendel studied different generations of these plants and discovered the basics of genetics.



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GARLIC
Medieval doctors recommended a mixture of garlic, wine and bull's bile as a cure for eye infections. Garlic is more commonly used today in cooking.

ROSE
This thorny plant has been bred to produce flowers of many colours. In medieval England, white and red roses were the symbols of the rival Yorkist and Lancastrian families during the Wars of the Roses.

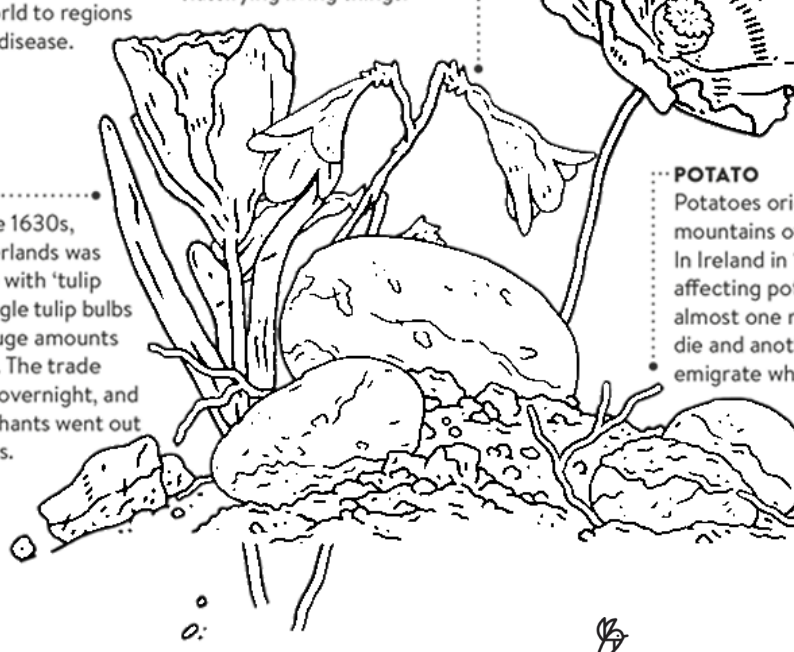
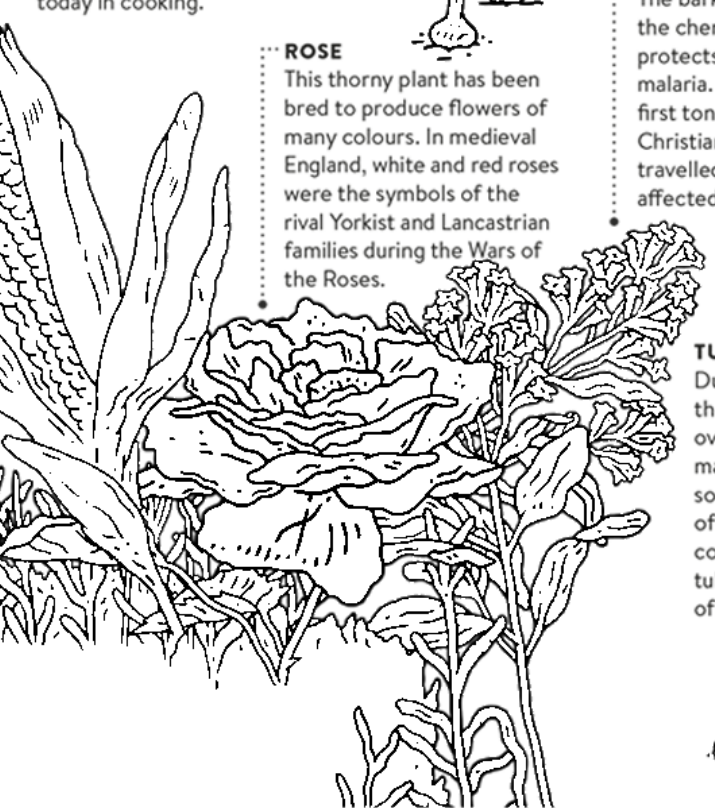
CINCHONA
The bark of this tree contains the chemical quinine, which protects against the disease malaria. The recipe for the first tonic was developed by Christian priests who often travelled the world to regions affected by the disease.

