

SUMMER EDITION 2021

WOM

MAGAZINE

THE LANGUAGE OF FLOWERS





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The Language of flowers

FLORIOGRAPHY FROM THE
VICTORIANS AND BEYOND

PHOTOGRAPHY BY: ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

Floriography is a 'language of flowers', a coded communication using specific flowers with associated meanings to express feelings or wishes. While Floriography has been in use throughout history it was especially popular during the Victorian era, which is little wonder in a society that shunned flirtation and outward expression. Being able to safely send and receive deeper messages would have been essential to a person's emotional survival. Today, Floriography continues to be 'spoken', though mostly in a simplistic and highly commercial way, being eagerly exploited by the celebration industry. Who could picture Valentine's Day without a dozen red roses, bouquets of carnations and chrysanthemums for Mothers' Day or wedding arrangements frothing with white roses and lily the valley? Before the Victorians constructed their botanical diction, much of the symbolism of flowers was highly regional, distinct to local folklore, with some fascinating concepts ascribed to anything that bloomed, from the plushiest rose to the tiniest wildflower. Here are just a few examples of the complex language of flowers.



Bluebell

These vibrant heralds of spring have enjoyed representations ranging from loneliness and regret, to kindness, humility, and constancy. Depending on where you live in Britain, bringing Bluebells into the house may be unlucky, so check your local folklore as you could be inviting the sweet blessings of the fairy folk into your home, or dooming yourself to mishap.

Forget-Me-Nots

With their five delicate petals, these tiny flowers represented a loved-one's faithfulness and were worn to show fidelity when separated from a partner. There is one myth that tells of a man who was swept into a river while trying to pick them for his lover. His dying words of 'forget me not' is how the flower earned its name.

The flower was used as a personal emblem by Henry of Lancaster, while he was exiled in Europe in 1398. It was retained as the royal emblem when he was crowned King Henry IV of England.



Hawthorn

A constant companion of roadsides and hedges, hawthorn symbolised hope to the Victorians. Older lore suggests that the blossoms may aid love and fertility, as long as it is kept outside. As the plant is beloved of the fairy queen, the first of May is the only day a bouquet of Hawthorn flowers can be brought indoors.

Its language is further evolving to encompass the vocabulary of global warming. Due to its temperature-sensitive blossoming, it is watched carefully by scientists for its response to climate change.

Primrose

Traditionally they have been a symbol of protection against fairy mischief and if you wish to ward off dark magic, gather them carefully, ensuring there are at least thirteen flowers in a bunch. The Victorians, however, saw some varieties as a symbol of how little trust you invested in the words of a fickle lover.

Poppy

Depending on the colour, they could symbolise remembrance, consolation and even wealth. As far back as Mesopotamia, this vibrant flower has been associated with sleep, dreams, healing, and various forms of divination.

According to Welsh folklore, one must not bring yellow poppies into the house as they will cause headaches, storms, or lightning strikes. However, placing wild poppy seeds under your pillow will reveal a future lover's face, or may help you to dream the answer to a question pondered while falling asleep.



Violet

Watchfulness, faithfulness, I'll always be true, according to the Victorians. Wild violets are also associated with Persephone, as it was the flower she was gathering when abducted by Hades. They are a flower of our changeable nature, the cycle of death and rebirth or the uncertainty of new love. Caution is advised when picking wild violets, you may not be snatched away into the Underworld, rather something more banal; in some areas of Devon, it is believed that bringing violets into the house will place a curse on the hens and they will refuse to lay.

As with any language, Floriography has evolved over the centuries, according to local culture and geography and is held together by the grammar of its etiquette. The role of giver and receiver, whether the bloom is singular, or part of a bouquet is as important as that which it symbolises. Remember, unless you wish to betray yourself as the secret admirer, never give a bride thirteen red roses on her wedding day!



The
Folklore
of Trees

More than convenient fixtures of parks and public spaces casting welcome shade on a sunny day, trees possess rich seams of culture, imbued over time with our obsessive storymaking and mythologies; edging our tame gardens, and lives, with just a bit of wildness, their roots reaching deeper than the earth, linking some of our most ordinary customs with ancient folklore.



Ash

The folklore and mythology of ash is one of life and the world, quite literally in Norse mythology where Yggdrasil, the World Tree, was a great ash that stood surrounded by the Nine Realms. It was also from a piece of ash driftwood that the first man was

created (the first woman coming from the wood of the elm). In Britain, the ash is a symbol of healing, where some customs involved passing an injured child through the split trunk of the tree in order to mend their broken bones.

