



Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United Nations



# WOULD YOU JUDGE A BOOK BY ITS COVER?

BOOK COVER DESIGNS ON PULSES  
AND LEGUMES FROM THE  
FAO LIBRARY COLLECTIONS

As we promote  
the International  
Year of Pulses (IYP),  
the FAO Library  
celebrates  
leguminous crops  
using its main  
asset: its valuable  
and unique  
book collections.

**Library exhibition**  
October – December 2016

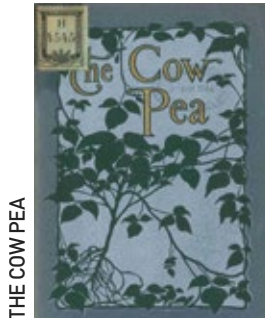


# 1910s

## ART NOUVEAU

The beginning of the nineteenth century is characterized by a new art style suitably called Art Nouveau. A highly decorative style using curvilinear patterns often based on plant and floral motifs and stylized female silhouettes. The movement comes to an end with the First World War and the Russian Revolution, historical moments that call for a more sober style.

1914



THE COW PEA

An early user's manual, this volume is illustrated in the Art Nouveau style of the period, focused on elevating to a high level the decorative arts in a sophisticated manner style. Its influence within book cover design is complex, ranging from geometrical patterns to floral motifs with curves rooted in British and Japanese art, as we can appreciate in this delicately designed cover.

# 1920s-30s

## ART DECO

The rich Art Nouveau movement is replaced in the 1920s by Art Deco, a more streamlined, rectilinear style, often characterized by rich colours and bold geometric shapes. Being scientific publications, they are also measured in design.

1920s-30s



FLEURS, FRUITS, LÉGUMES

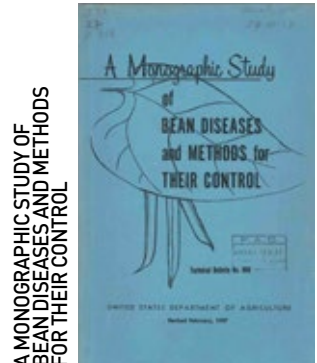
The cover illustrates a perfect example of the Art Deco style of the 1920s, using the beautiful logo of Louis van Houtte, a Belgian horticulturist and founder of the Belgian Royal Horticultural Society, by which this book was published.

# 1940s-50s

## INTERNATIONAL TYPOGRAPHIC STYLE

In the 1950s, we see functional cover designs that are entirely centred on the bibliographic information. Titles, authors and publishers are displayed with bold fonts and framed by monochromatic design and square lines. It is a neutral approach that emphasizes rational planning. The Scandinavian colour scheme, which is heavily influenced by nature and includes shades of brown, cream, grey and green, becomes one of the major colour trends for the period.

1957



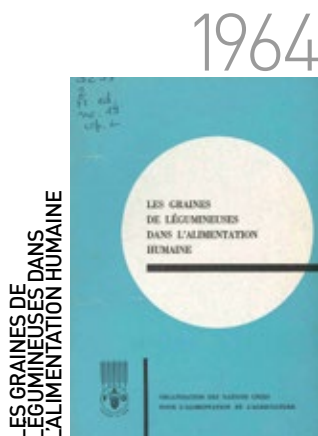
A MONOGRAPHIC STUDY OF  
BEAN DISEASES AND METHODS  
FOR THEIR CONTROL

Although a technical publication, the cover has a soft drawing design of a bean with the leaf embracing the title.

The subtle elegance of the drawing grid and functional restraint allows the picture to have a dominant space without unbalancing the page. It is a clear example of the 1950s functional design in book covers.

## 1960s TIME OF CONTRAST

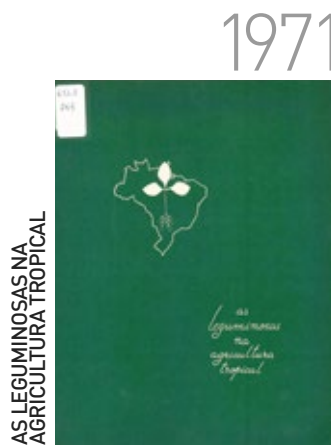
The influence of early 20th-century art movements like Suprematism and Constructivism forged a new relationship between art, text, image and reader to channel the power of modernity. This is also a time of change and contrasts with high-tech designs in contrast with the popular hippie culture. Some designers use a colour scheme inspired by nature while others are influenced by the contrasting colours of Art Nouveau.



The beautiful geometrical design of this cover reminds us of the Russian Suprematist style of Kazimir Malevich.

## 1970s LESS IS MORE

The 1970s are about typography and colour. Minimalism takes over. Colour printing advances and makes symbols and fonts pop out better against an "autumn" colour palette: brown, dark orange, harvest gold and avocado green. Experimentation is going on in the world of typography: letters are condensed or expanded, contain thick and thin parts or made balloony.



This minimalist green book cover where Brazil is underlined with a rooted plant as a cross image at its centre, is like a heart giving life. The cover's powerful meaning is due to the simplicity of its design.

This typical 1970s layout with hand-written typeface is extremely effective in capturing the eye of the reader.

## 1980s '80S DECO

In the 1980s, captivating colours appear – bright yellows, vivid greens, psychedelic colour combinations – together with clean fonts with pronounced angles and curves. Here and there, a touch of Art Deco, also called '80s Deco.



