

# NYBG/125

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: November 4, 2016

## **NYBG Launches Project to Create First Online Database of New York City Plants And Their Ecosystems to Protect Biodiversity and Improve Environmental Awareness**

With Funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the New York City EcoFlora Initiative Will Recruit Citizen Scientists to Produce a Dynamic Conservation Resource



A view of Lower Manhattan from Brooklyn Bridge Park, part of the urban ecosystem that The New York Botanical Garden's New York City EcoFlora project will help document, interpret, and conserve. (Photo by Daniel Atha)

**Bronx, NY**— With the dual goals of helping to protect New York City's plant biodiversity and improving the public's environmental literacy, The New York Botanical Garden is launching an ambitious initiative to create the first one-stop, online database about the city's roughly 2,000 naturally occurring plant species and their ecological roles.

The New York City EcoFlora will include not only information about the plants themselves—their scientific names, physical description, flowering and fruiting times, and other characteristics found in a traditional scientific flora—but also extensive data about their ecosystems, such as the plants, insects, birds, and other animals associated with a species and the physical conditions in which that species is found. This combination of established knowledge from the scientific literature and observations by citizen scientists will result in a uniquely valuable resource—an ecological flora, which will show for the first time how plants fit into the web of life in New York City. This sophisticated set of data will be useful for conservation planning, environmental education, and research about urban ecosystems.

To develop and test the data-gathering methods for the New York City EcoFlora, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) has awarded the Botanical Garden's Center for Conservation Strategy a one-year, \$150,000 grant as part of its Museums for America program.

“This grant from the IMLS makes it possible for us to launch an initiative that promises to become a landmark citizen science project across all five boroughs of the city,” said Brian M. Boom, Ph.D., the Garden’s Vice President for Conservation Strategy, who leads the Center for Conservation Strategy. “All of the information about New York City’s native and naturalized plant species will be available via a publicly accessible Web site, which will serve both as a land-use planning resource and as an educational resource for enhancing environmental literacy and fostering enjoyment and appreciation of nature in the city.”

In addition to being home to more than eight million people, New York City has a significant diversity of naturally occurring plants (including native species and non-native plants that have established self-sustaining populations), animals, fungi, and habitats. Among other benefits, plants clean the air, filter water, and mitigate flooding, but this biodiversity is under increasing threat from development, invasive species, and a changing climate.

The EcoFlora will use information from local natural history collections, biodiversity studies, and citizen scientists to provide a tool for understanding the dynamics of the city’s naturally occurring plant species. Much of this data has been collected over the past 300 years, but it is scattered across many scientific collections, publications, and datasets. As the first online ecological flora for New York City, the EcoFlora will be a model for how botanical gardens, natural history museums, park systems, and other science institutions can collaborate to leverage their resources and engage the public in compiling biodiversity data.

As part of the development phase, the Garden will pilot a citizen scientist project to collect data about native and naturalized plant species such as red oak and white wood aster in the Garden’s 50-acre Thain Family Forest, the largest remaining tract of old-growth forest in New York City. The findings from this phase will inform the EcoFlora’s expansion in 2018 into a city-wide effort.

Having an online, scientifically vetted, dynamic repository of plant information will contribute to data-driven biodiversity conservation planning in New York City. For example, it would facilitate projects to adapt the shoreline to a changing climate, including the threat of increased storm surges, or to redevelop landfills into parkland, as was done recently at Fresh Kills on Staten Island.

Equally important, the Garden’s EcoFlora project aims to improve the public’s environmental literacy by engaging the public in the collection and compilation of plant data. In turn, that will foster a citizenry that is better informed about New York City’s plants and their importance to the larger urban ecosystem.

## About NYBG's Center for Conservation Strategy

The Center for Conservation Strategy (CCS) leverages The New York Botanical Garden's scientific resources, in partnership with collaborators and stakeholders, to achieve conservation results that will help save the plants and fungi of the world. The Center's overarching goal is to catalyze conservation *action*. Geographically, the Center emphasizes projects in [Areas of Botanical Concern](#) (ABCs), which are regions where conservation action is urgent and the Botanical Garden is well positioned to have a major influence on conservation outcomes. Learn more: [CCS](#)

## About the Institute of Museum and Library Services



The Institute of Museum and Library Services is the primary source of federal support for the nation's 123,000 libraries and 35,000 museums. Our mission is to inspire libraries and museums to advance innovation, lifelong learning, and cultural and civic engagement. Our grant making, policy development, and research help libraries and museums deliver valuable services that make it possible for communities and individuals to thrive. To learn more, visit [www.ims.gov](http://www.ims.gov) and follow IMLS on [Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#).

###

**The New York Botanical Garden is a museum of plants, an educational institution, and a scientific research organization. Founded in 1891, the Botanical Garden is one of the world's preeminent centers for studying plants at all levels, from the whole organism down to its DNA. Garden scientists conduct fundamental research on plants and fungi globally, as well as on the many relationships between plants and people. A National Historic Landmark, the Garden's 250-acre site is one of the greatest botanical gardens in the world and the largest in any city in the United States, distinguished by the beauty of its diverse landscape and extensive collections and gardens, as well as by the scope and excellence of its programs in horticulture, education, and science. Learn more: [nybg.org](http://nybg.org)**

**The New York Botanical Garden, 2900 Southern Boulevard, Bronx, New York 10458**

**The New York Botanical Garden is located on property owned in full by the City of New York, and its operation is made possible in part by public funds provided through the New York City Department of Cultural Affairs. A portion of the Garden's general operating funds is provided by The New York City Council and The New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. The Bronx Borough President and Bronx elected representatives in the City Council and State Legislature provide leadership funding.**

**Contact:** Stevenson Swanson, 718.817.8512, [sswanson@nybg.org](mailto:sswanson@nybg.org)