

THE NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN

For Immediate Release
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The New York Botanical Garden Announces Major Grants To Create Comprehensive Plants of the World Online Database

**Google and Sloan Foundation to be Honored at May 14 Dinner for Their Support
Of NYBG's Leading Role in Providing Vital Plant Conservation Resource by 2020**

NYBG Research Results in Database Funded by National Science Foundation

To make authoritative information about all known plant species widely available and further efforts to protect Earth's biodiversity, Google Inc. and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation have separately awarded grants to The New York Botanical Garden to support its work as part of a global effort to create the World Flora Online (WFO), which will be the definitive online resource about plants, including their conservation status.

With a target completion date of 2020, the WFO will provide free, one-stop searching for scientifically verified data on more than 350,000 known plant species, including a comprehensive list of accepted species names, modern scientific descriptions, images of preserved and live plant specimens, links to other portals with plant information, and the geographic distribution and conservation status of each species.

Google will fund the Garden's work on the WFO with a three-year grant totaling \$600,000, as well as provide technical support.

The Sloan Foundation grant, which totals \$1.155 million for a period of 20 months, will not only help launch the Garden's work on the WFO but will also enable the Garden's contributions to WFO to be made available through the open-access Digital Public Library of America, a searchable portal that seeks to make content from American museums, libraries, and archives more readily available.

Research on the plants of the world that has been carried out by Garden scientists will be a vital source of data for WFO. This research has received major support from the National Science Foundation and other private funders.

The Google grant will be announced on the evening of May 14 at The New York Botanical Garden's Founders Corporate Dinner, held at the Garden. The Garden will recognize Google for its commitment to organizing the world's information and its significant contribution to World Flora Online. **Eric Schmidt, Executive Chairman of Google Inc., will accept the Founders Award on behalf of the company.**

The Garden will also honor the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation for its help with the Garden's groundbreaking work on the World Flora Online.

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“We are profoundly grateful to Google and the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation for their generous support of a crucial project that will make the Garden’s deep expertise in plant science and conservation available to all, and, of course, to the National Science Foundation for their long-term support of research at the Garden,” said Gregory Long, Chief Executive Officer and The William C. Steere Sr. President of The New York Botanical Garden. “Together, Google, the Sloan Foundation, and the Garden will forge the way toward the creation of the World Flora Online, which will become a global tool for people everywhere.”

“Google applauds World Flora Online for creating a definitive, verified online resource that will document all known plants of the world,” said Eric Schmidt, Executive Chairman of Google Inc. “Given our commitment to bringing more information to more people, we are proud to support The New York Botanical Garden and the other botanical institutions as they work to give us all more knowledge about the plants we share the Earth with every day.”

“We are delighted to support The New York Botanical Garden in helping to create the world’s first complete online scientific resource for all Earth’s 350,000 plant species and to enable this great collection to become a major Content Hub for the Digital Public Library of America (DPLA),” said Doron Weber, Vice President at the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation. “Sloan’s program aims to maintain a public digital commons and to facilitate the highest standards of scholarship, stewardship, openness and accessibility for all cultural and scientific knowledge in the digital age. Adding the great NYBG to the DPLA’s 1,300 participating institutions will ensure that this vast treasure trove of World Flora Online is available for the widest public benefit under the highest standards.”

World Flora Online: A Necessary Part of a Global Strategy for Plant Conservation

The New York Botanical Garden is one of four prominent international botanical institutions that are leading the effort to create the WFO; the others are the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh, and the Missouri Botanical Garden. The WFO is the first goal of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation, an ambitious plan adopted by the United Nations’ Convention on Biological Diversity to halt the loss of plant biodiversity around the globe by 2020. In addition to the four leadership institutions, which constitute the WFO Executive Committee, 30 international research institutions are primary partners in contributing content.

The WFO will be an invaluable tool for plant scientists and researchers, who will use it as a primary reference, and for conservationists and policy-makers, who will consult it for information about rare and endangered species and to understand what plants grow where.

Plants are one of Earth’s most important resources. As sources of food, medicines, and materials for shelter and clothing, they are indispensable to human life. They also provide important environmental services, such as mitigating climate change, preventing erosion, and supporting much of the world’s wildlife spectacle. Plants, both known and yet to be discovered, may hold answers to some of the world’s health, social and economic problems, but thousands of species are threatened by climate change, environmental degradation, and human interaction. A full inventory of plant species is essential to provide the basic information needed to protect them so their full potential can be realized.

It is estimated that there are more than 350,000 described species of plants, two-thirds of which are found in the tropics, where habitats are most threatened and local resources for cataloguing biodiversity are more limited. Yet the world does not have a complete catalog of all plant life, nor is there agreement on the correct name for each species. The same species is frequently described in different places using different names. Copyright restrictions and multiple databases worldwide have added to the challenge of compiling modern descriptions of every species.

Google and Sloan Support Will Help Garden Make WFO a Reality

The Google and Sloan grants will support the Garden’s work in making the WFO a reality. That work, involving 16 Garden scientists plus support staff, includes determining the correct scientific names and descriptions for plant species in many families, assembling a library of images and linking them to the species, resolving copyright issues, digitizing and archiving relevant publications, images and corrected texts, and entering data in the WFO database.

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Garden scientists involved in the WFO are specialists in such important plant groups and families as mosses, palms, ferns, legumes, and many types of tropical trees and plants. Leading the Garden's effort on the WFO is Wayt Thomas, Ph.D., Elizabeth G. Britton Curator of Botany and an expert on the sedge, tree of heaven, and bitterbush plant families.

About Google Inc.

[Google](#) is a global technology leader focused on improving the ways people connect with information. Google's innovations in web search and advertising have made its website a top Internet property and its brand one of the most recognized in the world.

About the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation

The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, founded in 1934, makes grants for research and education in science, technology and economic performance. A major goal of Sloan's program in Universal Access to Knowledge is to use advances in digital information technology to make all forms of knowledge available for the benefit of all. To this end, Sloan is the lead funder of the Digital Public Library of America, an interactive digital platform that brings together material from over 1300 libraries, archives and museums that aim to contain the full breadth of human expression and to keep it open and accessible and rigorously curated. Sloan is also the biggest funder of Wikipedia, the largest encyclopedia in human history and the fifth largest web site in the world—and the only nonprofit in the top 70 web sites visited globally—a model of open, collaborative text production available in over 290 languages. Sloan's program has also supported the Library of Congress, the Internet Archive, LYRASIS, the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard, the Berkeley Law Center the Boston Library Consortium, and the Espresso Book Machine. More information can be found at www.sloan.org.

About The New York Botanical Garden

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

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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.

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