



The Fruit Hunters: A Story of Nature, Obsession, Commerce, and Adventure

Adam Leith Gollner

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Tasty, lethal, hallucinogenic, and medicinal – fruits have led nations into wars, fueled dictatorships, and even lured us into new worlds. Adam Leith Gollner weaves business, science, and travel into a riveting narrative about one of earth's most desired foods.

Readers will discover why even though countless exotic fruits exist in nature, only several dozen varieties are available in supermarkets. Gollner explores the political machinations of multinational fruit corporations, exposing the hidden alliances between agribusiness and government and what that means for public health. He traces the life of mass-produced fruits – how they are created, grown, and marketed, and he explores the underworld of fruits that are inaccessible, ignored, and even forbidden in the Western world.

Gollner draws readers into a Willy Wonka-like world with mangoes that taste like piña coladas, orange cloudberry, peanut butter fruits, and the miracle fruit that turns everything sour sweet, making lemons taste like lemonade. Peopled with a varied and bizarre cast of characters – from smugglers to explorers to inventors – this extraordinary book unveils the hidden universe of fruit.

The Fruit Hunters: A Story of Nature, Obsession, Commerce, and Adventure Details

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Paul says

This was interesting enough and certainly made me want to eat more fresh exotic fruits, but just reminding me that fresh exotic fruits exists is enough to make me want to eat them. I wasn't surprised to see that the author was a former editor of *Vice* magazine - my impression of *Vice* is that the pieces are all in this "travelogue" style where the author inserts themselves into the story and tries to make it all about big personalities. This book is certainly in that style. I suggest discounting all "intensity" claims (about flavor, color, personality size, resemblance of a fruit to human genitals, etc) by at least 40%.

Erik Waiss says

I was drawn to this book by the documentary of the same name. While the documentary is bright and colorful and full of useful information as well as some embellishment about the history and future of fruit, the book would definitely benefit from some fact-checking. This is the author's first book, and it is clear from his writing style that he subscribes to the idea that the plural of anecdote is data. I don't believe he should be focusing his work towards narrative science, as he has a tendency to exaggerate or take what others have said in hearsay as absolute fact. The entire third section of the book I almost could not read as it was a urban myth-laden fruit-Mafia wonderland of false tails. Having so thoroughly enjoyed the documentary movie I found myself woely disappointed by its source material.

Petra CigareX says

I have my doubts about the writing of this book, its supposed to be about people who go out looking for new fruits and their stories. Language, noughties' slang, like "two cougars" to describe women strikes a jarring note.

I have several fruits in my garden, or at least the bit of rainforest that is accessible the rest being too difficult and bushy to penetrate, that I do not have more than local names for. Sweet water, the pod of a tree with amazingly-perfumed flowers, that is like sucking cotton wool that has been soaked in ... sweet water. A peach-sized woody brown fruit with a bright peachy-orange interior that is apple-crunchy and sweet (I think this might be better ripe). Some tiny orange berry that comes in a lacy bract and tastes like the essence of a really good passion fruit. I wonder what they are, I'm hoping the book might tell me.

Lizz says

I started the *Fruit Hunters* with some trepidation. It sounded like an interesting book, but the cover looked old fashioned and I was prepared to find a *Farmers Almanac*, rather than an exciting look into exotic fruit.

I completely misjudged *The Fruit Hunters*. While there were a few chapters that weren't as interesting as most of the chapters, it made me want to journey to far away locations to sample cloud berries. And fruit that

proves that God has a sense of humor, the coco de mer is a fruit that looks like a woman's butt, but whose seeds look like fully erect penises.

There were so many interesting facts about fruit that I didn't know about, or even thought about, or even realized that I should have thought about.

When we go to Florida in April, I'm going to go the Fruit and Spice Park south of Fort Lauderdale, where you can sample more than 100 varieties of mangoes and other fruit from right off the trees.

If you're looking for an interesting read, about all things fruit including fruitarians, the "Fruit Detective" and fruit that tastes like vanilla ice cream; then this is the book for you.

Michelle says

This is one of those books where you suddenly realize again just how odd some of the people on this planet are. Almost makes me feel normal. :-) Anyway, did you know there are people absolutely obsessed by fruit, who travel the globe finding and tasting very weird, rare fruits? I had no idea just how extensive the "fruit world" was--our supermarket produce aisles are a very poor representation, as it turns out. And the people who spend their lives focused on weird fruits are even weirder. This book was definitely interesting, but I would have enjoyed it more without the occasional bad language and several very inappropriate sections which I had to skip over. I was interested in reading a book about fruit, not about sex. Who knew that Gollner, at least, can hardly discuss the one without the other. Different, not sure I'd recommend it, but interesting.

Naomi says

I don't read a lot of non-fiction, but I received an ARC of this book from the publisher and started to flip through the first few pages. It turned into a fascinating read!

