



# A Shakespearian Botanical

*Margaret Willes*

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When Falstaff calls upon the sky to rain potatoes in *The Merry Wives of Windsor*, he highlights the belief that the exotic vegetable, recently introduced to England from the Americas, was an aphrodisiac. In *Romeo and Juliet*, Lady Capulet calls for quinces to make pies for the marriage feast, knowing that the fragrant fruit was connected with weddings and fertility. Shakespeare's contemporaries would have been familiar with such ripe symbolism in part due to herbals, tomes filled with detailed botanical descriptions consulted to deepen knowledge of the plants of the day.

*A Shakespearean Botanical* follows in the tradition of the medieval and Renaissance herbal, touring the Bard's remarkable knowledge of the fruits, vegetables, herbs, and flowers of Tudor and Jacobean England through fifty quotations from his plays and verse poems. Each of the entries is beautifully illustrated with hand-colored renderings from the work of Shakespeare's contemporary, herbalist John Gerard, making an appropriate pairing with his writing, along with a brief text setting the quotation within the context of the medicine, cooking, and gardening of the time.

The book's many beautifully reproduced images are a pleasure to look at, and Margaret Willes's well-chosen quotations and expert knowledge of Shakespeare's England provide readers with a fascinating insight into daily life. The book will make an inspiring addition to the Shakespeare lover's bookshelf, as well as captivate anyone with a passion for plants or botanical art.

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