This book stands tall for its small size and strikingly colourful cover that resembles a stained-glass window. It is inspired by Art Deco geometrical style with a first read image of a plant under and above ground and a second depiction of "life" as represented by the rising sun.

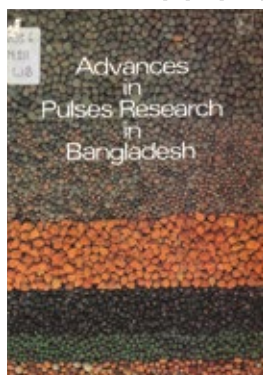
The cover is a clear example of the neon noir 1980s graphic design: a combination of dark background overlaid with bright colours providing a distinctive visual design using high-contrast look that grabs our attention. The imagery is also typical of the era, with a sunset and palm trees.

## 1990s THE PICTURE

The 1990s are hard to pin down in terms of specific fonts, colours or designs, although there is a recurrent element: the image. This may in part be due to the birth of Photoshop in the 1990s.

1991

ADVANCES IN PULSES  
RESEARCH IN BANGLADESH



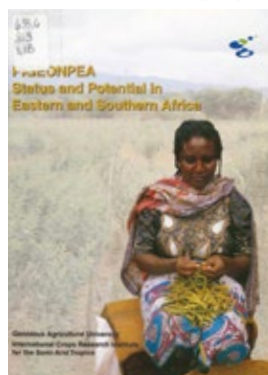
The photographic cover using a creative approach to its composition recalls geological strata: it is an image that directly relates to the book's content. In this case, the photograph fully covers the front, back and spine of the book, thereby appearing to wrap the content through the design.

## 2000s TO THE POINT

The new millennium sees modern and minimalist designs, sleek and to the point, on the verge of becoming anonymous. It's all about the message!

2001

PIGEONPEA: STATUS AND  
POTENTIAL IN EASTERN  
AND SOUTHERN AFRICA



The cover picture has a clear message: gender and production. This is shown using a photoshop design of a woman working against an agricultural crop background. There is no room for typography, colour palettes or composition. Everything emphasizes the anonymous picture.

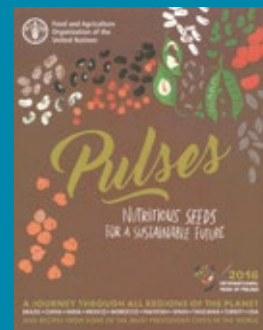
## FROM 1914 TO 2016: TRANSFORMING OLD INTO NEW TO REFLECT THE PRESENT



1914



1969



2016

This timeline shows how there is an interrelationship between book cover designs – how every period is inspired by earlier art styles and how the meaning of a cover design is shaped by previous designs.

The highly decorative style of the 1910s with its curvilinear plant and floral motives and the ethnic look with nature-based colour palette of the 1960s add layers of depth to the design of the 2016 FAO publication, which transforms the beauty of these early art styles into a timeless modern look.

# THE FAO LOGO 1946-2016

FAO's first Director-General, Sir John Boyd Orr, addresses the need for "an official FAO seal, to use on documents, printed on FAO publications etc." in **1946**, one year after the foundation of the Organization. He suggests adopting the design created for the second session of the FAO Conference, held in Copenhagen (Denmark), 2-13 September 1946:

a small black and silver button with an FAO logo.

This button was designed by Harald Nielsen, a silversmith who worked for Georg Jensen Silversmiths in Denmark.

Nielsen's design was inspired by the Art Nouveau movement and characterized by strong clear lines, symmetrical curves and ornate detail. Central to the logo is an ear of wheat: a continuation of the three ears of wheat that formed the logo of FAO's predecessor, the International Institute of Agriculture.

Sir John Boyd Orr proposes the Latin motto *Fiat panis*, meaning "Let there be bread" or more freely translated "Let there be food". Mid-**1947**, a first official version of the FAO logo begins appearing in an irregular way on some FAO documents. It is the same logo we find on the cover of the FAO publication *Legumes in Agriculture* from 1953.

At the end of the 1950s, a discussion takes place within FAO on changing some aspects of the FAO logo.

Mr. Cyprien, chief Visual Media, focuses on "getting rid of the unattractive square O". Mr. Cassola, chief Graphics, would like to "eliminate the peculiar 'sawn-off' appearance of the base of the wheat ear".

Both changes are seen for the first time in the FAO logo developed for the Freedom From Hunger Campaign (launched in **1959**). In this particular case, the space outside the logo has also been used to create a specific campaign-related logo.

Still in 1959, the FAO logo is adapted another last time by Mr Engeler, chief Printing and Offset. It is this FAO logo which is approved by Director-General B.R. Sen and is registered on 1 July **1964** with the United International Bureaux for the Protection of Intellectual Property, and it is this logo we still use today.



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## **Library exhibition** October – December 2016

Among thousands of books, we have chosen the most striking book covers from the 1910s to the present day, illustrating how design has changed over the decades to reflect the content, attract audiences and celebrate art.

On display are examples of:  
Art Nouveau and Art Deco from the early decades of the twentieth century;

the explosion of typography in the 1950s; minimalist designs of the 1970s; the 80s Deco style; and the massive use of photography in the 1990s.

The FAO Library invites you to visit this historical perspective with treasures from the International Institute of Agriculture's collection, FAO first editions and its current and worldwide monographic collection.