TWINFLOWER
This small forest flower was a favourite of Swedish botanist Carl Linnaeus, who developed the *Systema Naturae*, the basis of the modern system for classifying living things.

OPIUM POPPY
The addictive drug opium is produced from this plant. Trading in opium caused wars between Britain and China with British traders attempting to profit from China's addiction.

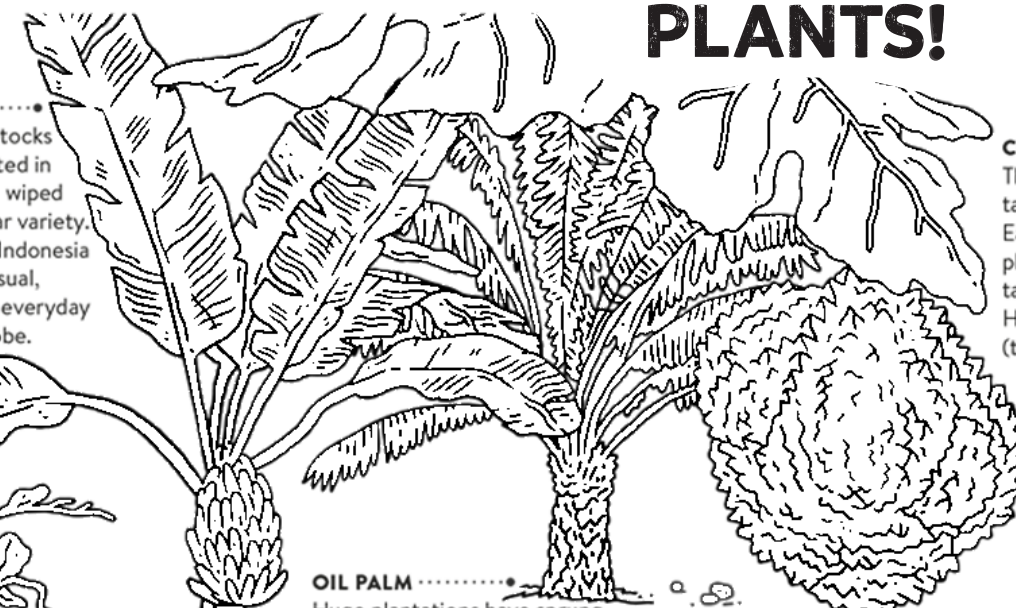
TULIP
During the 1630s, the Netherlands was overcome with 'tulip mania'. Single tulip bulbs sold for huge amounts of money. The trade collapsed overnight, and tulip merchants went out of business.

POTATO
Potatoes originated in the mountains of the Andes. In Ireland in the 1840s, a disease affecting potatoes almost one million people died and another million emigrated.



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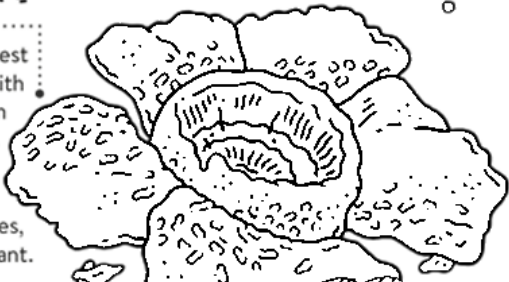
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OIL PALM
Huge plantations have sprung up across the Indian Ocean and South America to produce vegetable oil from these plants' fruits, but this has endangered rainforests in the process.

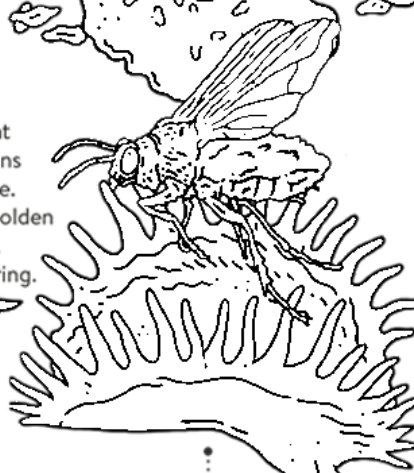
DURIAN
Durian fruit has such a terrible smell that it is banned on public transport in Singapore. To some, it tastes of cheese, onions and almonds, but others consider it a delicacy.

