



The People & Plant Connection

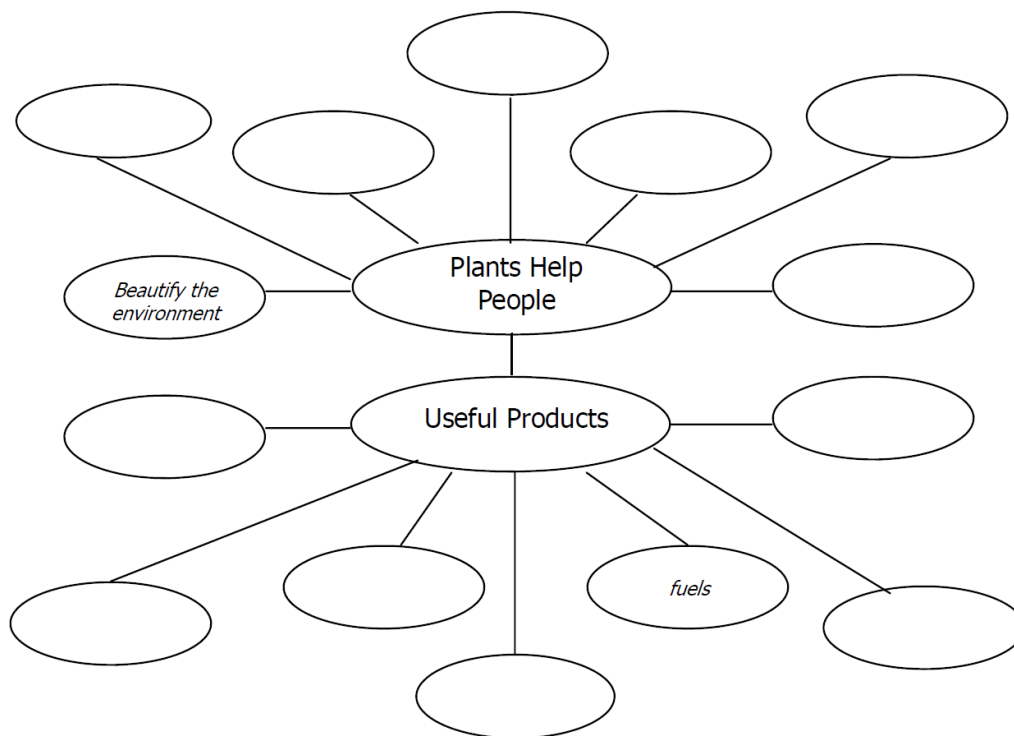
They're the only living things that make their own food. Not only that, but they are the source of all food for every other living thing. What are they? Plants!

Plants are so much a part of our lives that you probably don't give them much thought. We use plants for useful products such as medicines, fibers, paper products, cosmetics, spices and building materials. We burn plants for fuels. That includes wood as well as the fossil fuels that came from plants eons ago. We eat plants, and everything else we eat also eats plants! Finally, we depend on plants for oxygen we breathe. Without plants, we would not survive. People and plants have always been connected. Long ago, humans were hunters and gatherers, roaming from place to place to find plants and animals to eat. Over time people learned to grow their own plants, collecting and replanting seeds of plants they liked and used. They settled and became farmers in places where plants grew well. Then came the industrial revolution. Many people stopped being farmers in order to work at new jobs. Fewer farmers grew more to feed growing numbers of consumers.

The people-plant relationship changed with every shift in these events. The human need for plants has triggered wars, famine and waves of migration. Plants and products of plants have always had meaning in many parts of human life. What examples can you share about the roles of plants in folklore or celebration? How about the use of plants in music, arts and poetry?

The study of the role of plants in a society is called ethnobotany. You can think of ethnobotany as the people and plant connections.

One of the fastest growing agricultural industries in the United States isn't something we eat. It's the growing and selling of nursery and greenhouse plants. That includes the growing of trees, shrubs, bedding plants and flowers. We grow these plants to make our surroundings more beautiful and to help the environment at the same time. In Oregon, nursery and greenhouse is ranked as a top agricultural industry.



Did you know? Many cultures have relationships with certain plants. Some Native American cultures, for example, depended on corn for survival. They had corn dolls, corn maidens, special corn-sowing dances and harvest festivals of thanks. They developed many ways to save and use corn. They even made some of the earliest calendars to keep track of corn planting and harvesting dates.