One of the first trees to advance when the glaciers of the last Ice Age began to recede, the resilient birch is a common fixture of parks and gardens. With its shimmering bark, it was known as the Lady of the Woods in Celtic mythology and this tree's quiet grace perhaps belies the folklore that pervaded our customs and culture throughout history. It was believed that the tree had the

power to cast off evil and laying newborn babies in a birch cradle would ensure protection from malevolent forces. This motif of expelling evil later associated the tree with punishment, when in Medieval Britain a staff of birch was used by the local magistrate as a symbol of authority and in Victorian times it was birch switches that were put to use against wayward school children .



Birch



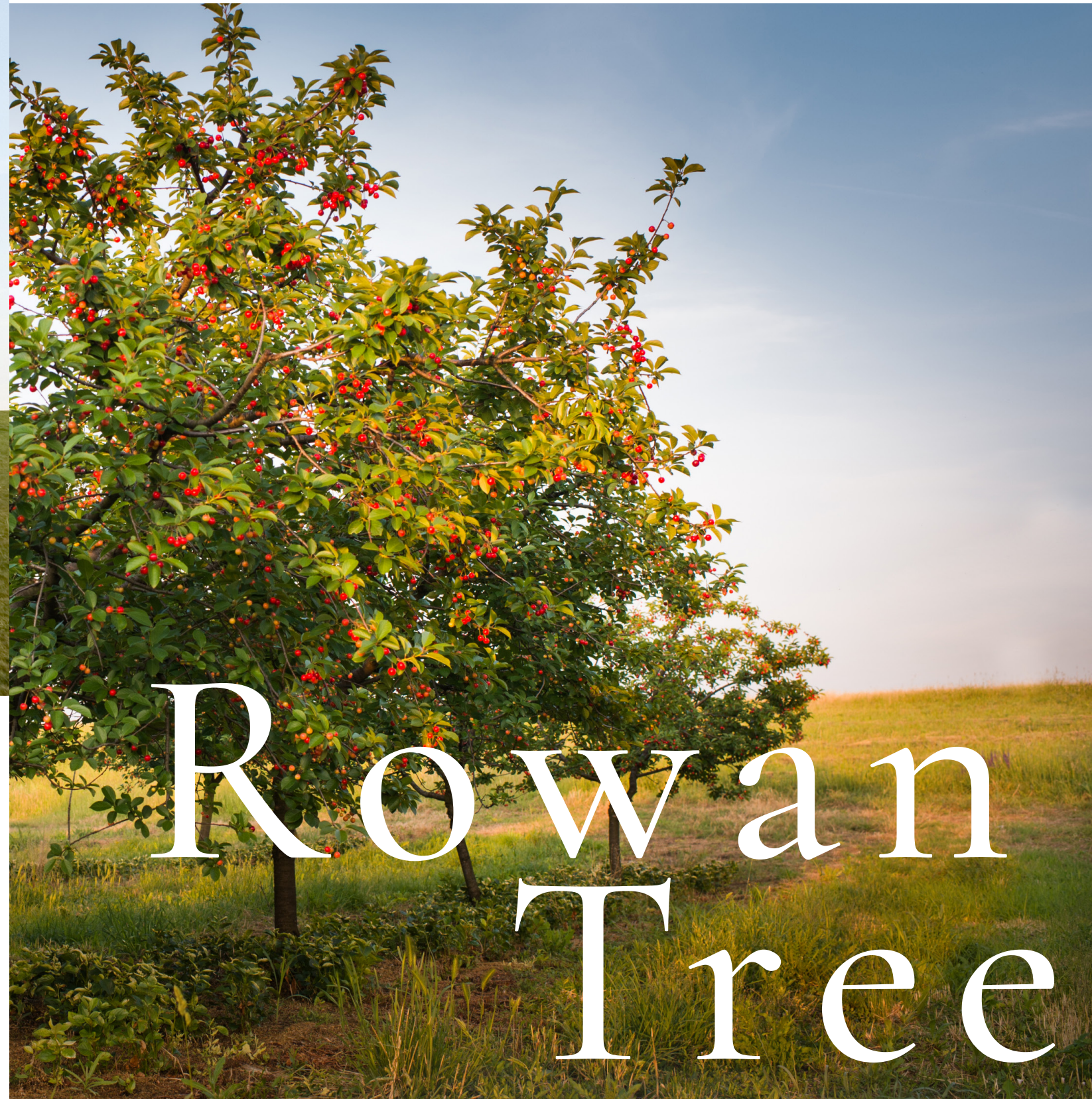
Oak

Associated with gods of thunder and lightning, the oak has been revered as sacred by many civilisations across Europe including the Ancient Greeks, the Norse and the Celts. Owing, perhaps, to oak's susceptibility to lightning strikes, a phenomenon caused by their high water content and size; they are often the tallest trees in the

