

Poetry Book Awards 2025 - 3rd price and comments from the judge John Evans

Meet Us and Eat Us, Vilma Bharatan and Liz Kendall

Within the very narrow confines of its brief, *Meet Us and Eat Us* achieves something genuinely impressive. Vilma Bharatan and Liz Kendall set out to fuse poetry, prose and fine-art photography in celebration of the world's food plants, and the result is both educational and entertaining. The design and production are exceptional — a stunning, high-budget volume that invites readers to look and learn as they read.

The book could well be many readers' first introduction to modern poetry, demonstrating how verse can be used in new ways to inform and captivate. That ability to reach beyond the usual poetry audience is one of its strengths. What is perhaps most remarkable is how consistently the authors manage to balance instruction and imagination. The writing never feels mechanical; the poems retain warmth, humour and personality. The marriage of text and image creates a rhythm of its own—at times lyrical, at times playful—reminding us that poetry can speak through many forms.

Below is an example:

'Parana pine – *Araucaria angustifolia*'

This popular pine has an uncertain future.
Affection and appetite are rivals in life.
One keeps me growing, cares for my homeland;
The other takes greedily, leaves tomorrow to chance.

In one hundred years I've lost most of my trees.
The forests I filled are now thinning too fast.
And what of the mammals and birds who rely
On my seeds in the winter, to keep them alive?

So give me some time and some space to recover,
Leave me to birds and to beasts for a while.
I can meet some demands but I balk at destruction.
Please solve this puzzle before too much time passes.

Reviews

Below is what people have been saying about *Meet Us and Eat Us*

Orlando Murrin, cookbook and culinary crime writer, and founder of Olive magazine

"Different, original - and utterly absorbing"

Will Holmes, School Gardener/Project Officer at School Food Matters.

"This book really celebrates the joy and wonder of the foods we eat, which is a fundamental part of our food education programmes in school. We always try to get across the idea to children that food is inherently interesting (where it comes from, how it's grown, its cultural significance), and how much fun we can have if we simply notice this, and the book captures this idea perfectly. In particular, when we deliver sensory food education to children in schools we encourage them to let their imagination run wild when describing what different foods look like to them. The artwork of food in the book really aligns with this childlike lens of creativity and fantasy when perceiving different foods. This is great as it makes every opportunity to eat an opportunity to discover something new and exciting. We'll bring the book along to our next sensory food education session"

Martine Bailey, author of An Appetite for Violets and several other historical mysteries and crime novels.

"I loved sampling this cornucopia of food plants from around the world. The authors have used an ingenious method to explore edible plants by family, presenting botany, stories and legends and food facts alongside charming anthropomorphic photographs. It is a unique idea, and one that lends itself to happy browsing. I enjoyed reading poems and pieces on old favourites, such as ginger, cardamom, and sweet potatoes, as well as introductions to new plant foods, including chocolate pudding fruit, sacred lotus, and the lipstick tree. There is some beautiful writing here, in both poetry and prose. From the 'garnet-sweet mysteries' of pomegranate seeds, to the various states of dates, from those found in 'near-mummification to soft and oozing with sticky juice'. References to historical uses and food combinations are both accurate and tempting. This is a beautifully produced book that would make an idea gift for foodies, and I recommend it to anyone with an interest in plant foods and their rich roles in our lives."

Jasma Patel, Gorgeous Book with quirky but gorgeous illustrations. Every food lover should have this book!

Reviewed in the United Kingdom on 13 March 2025

"this wonderful book was recommended by one of my dear friends as she knew just how much I love food, cooking and fresh ingredients. I wasn't sure what to expect when my copy arrived in the post but... i simply cannot put it down. the history of each vegetable, fruit, nut, its role in society, their

popularity and so much more... it's even encouraged me to start my own little veg plot!

The poetry is beautiful, the insight into each fruit and vegetable is impressive. Thank you for this wonderful book. this should be o every food lover's book shelf. Beautifully illustrated too!"

Jackie Hall, A very original and informative book

Reviewed in the United Kingdom on 4 January 2025

"This is a beautifully produced book. A work of art in itself. It is deeply researched and intelligently written, hugely informative about the origins and geography of the families of food plants, familiar and unfamiliar, which are presented and their interrelationship with world geography, human histories and cultures. This learning is complimented by remarkable, animistic depictions of each vegetable and fruit and playful, engaging poems which summarise the text and are accessible to readers of all ages. The joint enthusiasm of the authors shines through. It is a book to be shared and discussed and I think children will love it. I felt I was on a voyage of discovery when I read it and it is a book I will go back to again and again. It made me hungry to eat and know more. I highly recommend it."

Sharron Green, A feast for the Eyes!

Reviewed in the United Kingdom on 17 September 2024

"This beautiful and stylish volume by Vilma Bharatan & Liz Kendall uses poetry, prose and fine art photography to introduce a selection of 90 food plants - their history, geography, cultural and mythological roots as well as the science behind them and their role in our diets.

It is an amazing achievement and suitable for all ages as it makes no assumptions about background knowledge or experience.

An excellent gift for all plant and nature lovers (although make sure you keep a copy for yourself!). Also a fun way to share fundamental food facts."

Amazon Customer, Beautiful and interesting

Reviewed in the United Kingdom on 9 September 2025

"This book is both beautiful and interesting - the quality of the hardcover makes it perfect for the coffee table - dip in and out of the book to find inspired snippets of information about food plants with insightful poems and quirky illustrations."

rainbow_butterfly, A delightful book that will teach you a lot

Reviewed in the United Kingdom on 15 August 2025

"A clever, interesting, informative book which I return to time and time again - as do the rest of my family. I've learned so much about food and this has

helped me understand what we're eating, and to make good decisions on food. The book is beautifully made, really good quality."

R Macphail, Delightful and informative

Reviewed in the United Kingdom on 28 November 2024

"This book is fascinating as it gives us excellent information about fruit and vegetables in a fun way with unusual pictures and poetry. It is not just children who will benefit from reading it. I learnt lots of things that I did not know. It is beautifully produced. Well done Vilma Bharatan and Liz Kendall."

Clare Woods

Reviewed in the United Kingdom on 21 November 2024

"Such a wonderful book! Really well put together, so interesting and beautifully illustrated. Bought as a Christmas present for a food loving relative who I think will love it. The poems are particularly good "

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