

For Immediate Release
October 13, 2004

Cultured Conifers
A Selection of Rare Works from the LuEsther T. Mertz Library

October 30, 2004 – January 30, 2005

This fall, conifers take center stage in *Cultured Conifers*, an exhibition drawn from the rich collections of botanical illustrations and rare books in the LuEsther T. Mertz Library. The exhibition will illuminate the astonishing diversity of conifers as well as the many roles of conifers in their natural habitats and in their uses by human beings, from culinary to medicinal, economic, landscape, and horticultural. It will be on display in the William D. Rondina and Giovanni Foroni LoFaro Gallery from October 30, 2004 to January 30, 2005.

Cultured Conifers is organized around several themes. One grouping shows works that clarify the characteristics of conifers, of what makes a conifer a “conifer.” A second grouping shows conifers in their ecosystems and the interactions with other living things that are dependent on conifers. For example, the rufus hummingbird, which was discovered by Captain Cook, lives in a coniferous forest when it migrates to Alaska. A third group focuses on superlatives, the coniferous world’s own book of records. The most massive, the tallest, and the oldest trees in the world are all conifers.

Another theme is the role of conifers in history. The exhibition includes a royal decree by the Queen of England in 1710, proclaiming that all “white and other pine-trees growing in Her Majesties Colonies” belonged to the crown, for the purpose of “the masting of Her Majesties Navy.” During the American Revolution, the colonists disputed the British crown’s claim. Control of old-growth white pines, which made superior ship masts, was an advantage at sea.

Cultured Conifers includes examples of many other uses of conifers. Early illustrations of forest management show how resin was extracted from balsam firs and how charcoal was produced from conifer wood. A lithograph of *Pinus pinea* L. illustrates the source of pine nuts for culinary use. Illustrations of the horticultural use of conifers include grand vistas of formal parterres and estate gardens.

The opening of the *Cultured Conifers* exhibition has been scheduled to coincide with the opening of The New York Botanical Garden’s collection of living ornamental conifers, the Benenson Ornamental Conifers. This collection contains some of the most interesting exotic specimens in the world, including unusual plants given to the Garden by Colonel Robert H. Montgomery in the 1930s and the 1940s. Recently, the Garden undertook to refurbish this historic collection. In addition to improving the health of the existing specimens, 100 new trees have been planted, interpretative signage and viewing pavilions are being added, and tram and pedestrian paths are being expanded to improve access for visitors.

The Mertz Library, established in 1899, houses one of the world’s most important plant science research collections of published and archival documents tracing the development of botany and horticulture from the 12th century to the present. *Cultured Conifers* is open daily from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is free with Garden admission.

Exhibitions in the Mertz Library are made possible by the LuEsther T. Mertz Charitable Trust, William D. Rondina and the Carlisle Collection, and The Kurt Berliner Foundation. Additional support for Cultured Conifers was provided by a generous anonymous friend of the Library.

The New York Botanical Garden is a museum of plants located at Bronx River Parkway (Exit 7W) and Fordham Road in the Bronx. The Garden is open Tuesday—Sunday and on Monday holidays, from 10 a.m.–6 p.m April to October and from 10 a.m. –5 p.m November to March. For more details, call (718) 817-8700 or visit our Web site at www.nybg.org.

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