

Heroes of 2022

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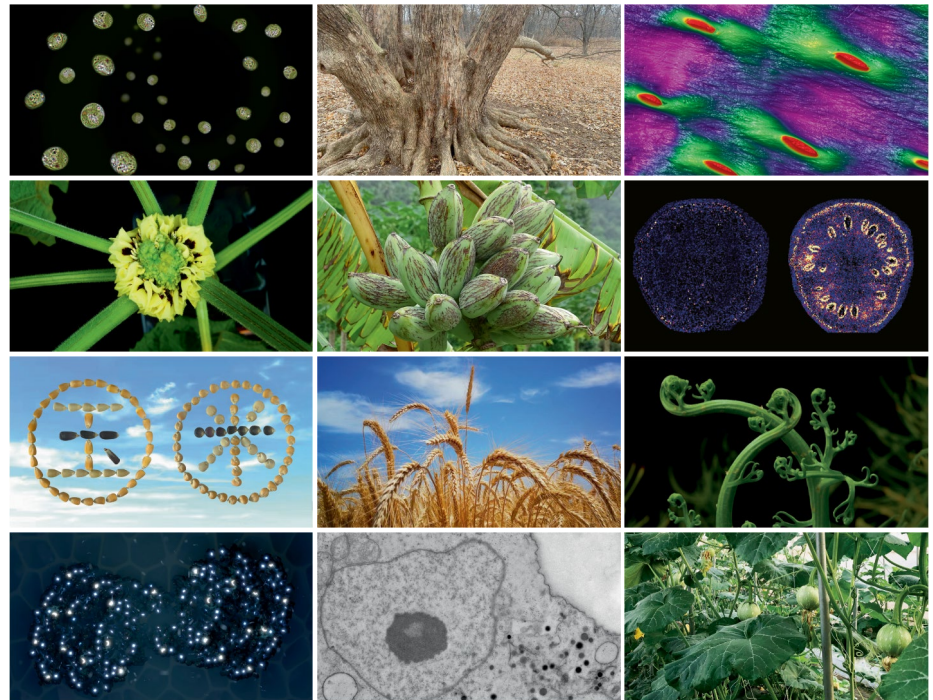
Plants are not only fascinating but also photogenic. At *Nature Plants* we try to reflect both of these aspects.

The cover of this issue of *Nature Plants* shows some beautiful botanical drawings of early embryophytes, only known from their fossils, drawn by the artist June Ding. These accompany John Bowman's Review on [the origin of land plants](#) and complete another year of fantastic cover images, which started with a collage of glass flowers for our January issue (they can all be seen [here](#)).

It may seem odd to make a cover for a journal that exists only online and so has no need to protect its contents between strengthened initial and final pages. Although covers are certainly an anachronistic hangover from the days of physically printed journals, they still serve a purpose by making our tables of content more visually appealing and, quite frankly, we like making them.

The images for our cover come from our authors. Sometimes we are sent mock-ups showing how these images might look as covers, but these are not often helpful. We much prefer a clean image or images which we can present within our own style. We are always happy to receive a range of possibilities, the more images the better, although more than about ten per paper is excessive. The cover images are selected more on aesthetic grounds than because of the contents of the paper with which they are associated; a striking image always trumps an outstanding finding. We also prefer to have photographs of real things rather than models, diagrams or cartoons, but this is not a hard and fast rule. This issue's cover and May's depiction of an ecosystem dominated by tree ferns, as might have been seen in the Jurassic period, are both artist's impressions. And the cover of the [April 2016 issue](#) displayed a picture of a sunflower drawn by the nine-year old daughter of one of our authors.

All our covers can be found on the website, but we receive far more suggestions than we can use each month. Fortunately, we can still use some of this bounty, albeit in a less permanent way. The 'top item' on our homepage



highlights a recently published piece of content and includes a 'hero' image. These heroes are usually selected from the possible cover suggestions and remain on the site for about a month. After that they are gone, not preserved in any accessible form unless the Internet Archive (<https://archive.org/>) has taken a snapshot of our site while they were present.

That these heroes are so ephemeral seems a shame. They are certainly not 'failed' covers, but rather images that for one reason or another were better suited to the hero. The reasons for this can be as simple as their shape fitting the dimensions of the hero box better than those of the cover, or the background colour working better. So, as an end-of-year treat, we are reproducing all twelve of our heroes together so that they can be enjoyed again and as a reminder of the breadth of topics covered in *Nature Plants* each year.

The heroes (and their associated papers) feature crop plants quite heavily, including the staples maize (<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41477-022-01190-2>) and wheat (<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41477-022-01197-9>),

as well as tomatoes (<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41477-022-01154-6>), squashes (<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41477-022-01297-6>), and bananas (<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41477-022-01144-8>). There are also images showing the plasticity of plant development (<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41477-022-01118-w> and <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41477-022-01226-7>), micrographs of cellular structures (<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41477-022-01113-1> and <https://www.nature.com/articles/s41477-022-01259-y>), and an atomic model of a photosystem (<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41477-022-01253-4>). The last two heroes show the range of plant life from single-celled algae (<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41477-021-01042-5>) to a vast and ancient tree (<https://www.nature.com/articles/s41477-021-01088-5>).

As another year comes to an end, it is a good time to remind ourselves of our good fortune to work on subjects so intellectually and aesthetically rewarding.

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