



Branches: Nature's Patterns: A Tapestry in Three Parts

Philip Ball

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As part of a trilogy of books exploring the science of patterns in nature, acclaimed science writer Philip Ball here looks at the form and growth of branching networks in the natural world, and what we can learn from them.

Many patterns in nature show a branching form - trees, river deltas, blood vessels, lightning, the cracks that form in the glazing of pots. These networks share a peculiar geometry, finding a compromise between disorder and determinism, though some, like the hexagonal snowflake or the stones of the Devil's Causeway fall into a rigidly ordered structure. Branching networks are found at every level in biology - from the single cell to the ecosystem. Human-made networks too can come to share the same features, and if they don't, then it might be profitable to make them do so: nature's patterns tend to arise from economical solutions.



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