forest or field making them an ideal lightning rod. The longevity of the oak is also bound up in its folklore. A symbol of wisdom, early Christian churches in Britain were constructed from the wood of the oak and the strength and durability of its timber continues to be prized by builders and artists alike.

Crowned with red berries at summer's end, the Rowan is a tree historically associated with the sacred, magic and witchcraft and with the power to ward off evil, it is often found in churchyards across Britain. Traditionally it was

planted at the thresholds or entrances to a property, preventing evil from entering and sprigs or crosses made from rowan hung above doorways and stables will keep away malicious spirits.




Rowan Tree

A large, mature weeping willow tree with long, thin, drooping branches is the central focus on the left side of the image. The tree's leaves are a vibrant green. In the background, there is a park with a pond, other trees, and a clear blue sky. A black lamp post stands on a small island in the pond, and a large rock is visible near the water's edge. The overall scene is peaceful and scenic.

Willow

Valued by the Celts who associated it with optimism and growth, this iconic tree has more recently been saddled with the motif of sadness and grief, with its slender branches seeming to weep over the water. Many attribute the weeping of the willow to Psalm 137; with the line “By the rivers of Babylon we sat down and wept/ when we remembered Zion./There

on the willow trees/we hung up our harps.” However, this elegant tree continues to yield benefits including salicin, the active agent within its bark which became the basis of the discovery of aspirin. The traditional willow-crafts such as weaving and wicker are also enjoying a revival alongside the growing popularity of modern folk movements.



Fleeting Glimpse

from the Ephemeral to the Ancient

An ephemeral plant is one marked by short life cycles. The word ephemeral means transitory or quickly fading and when speaking of plants, this term specifically refers to distinct growth strategies that allow a plant to thrive at the points where its essential resources, such as sunlight or rainfall, are readily available

One of the shortest lived plants in the world is the *Arabidopsis Thaliana* (a mustard relative), which has a seed-to-seed lifespan of about a month. A plant that is easy to grow indoors, the rapid generation time, diminutive proportions and self-pollination has made the *Arabidopsis* a model organism for genetic experiments and is the most studied of all flowering plants.

Beyond the lab, it is the first spring ephemerals, the wild perennials that can be some of the shortest lived, or more accurately the shortest visible above ground in the UK. Their lifecycle is designed to take full advantage of the additional sunlight of the early spring season, when the branches of its larger, deciduous neighbours are still bare, blooming and producing seed before being overshadowed later in the year.

On the other end of the spectrum are the ancient trees, the longest lived plants in the UK. As different types of trees age at different rates, to be classified as 'ancient', the tree is compared to other members of its species. For oaks it takes around 400 years to wear this accolade, however yew trees must be around 800 to 900 years to qualify. The Fortingall yew, located in a churchyard in Perthshire, Scotland, is considered to be the oldest yew in the UK between 2,000 and 3,000 years old, some even believe it could be up to 5000 years old.

With their characteristic wide, complex and often cavernous trunks, ancient trees are vital to the survival of rare and specialist wildlife, providing food and habitat to insects, fungi, birds and mammals.

Garden Shows



With some of the best garden shows in the world right on our doorstep, why not make the most of the season and spend a day igniting your imagination with the arts of gardening and horticultural design, or getting some great advice from the experts. We have a list of five fantastic shows that open their doors from spring through to autumn.

RHS Chelsea flower show

One of the most internationally renowned flower shows will be held for the first time ever in September. This is an opportunity to soak up the Autumnal ambience while enjoying expert advice, world-class design and shopping.

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/rhs-chelsea-flower-show>

RHS Hampton Court Palace Garden Festival

This is the world's largest annual flower and garden show, set amongst one of the most historic royal palaces in London.

