Throughout the middle ages and well into the early modern period, plants were the most essential material components of rural life. But with the rapid socioeconomic changes of the sixteenth century – urbanisation, industrialisation, expanding market economies, the rise of the nation state and the national church – plants also became a crucial site for both a growing nostalgia over the rural past and the fraught social and moral battle over emerging English identities. Nowhere is this more evident than in the literature and drama of the late-Tudor period, and in the growth of plant arts and cultures around the court of Elizabeth I. Shakespeare himself was a consummate botanist and his plays, written for an audience of rural-educated Londoners like himself, fuelled the growing passion for plant life that went on in succeeding decades to shape the political struggles of the Civil War period and the rise of English colonialism.

WEEK ONE: THE HOME
Shakespeare’s early education took place almost exclusively in the female domain of plant etymology, fairy lore, hearth stories, kitchen physic and domestic botanical arts. But at eight years-old Shakespeare went to Grammar school, where he met instead a male world of Latin poetry and physical discipline. The new Humanist curriculum was specifically designed to eradicate the ‘nursery nonsense’ of a Tudor boy’s childhood, to replace the folk world of plant magic with the ‘poesies’ of Greek pastoral and local plant names with the Latinate terms newly circulating in early modern printed Herbals. But this intellectual cleansing failed. Instead, the two worlds interwove in Shakespeare’s imagination, producing such rich combinations of folklore and Classical mythology as we find in *A Midsummer Night’s Dream.*

Key texts:
Shakespeare, *A Dream* and *Cymbeline*

Secondary Reading:
*Wendy Wall, Staging Domesticity*
*Leah Knight, Of Books and Botany*
*Andrew Wear, Knowledge and Practice in English Medicine*, an ebook: Chapter Two (‘Remedies’).

Clare Guest, *The Understanding of Ornament in the Italian Renaissance* (excerpts)

WEEK TWO: THE GARDEN
English gardens were never simply the ‘green thought’ that Marvell desired; they were Eden, the *hortus conclusus* and the *locus amoenus.* They signalled love, the body and moral danger, but also redemption, sanctification, and spiritual joy. This seminar looks at some of the most sophisticated early modern treatments of garden plants, in texts whose layers of irony play upon the garden’s excessive signification, especially in the later decades of Elizabeth’s reign. We will also look at Shakespearean uses of the medieval trope of the political garden, and some of Shakespeare’s own innovations, such as his ‘folking’ of urban garden thought. We
will consider some particular images surrounding Elizabeth I’s favourite flowers (the pansies on her clothes and in her perfume) in the context of medical and moral thought surrounding menses as flowers, bleeding as cloth dying, blood as ‘compost’ and the Queen herself as Flora.

Key texts:
Marvell, ‘The Garden’
Shakespeare, *Richard II* (Garden scene) and *Venus and Adonis*
Elizabethan portraiture

Secondary Reading:
*Rebecca Bushnell, *Green Desire*
*Jennifer Munroe, *Gender and the Garden in Early Modern English Literature*
*Amy Tigner, *Literature and the Renaissance Garden from Elizabeth I to Charles II*
*Diane Kelsey McColley, *Poetry and Ecology in the Age of Milton and Marvell*
*Roy Strong, *The Renaissance Garden in England*

WEEK THREE: THE NATION
The later-Tudor period witnessed the birth of Chorographic writing, through which readers rediscovered the English landscape as a moral and aesthetic space that rivalled the classical landscapes of the georgics. The first expeditions to the new world likewise stimulated comparisons to home and a rediscovery of ‘local’ plant life that spawned new ‘geohumoralist’ thought about the importance of local plants for the health of local bodies. This week we will look also at the changing role of trees and woodland, which inhabited a special place in the late-Tudor literary imagination.

Key Texts:
Drayton, *Poly-Olbion* (excerpts)
Spenser, *FQ* Book One, ‘The Wandering Wood’
*Milton, Comus*

Secondary Reading:
*Alix Cooper, *Inventing the Indigenous: Local Knowledge and Natural History in Early Modern Europe*
*Jeffrey Theis, *Writing the Forest in Early Modern England*
*Robert N. Watson, *Back to Nature*
*Garrett Sullivan, *The Drama of Landscape: Land, Property, and Social Relations*
*Andrew McRae, *God Speed the Plough: The Representation of Agrarian England*
WEEK FOUR: THE WORLD
This seminar addresses plants as foreign curiosities, both real and imagined. It crosses discourses of travel, medicine, collecting and natural history. We will be thinking about how the arrival of foreign plants in England helped shape the nationalist narrative already emerging in local plant cultures, but also how English thinking about plants formed part of a broader European scientific movement.

Key Texts:
Walter Raleigh, *The Discoverie of the Large, Rich, and Beautiful Empyre of Guiana* (1596)
Richard Hakluyt, *Discourse Concerning Western Planting* (1584)
Louis B. Wright (ed.), *A Voyage to Virginia in 1609*
Herbals

Secondary Literature:
*Pamela H. Smith and Paula Findlen (eds.), Merchants and Marvels: Commerce, Science, and Art in Early Modern Europe*
Richard Hakluyt, *Divers Voyages Touching the Discoverie of America* (1582)
Sachiko Kusukawa, *Picturing the Book of Nature*
Brian W. Ogilvie, *The Science of Describing: Natural History in Renaissance Europe*
Daniel Carey and Claire Jowitt, *Richard Hakluyt and Travel Writing in Early Modern Europe*