This book makes me want to travel to far-away places just to eat exotic fruits. And it make me incredibly annoyed at the paltry selection that we have here in the United States. Why don't we have the ice cream bean fruit? Why are we denied the miracle fruit? And who knew there are over 1,000 types of banana, some tasting like vanilla custard (which we may get to eat soon as our own hardy Cavendish banana is being killed off at an alarming rate by a terrible fungus).

Terrify your friends with disturbing facts about pesticides and fruit! Talk about fruit endlessly until everyone tells you to shut up already! Read this book!

Knitography says

I found this book incredibly frustrating. The subject matter is fascinating and the author clearly did a great deal of research. The book is absolutely packed with interesting facts about a seemingly endless variety of

fruits, not to mention a wacky cast of characters - the fruit hunters - who are obsessed with fruit.

Unfortunately, in his effort to include as many facts and people in the book as possible, the author has completely neglected any kind of organization or narrative flow. I rarely abandon a book, but after 100 pages of what was essentially a rambling recitation of facts about fruit, I gave up. When I put the book down, I felt like I'd been trying to drink water from a fire hose. Many of the facts are presented without context or follow up; the author has peaked the reader's curiosity, but he's too busy zooming on through his list of facts to stop and satisfy it.

Most frustrating of all is that this is really close to being a very good book. When the author is able to tear himself away from simply listing fact after fact after fact and actually *writes*, you get a glimpse of what the book could have been. Gollner's writing style is unfussy and easy to read, and he clearly developed a passion for the topic. Sadly, the jumbled and rambling approach he took to telling us about it put me off.

Joan says

reading for Slow Food book group; slower going than I thought, plus I thought it was going to be more about Florida as we're into local foods. hope I'm wrong and need to revise as get further into book.

UPDATE: It got worse ! It might have been a good long New Yorker essay but it read as if he googled "banana" and then wrote a sentence each re each item found. Plus it never ceased to be about him including men having sex with fruit and dangers of microwaving melons for this practice.

Very curious about how group discussion will go.

Heather Denkmire says

My daughter suggested I should maybe stop reading the "no no no" books because it keeps affecting my life choices in fairly dramatic ways. She's joking, though, because she (like me) appreciates knowing about ways we may be damaging or helping the earth (that's the larger issue we were talking about).

I enjoyed this book on several levels, mostly because of the luscious invitation to appreciate real fruit (fresh from the tree, vine, plant). It has ruined my experience of the produce section of the supermarkets, even the "organic" style stores. Even the farmers' markets are in question now, too, when it comes to fruit. So, that's the down side.

I had no idea, not even a clue, that there were so many fruits in the world. I had no idea how many items I consider not-fruits actually are fruits.

This delved into mostly the personal passions of fruit appreciators and toward the end it touched on the politics and commerce issues.

There were times the lists of kinds of fruits were so long, it got a little dull. And, at times, it was a bit heavy with the facts and details (a good quality most would think). I don't imagine I would've gotten anywhere with the book if I had read the book-book instead of listening to the audiobook. Still, I'm glad I heard all of the

words in the book. It was very worthwhile.

jeremy says

adam leith gollner's *the fruit hunters* is a delectable, alluring glimpse into the realm of fruit, pomology, and the sweet obsession it seems to engender in so many. rather comprehensive in scope, gollner's book focuses on myriad aspects of the fruit world, beginning with the definitional, historical, and cultural. with some 70,000 to 80,000 different edible fruit-bearing plant species, it is dumbfounding to consider that "most of our food comes from only twenty crops."

gollner goes on to explore some of the more exotic fruits, many of which quite nearly defy the imagination (coco de mer?!), as well as, presumably, the taste buds. he also reports on a number of fruit-related subcultures such as fruitarians, fruit tourists, amateur growers, hobbyists, etc. his chapters on fruit smuggling, poachers, black markets, hybridization, and the like offer insight into an industry that appears, perhaps at first glance, far more cultivated than it really is. *the fruit hunters* is an absorbing, well-researched work, which, if nothing else, will tantalize you with descriptions of fruits so remarkable that you may well want to seek them out for yourself (especially the miracle fruit!).

by discovering fruits, whether in our backyards or abroad, we can reconnect with nature, the realm of the sublime. to experience biophilia is to love a diversity that, as limitless as it is fragile, both haunts us and fills us with hope.

Elizabeth says

Fascinating topic, clumsy execution. Like many other books of its kind, The Fruit Hunters takes a seemingly mundane object and exposes the history, science, politics, and personalities behind it. While Gollner's research and dedication are admirable, his book is wildly overcrowded. While each chapter ostensibly has a single topic, the jumble of science, travelogue, interview, and introspection is dense and sometimes boring. There's an interesting, focused book in here somewhere, but you have to wade through a lot of excess material to find it.