There is always plenty on offer, including education, advice and expert appearances

<https://www.rhs.org.uk/shows-events/rhs-hampton-court-palace-garden-festival>

Harrogate Flower Show at Newby Hall & Gardens Spring Flower Show

Organised by the North of England Horticultural Society, all proceeds from the exhibition will be used for the promotion of horticulture in the North of England as well as enjoying some floral inspiration



from other flower enthusiasts, take the opportunity to satisfy your garden queries with the experts

Autumn Flower Show

Enjoy displays of giant award-winning vegetables, at the Northern Championships for the National Vegetable Society, as well as admission to Newby Hall's award-winning gardens.

<https://www.flowershow.org.uk/>

Blenheim Palace flower show

Held in Blenheim Palace, Woodstock, Oxfordshire, the gardens are a beautiful sight year-round, with even more for visitors to enjoy during its annual flower show

blenheimflowershow.co.uk



Night *Blooms*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY ISTOCK/GETTY IMAGES

When we think of flowers, it is likely we think of daytime, associating them with the sunshine of spring and summer months, whose petals open gently in the first rays of dawn and fold to rest as evening settles. However, there are actually a number of plant species that flower only at night, bringing a new dimension to your garden experience, while also supporting a myriad of evening pollinators that are vital to our ecosystem.

Evening Primrose or Evening Star (*Oenothera biennis*)

is a wildflower native to North America that produces sweet-scented yellow flowers that open in the evening. This plant, introduced into the UK in the 1600s and now naturalised, can be found along roadside verges, sand dunes and other 'dry waste ground'. The flowers can be seen from June to September

The Nottingham Catchfly (*Silene nutans*)

is a tiny wildflower with pinkish-white petals and hairy leaves. It earned its name as it was originally discovered on the walls of Nottingham Castle and while it no longer grows there, can be found among limestone rocks and banks and coastal shingle. This night-loving bloom attracts nocturnal flying insects by filling the evening air with its heavy scent. Its seeds are best sown in early autumn or in spring, in sunny open sites with light, dry soil.



Night Gladiolus (*Gladiolus tristis*)

Exudes a spicy scent from either pale yellow or striped dark yellow and green flowers. Its blooms can be enjoyed in the late spring or early summer months, provided they are planted in good, well drained compost with plenty of light. They can sometimes take three to four years to flower.

Brahma Kamal (*Saussurea obvallata*)

named after the Hindu god Brahma, is a plant whose native region extends from India to southwest China and can be found at altitudes of up to 4500 metres, in the Himalayas. It is also known, in English, as Night blooming Cereus, Queen of the night and Lady of the night. Boat-shaped bracts of green and yellow enclose the purple flower heads of this beautiful nocturnal bloom. It flowers late at night and only once a year, mid-monsoon from around July to August.

Moon Flower

is a fragrant and exotic plant, characterised by white trumpet-like flowers that unfurl in the evening. Sharing the same family as the notorious and recalcitrant bindweed, there are several species including *Ipomoea alba*, a vine-like plant, *Datura innoxia* and *Mentzelia pumila*, (also referred to as evening star due to its nightblooming nature). While they can be grown in the UK, these nocturnal beauties do best in temperatures ranging between 15.6 and 21.1 degrees Celsius.



Flower power

The power of plants to ease our stress and boost our mood is well known and anyone would be hard pressed to find a lovelier way of improving both their mental health and their environment than by surrounding themselves with some of these amazing flowers and plants.

For calm and easing of anxiety

Lavender is one of the most effective remedies for soothing stress, promoting relaxation and reducing the associated effects of anxiety such as disturbed sleep, restlessness, and agitation. One of the benefits of lavender is its ability to soothe without sedating, making it a great first aid for moments of heightened stress or worry. Jasmine flowers also contain calming and sleep-promoting properties, with their gentle sweet aroma they can be used to complement lavender, or on their own, to help with that all-important restorative: sleep.

Chrysanthemum tea has been shown to lessen symptoms of worry and stress, with the effect of actually cooling and relaxing the body. Or, to simply lighten your mood by brightening your surroundings and purifying the air, why not bring a bouquet of these beautiful flowers into your home or work.

For focus and energy

Carnations: When it comes to raising productivity, without the cortisol levels, a bunch of these stunning red blooms can energise any environment. Associated with commitment, these are ideal flowers for focusing that energy and committing to the job at hand, whatever that may be.

