

Living Science Readers
The Little Wanderers:
Plants and Their Travels

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WHY PLANTS TRAVEL.

Plants are great travelers; they often wander far and wide. Sometimes they even cross the ocean and take up their abode in a new land.

The oxeye daisy, our common meadow buttercup, and the little Canada thistle, now so abundant everywhere, are not native Americans, but came here from Europe.

Very likely they sailed in the ships with the early settlers and took possession of the New World with them. They are so much at home now that most people think they always grew here. But they did not, and when the Pilgrim Fathers looked over their new home, the fields were not white with daisies nor yellow with buttercups.



No doubt the Pilgrim Fathers were glad of this, for daisies and buttercups often cover the fields and spoil the hay, and while “daisies in the meadow” seem very lovely to the city people who go to the country for the summer, daisies in the hay are another matter, and the farmers do not think they are lovely at all.

It is not the grown-up plants that travel, as a rule, though some of them do. For you must know the plant world is an upside down kind of place where the parents stand still at home and the children wander about.

Of course the children are the seeds, and they are free, but when they once settle down and begin to grow, their wandering days are over.

Plants with roots are great home-bodies; nothing short of actual violence can make them move from the spot they have chosen. Frequently they die if they are moved.

Not so with the seeds, however.

They wander about, and their parents often take great pains to send them out into the world.

For the children of the plants are very apt to die if they remain at home too long. They need to find a place in which to settle down and grow, and it is often better for them to do this at a distance from their parents.

Plants eat what is in the soil, and each kind of plant needs some particular earth food. When plants of one kind are crowded too closely in a place, the earth is often impoverished from so many of that same plant consuming the same nutrients out of it, and the plant might die out if it were not able to find a fresh growing place. Then, again, if the seeds always fell close to the parent plant, the earth would soon become too crowded to support more than a few new plants.

So for these and other reasons it is best for the seeds to go while they are able and find a place for themselves.

Nearly all seeds are provided with some way of moving about, and while some of them go very short distances others go very long ones.

They travel for their profit, and why may we not say for their pleasure? For if a plant is able to feel and enjoy at all, — and I for one believe it is — then the dandelion seeds must feel very joyous sailing before the wind in the early summer, and later the thistle-down and the milkweed seeds, scudding before the breeze.

