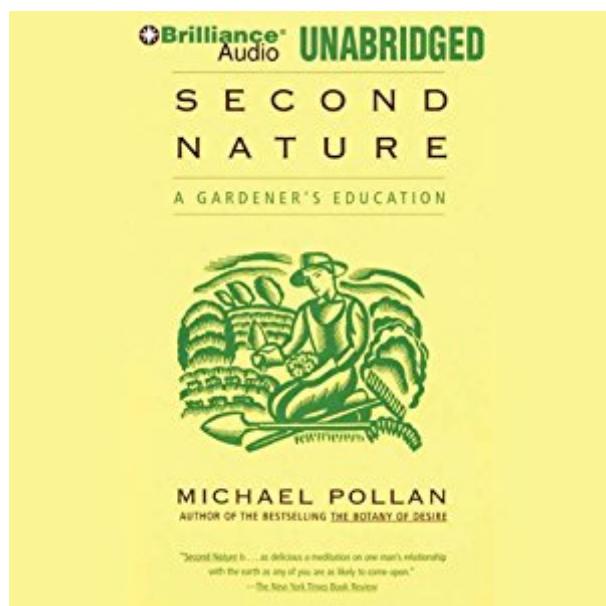


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# Second Nature: A Gardener's Education



## **Synopsis**

In his articles and in best-selling books such as *The Botany of Desire*, Michael Pollan has established himself as one of our most important and beloved writers on modern man's place in the natural world. A new literary classic, *Second Nature* has become a manifesto not just for gardeners but for environmentalists everywhere. Chosen by the American Horticultural Society as one of the seventy-five greatest books ever written about gardening, *Second Nature* captures the rhythms of our everyday engagement with the outdoors in all its glory and exasperation. With chapters ranging from a reconsideration of the Great American Lawn, a dispatch from one man's war with a woodchuck, to an essay about the sexual politics of roses, Pollan has created a passionate and eloquent argument for reconceiving our relationship with nature. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

## **Book Information**

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## **Customer Reviews**

I read this book for a college course, "Religion, Ethics, and the Environment." Most of the books were (as the course title suggests) very heavy texts...yawn. However, when assignments from Pollan's book came up, I would laugh out loud while reading. My classmates & I would discuss the book at any given opportunity, and the bookstore sold twice as many copies as there were students in the class, because we recommended it to everyone. How many philosophy books can you say that about? Pollan makes his philosophical points with vivid stories from his childhood on Long Island and his adult experiences in his garden. His garden-centered view of nature provides an

excellent counterpoint to most environmental philosophy, which has been written from a preservationist's point of view.

Many of us fall into the trap of thinking that our relationship to the land must be one of either two choices: either we ruthlessly exploit it, with no regard for any but short term use, or we refuse to "meddle" in it at all, letting nature do what it will. *Second Nature* explores the third alternative, that of working with nature respectfully to produce something that we intend. Believing that our relationship with nature can not be broken down into simple nature versus culture arguments, Pollan explores the overlapping of nature and culture. To that end, he discusses Americans' historical and contemporary ideas of what makes a garden a garden and attitudes toward gardening and wilderness. There is wonderful, thought-provoking commentary on the tyranny of the American lawn, the sexuality of roses, class conflict in the garden, privacy, trees, weeds, and what it means to have a green thumb. Pollan's stories of his own adventures in the garden are interesting and often amusing. His writing is thoughtful and his insight frequently unexpected, as when, in the chapter "'Made Wild by Pompous Catalogs' ", he points out that garden catalogues are selling not merely seed but their ideas about gardens. Pollan is also highly readable. It is hard not to like an author who says things like "...the Victorian middle class simply couldn't deal with the rose's sexuality" or "...there is a free lunch and its name is photosynthesis". *Second Nature* is well worth reading

I really enjoyed this book. I grew up in a family which gardens, and have my own garden today. I also grew up in an agrarian family, and went on to get a master's in cultural anthropology - all that to say, I suppose I am well-suited to enjoy Pollan's perspectives. I don't agree with everything he wrote, but I do agree with most of it. And the book is very well-written, very entertaining, and it really makes the reader pause to consider choices made in their own life. So much of the information about gardening is "how-to", and this book delves into the philosophy, the motivations, the rationales, and the environmental impacts of gardening .... It's written on a higher level, and as worthwhile for readers as the "how to" books, too. I highly recommend this book - for those who enjoy gardening, and also for those who are concerned about the environment. Pollan will be a good read for both. I absolutely disagree with the previous reviewer who disparaged Pollan's take on the environmental movement as a whole. Perhaps that person is so deeply enmeshed in environmental causes that he can't see the big picture- but for me, the big picture looks much more as Pollan describes it, than not.

This was probably the first book I read that dealt with relations to nature on a practical and philosophical level. I'm not sure if Pollan counts as a philosopher, but the views he presents are very accessible and bring a lot into question. I've heard his writing described as piecey, which surprised me. I will agree that the separation of the chapters into seasons didn't really seem to fit, but ignoring the headers fixed that problem. Overall it was an enjoyable and informative read. There's a very strong sense of humor that runs through the whole book and many good points are made. Anyone interested in gardening would love this book, and I think that anyone interested in environmental issues or ethics would too. It's a good place to start off if you've ever wondered about societal attitudes to the land but wavered on learning more by the writing style of people like Emerson or Singer. I was so pleased reading this book that I bought Pollan's *A Botany of Desire*, as well, and though the check-out girl gave me a funny look because of the title, it was well worth it.

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