RAFFLESIA
This plant has the largest flower in the world, with some growing to 1m in diameter. The flowers produce a disgusting rotting-meat smell to attract flies and beetles, which pollinate the plant.



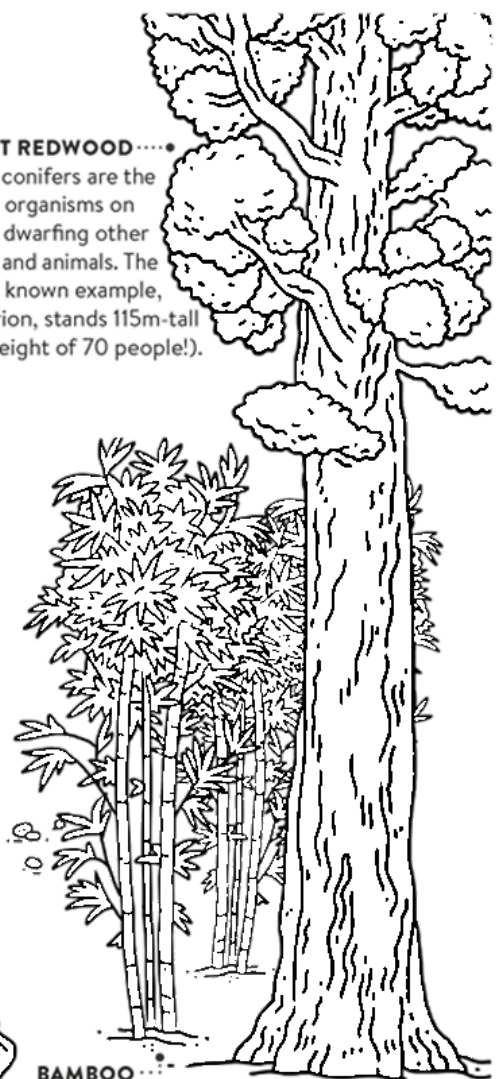
ANT-HOUSE PLANT
These plants contain structures called 'domatia' which ants build as secure homes inside the plant's stem. But, far from being a nuisance, the resident ants guard their new home from plant-eaters and vines.

RICE
The tiny seeds of this plant are a staple food for billions of people across the globe. Scientists have created Golden Rice with extra Vitamin A through genetic engineering.



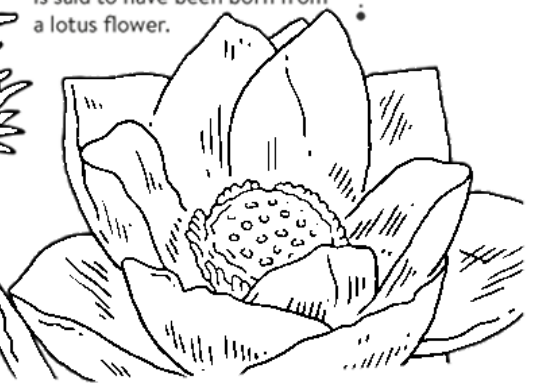
VENUS FLYTRAP
When a bug touches the trap, this meat-eating plant closes up and the bug is digested. Charles Darwin called it 'one of the most wonderful plants in the world'.

COAST REDWOOD
These conifers are the tallest organisms on Earth, dwarfing other plants and animals. The tallest known example, Hyperion, stands 115m-tall (the height of 70 people!).



BAMBOO
Bamboo is actually a giant grass and the fastest growing plant in the world. It can grow 93cm per day, and the largest species can reach more than 30m in height.

SACRED LOTUS
Lotuses grow from the bottom of lakes and rivers to produce a stunning flower which is held above the water's surface. In the Hindu religion, the god Brahma is said to have been born from a lotus flower.



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