From our clothes, food and medicines, to the design of warplanes, seeds shape almost every part of our lives. In *The Triumph of Seeds* (Basic Books, 2015, $26.99) conservation biologist Thor Hanson chronicles the symbiotic relationship of humans and seeds through a series of anecdotes that spans the biblical expulsion from Eden to the Arab Spring. Hanson’s cinematic accounts of his own research and his interactions with the experts behind his stories set this apart from other era-hopping historical narratives. Useful appendices provide specialized scientific terminology and extended historical details.

*Trees Up Close* (Timber Press, 2014, $15) features balletic images of common trees created through a special process designed for microscopic slides. Photographer Robert Llewellyn and author Nancy Ross Hugo have created a nook whose concise text and almost pocket-size dimensions make it perfect for tree-watching in the backyard or forest. A water-and-dirt-resistant cover makes it easy to wipe off the book before returning it to the shelf.