Peace Lily: A plant whose beauty is matched by its resilience, the peace lily is an energising addition to the home or office that provides a number of benefits. As well as being an attractive and hardy plant, this plant is known to remove toxins from the air, breaking down and neutralising a number of gases including carbon monoxide

For creativity

The cypress Vine: This star-shaped, aromatic flower combines the scent from its leaves as well as its petals to create a beautiful aroma that can ignite and enhance creativity, while increasing alertness and focus. It can be a challenging plant, as the vines are fast growing, requiring care to prevent overgrowth.

Snake Plant :Not necessarily a flower, but beautiful nonetheless, this plant is native to tropical West Africa and has long been associated with transformation and mediation. This plant is also an effective air purifier, ridding the indoor environment of toxic gasses.

Forest Gossip

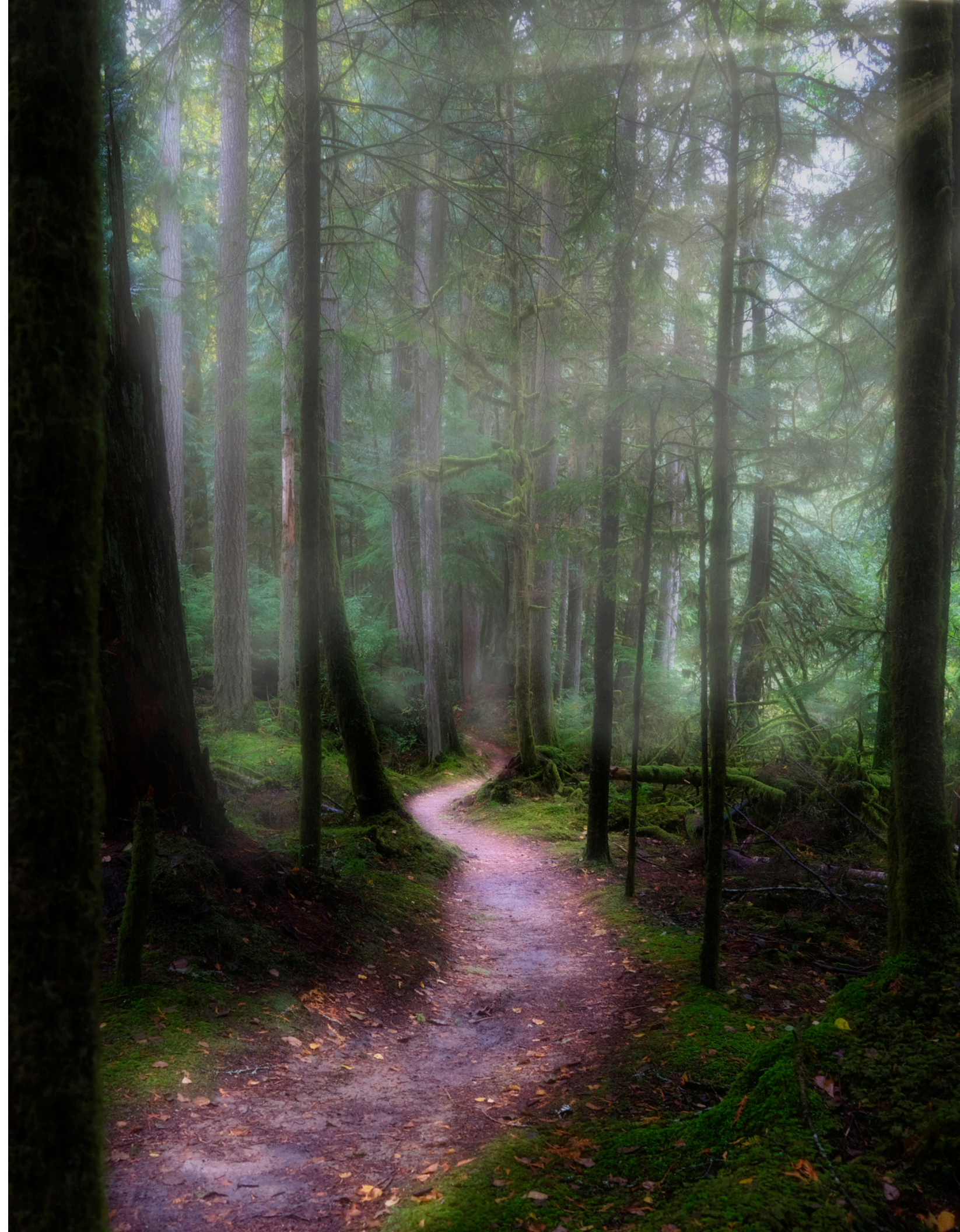
HOW TREES COMMUNICATE

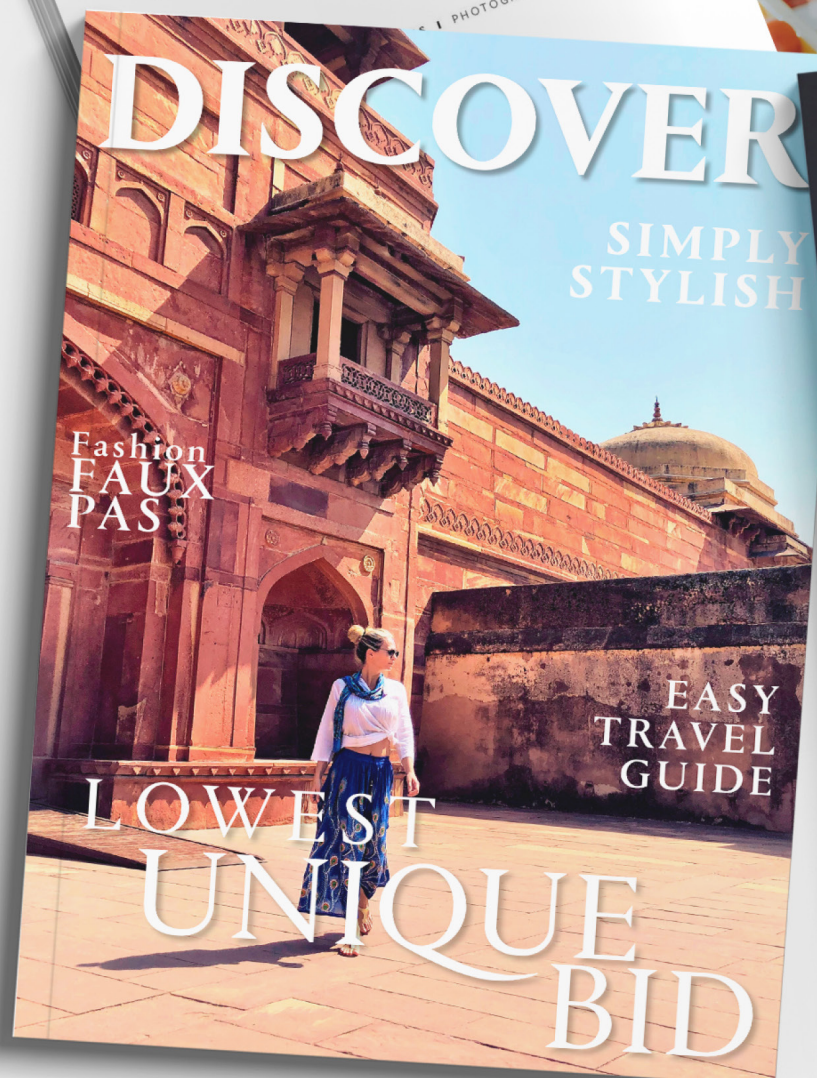
Current research indicates that trees may be able to communicate with, as well as even care for one another, shoring up any weaker individuals against disease and other pests.

This is all possible with the help of something called mycelium fungal threads, microscopic fibres that stretch from root to root creating an elegant network that connects individual plants together; these threads transfer materials vital to the plant's survival such as water, nitrogen and carbon. Of this fungal organism, we only observe the small fruiting bodies that emerge above ground, in the form of mushrooms and toadstools. However, like the proverbial iceberg, the true vastness of its being, known as the mycorrhizal network, wraps invisibly around, or bores into roots, spreading their symbiotic net beneath the forest floor.

'Mother' trees use these threads to nurture their young, feeding struggling saplings the sugars they need to become strong. Though it sounds like the stuff of fairytales, a study on douglas-fir trees, undertaken by the University of Reading, indicates that trees recognise the root tips of their relatives, favoring them when sending carbon and nutrients through this network. <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/the-whispering-trees-180968084/>

While the fungi benefit by consuming portions of the carbon, sugars and water, they facilitate the health and life of even the largest trees. The mycorrhizal network is an integral part of the complex relationship of forest survival, where different species work together to support one another's success.





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