



Fruits of Eden: David Fairchild and America's Plant Hunters

Amanda Harris

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At the turn of the nineteenth century—when most food in America was bland and brown and few people appreciated the economic potential of then-exotic foods—David Fairchild convinced the U.S. Department of Agriculture to finance overseas explorations to find and bring back foreign cultivars. Fairchild traveled to remote corners of the globe, searching for fruits, vegetables, and grains that could find a new home in American fields and in the American diet.

In *Fruits of Eden*, Amanda Harris vividly recounts the exploits of Fairchild and his small band of adventurers and botanists as they traversed distant lands—Algeria, Baghdad, Cape Town, Hong Kong, Java, and Zanzibar—to return with new and exciting flavors. Their expeditions led to a renaissance not only at the dinner table but also in horticulture, providing diversity of crops for farmers across the country.

Not everyone was supportive, however. The scientific community was concerned with invasive species, and World War I fanned the flames of xenophobia in Washington. Adversaries who believed Fairchild's discoveries would contaminate the purity of native crops eventually shut down his program, but his legacy lives on in today's modern kitchen, where navel oranges, Meyer lemons, honeydew melons, soybeans, and durum wheat are now standard.

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