Kay says

This took me an inordinately long time to read, considering that on the whole I quite enjoyed it. I think this may have been due in part to an organizational problem -- the book didn't seem to have a particular direction or focus. Instead, it seemed that the author was cramming everything he learned about fruit (and that was a considerable amount) into the book, willy-nilly. The author delights in long (very long) lists of fruits, places, cultivars, and characteristics. It's a bit of an onslaught at times. Plus, I had difficulty keeping all the various people he met in his travels straight -- he delights in presenting the oddities of fruit hunters, but it grew a bit tiresome. Yes, they're eccentrics, monomaniacs, obsessives... I got that part after the first few pages. It seemed excessive to reiterate basically the same thing time and again.

Despite these flaws, I enjoyed the book... in small doses. Gollner has an engaging style, and a real gift for description (which, admittedly, he sometimes lets run a little too loose). But the part of the book that really

stood out for me -- and seemed to merit its *own* separate treatment -- were the chapters on government regulation of fruit, sweeteners, and pesticides. THIS was where Gollner's journalistic instincts worked best, not in tracking down one more exotic fruit on some remote island. The switch over to this aspect of fruit was rather abrupt -- as if he grafted on a separate article he had written (which would, indeed explain a lot).

Gollner basically summarizes the politics of fruit - the scandals, machinations, and underhanded dealings that are behind, for example, the FDA ban on certain sweeteners, the (often flawed) rationale for which fruits can or can't be imported, and how market forces shape what ends up in our supermarket produce aisles. The latter, sadly, has little to do with taste and a lot to do with what ships and keeps well. The section on pesticides was particularly alarming. On the other hand, Gollner leaves the reader with a glimmer of hope, for there are fruit pioneers out there now, piggy-backing on the trend for buying quality produce locally, who are intent on introducing new varieties of fruit. This, as an avid fruit lover, is something I'm really looking forward to.

Jill says

Just wish I hadn't read it in the winter, because all those glorious exotic fruits are NOT to be had in New England in December and I wanted to try them all! Fun, fun read (great narrator on the audiobook). Starts slow but I'm so glad I stuck with it.

I adore these "world history via a specific subject" books, and this is so much more. It's a very personalized story of the (journalist) author's investigations (sometimes TOO personal: What's up with the random R-rated moments among stuff like the details about laws regarding the importation of mangosteens!?).

The relationship of fruit, its cultivation, superstition, and world history was eye opening. I have a greater appreciation for the magnitude of how many fruits there are in this world, and how many most of us will never taste. The author focuses a lot of ink on fruit-obsessed people he meets, and they're as fascinating as the exotic fruits they pursue around the world. The description of the worldwide fruit trade -- smuggling, pests, legal restrictions, industrial espionage -- was much more interesting than it sounds.

Best part was when I was in tears laughing at his description of how nasty durians are: like eating your favorite ice cream while sitting on the toilet...a disinterred corpse clutching a wheel of blue cheese...Undercooked peanut butter mint omelets in body odor sauce...but who knew that there are people who love durians enough to relocate to places they can eat them exclusively (and they're not the only "fruitarians" he meets)? And for that matter, how much can you mess with adding artificial flavors to apples before there's a revolt? How on earth can a fruit be as scandalous as a coco de mer?

Best takeaway is that the best fruits are not growing wild in the woods, and are also not growing on massive factory farms -- they're somewhere in between. And I want to go there!

Craig says

This book is, in a word, overwritten. Never one to forgo an adjective, or to use a simple verb when an ornate one will do, the author prefers sentences like, "Islets ringed with white sand merge into turquoise translucence." Landscapes "burst" with craters. Describing a situations where neighbors complained about the smell from a fruit he was eating, he writes, "Durian vapors were moseying down the hall." Later, he doesn't just visit the heart of the durian kingdom, he visits its *pulsating* heart. (This is after comparing the

smell of Durian to no less than 13 different items; really, after "stale vomit" I got the idea.)

Maybe a sentence or two like this, for seasoning, would liven a book. But sentence after sentence, paragraph after paragraph ... it gets old fast. This book is written like the author wasn't confident the material could stand on its own merits.

The thing is, it could. About halfway through, the book settles down into a study of bizarre people and even more bizarre fruit. Among the former: a cult that eats only dates and believes its members will live forever (most have died of old age, but they keep the faith: "We really believe some of us will make it"). Among the latter: the coco-de-mer, whose fruit looks just like a female's nether regions (and don't even get the author started on the stamen), and whose shell was the capstone of an enlightenment-era cabinet of wonder. Interesting fruit facts abound in this book. But -- to use a non-fruity metaphor -- they're stuck in the clotted prose, and it's hard to get them out.

Laurie DeVecca says

This should have been a good book, but it felt like the author was too concerned about appearing hip, or perhaps was insecure about his topic choice....his word choice and digressions were annoying, not clever. Very disappointing.
