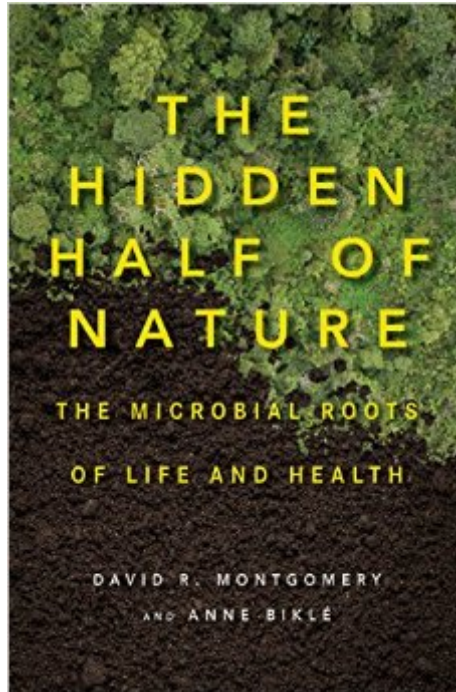


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The Hidden Half Of Nature: The Microbial Roots Of Life And Health



Synopsis

A riveting exploration of how microbes are transforming the way we see nature and ourselves—and could revolutionize agriculture and medicine. Prepare to set aside what you think you know about yourself and microbes. Good health—for people and for plants—depends on Earth's smallest creatures. *The Hidden Half of Nature* tells the story of our tangled relationship with microbes and their potential to revolutionize agriculture and medicine, from garden to gut. When David R. Montgomery and Anne Bikl decide to restore life into their barren yard by creating a garden, dead dirt threatens their dream. As a cure, they feed their soil a steady diet of organic matter. The results impress them. In short order, the much-maligned microbes transform their bleak yard into a flourishing Eden. Beneath their feet, beneficial microbes and plant roots continuously exchange a vast array of essential compounds. The authors soon learn that this miniaturized commerce is central to botanical life's master strategy for defense and health. They are abruptly plunged further into investigating microbes when Bikl is diagnosed with cancer. Here, they discover an unsettling truth. An armada of bacteria (our microbiome) sails the seas of our gut, enabling our immune system to sort microbial friends from foes. But when our gut microbiome goes awry, our health can go with it. The authors also discover startling insights into the similarities between plant roots and the human gut. We are not what we eat. We are all—the product of what our microbes eat. This leads to a radical reconceptualization of our relationship to the natural world: by cultivating beneficial microbes, we can rebuild soil fertility and help turn back the modern plague of chronic diseases. *The Hidden Half of Nature* reveals how to transform agriculture and medicine—by merging the mind of an ecologist with the care of a gardener and the skill of a doctor.

20 illustrations

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Customer Reviews

This is a more complex book than meets the eye. I thought it would be about the quite recent scientific and medical investigations of the human microbiome, which increasingly looks central to human health. It is that, but this is a highly personal book that mixes health of the earth--soil--and health of a person, sort of an inside soil and outside soil, literally grounded in the authors' garden in Seattle. The book presents equal parts personal experience and hard science, which is described clearly and should be accessible to readers--both soil and human microbiomes are far, far more complex than most people appreciate. The book starts with a description of the authors' (the authors are married, and both have extensive backgrounds in science) rebuilding poor soil in their Seattle house, to make a garden. To be brief (the book describes this very well and gardeners will like it) it quickly became fertile and growth exploded, as did unanticipated populations of birds, insects and visiting mammals, all stemming from an enriched microbiota (which includes bacteria, fungi and other folks). A healthy soil has a healthy microbiota, every bit as complex as the above ground ecosystem parts; the point is that healthy soil produces healthy food--the book is explicitly advocating changes in farming. This connects with Bikle's cancer and experience. At first this doesn't seem relevant, but it gradually introduces the human microbiome in all its complexity, and its impact on health, and how manipulating it can have good consequences. See the connection between healthy soil and healthy body? Human ignorance of the microbial world has been hugely costly.

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