



THE NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN

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THE NEW YORK BOTANICAL GARDEN LAUNCHES *PLANT HUNTERS*

New Online Resource Provides Virtual Exploration of Enid A. Haupt Conservatory and Is Important New Plant Science Tool for Elementary Education

May 20, 2010 (Bronx, N.Y.) – Today, The New York Botanical Garden launched a new online educational resource that brings the wonder of the Botanical Garden’s Enid A. Haupt Conservatory—the largest Victorian-style glasshouse in America, which displays plants in diverse natural habitats from tropical rain forests to arid deserts—into homes and classrooms around the world. *Plant Hunters* is a new, Web-based tool that provides a virtual exploration of the Haupt Conservatory and serves as a dynamic online educational resource in plant science. Created with support from the Verizon Foundation, this free tool is now accessible for family and classroom learning on the Botanical Garden’s Web site at: www.nybg.org/planthunters and on Verizon Thinkfinity, www.thinkfinity.org, a comprehensive educational Web site that provides thousands of free educational resources for teachers, parents, and students. In this United Nations-declared “Year of Biodiversity,” *Plant Hunters* provides an important new resource for K–8 science education.

“The New York Botanical Garden developed *Plant Hunters* as a way to extend the reach of its Children’s Education programs and resources to a global audience,” said Gregory Long, President of The New York Botanical Garden. “This engaging new tool will help students and families everywhere discover the beauty and importance of the world’s biodiversity, by making the rich collections and wealth of information contained in the Enid A. Haupt Conservatory available across the country and around the world.”

“Through the use of online technology children from across the country can virtually experience the wonders of The New York Botanical Garden,” said Verizon Foundation President Patrick Gaston. “We are proud to partner with the Botanical Garden on this valuable project and add it to the ever growing number of resources available on Verizon Thinkfinity.”

Through *Plant Hunters*, families can supplement their visits to the Haupt Conservatory by exploring 64 of the plants showcased there in more detail at home. The site is also intended to provide families unable to visit the Conservatory with a rewarding educational experience. *Plant Hunters* enables users to experience the diverse plant life displayed in the Conservatory such as: the *Palms of the Americas Gallery*, which includes the largest collection of New World palms under glass; the *Lowland Tropical Rain Forest Gallery* and the *Upland Tropical Rain Forest Gallery*, which feature plant specimens used to treat human illnesses and illustrate the ethnobotanical study of how plants and people relate; the *Deserts of the Americas* and *Deserts of Africa Galleries*, which house plants such as cacti, agave, boojum trees, and aloes that have adapted to dry and challenging climates; as well plants adapted to life in the water in the *Aquatic Plants and Vines Gallery*.

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Innovative Web Site Combines Expert-Developed Plant Science Content for Educators with Interactive Activities for Children

Plant Hunters combines digital illustrations and interactive games with expert-developed plant science content as an engaging way to teach users about the world's plants. The site allows users to navigate the diverse desert and tropical galleries of the Conservatory, explore 64 featured plants in more detail, watch videos with Botanical Garden scientists, listen to descriptions about each Gallery in the Conservatory, discover each plant's origin and biome, and play seven different Plant Challenges. The Challenges relate to basic plant science topics such as: pollination, plant evolution, and how plants may be used for medicine, food, and shelter. Children can advance from a "Beginning Biologist" to a "Cool Conservationist," and finally to a "Professional Plant Hunter" as they navigate the site. Kids can record their success by printing an official Scorecard. Both teachers and parents can integrate the *Plant Hunters* site into classroom and home-based learning by visiting the Classroom Resources page, which features downloadable classroom materials and activities that align with New York State and National Science Standards.

Created by award-winning Web design and development company Second Story, the *Plant Hunters* Web site offers a self-directed learning experience, so that users can learn at their own pace. For example, users can explore the Conservatory's *Lowland Tropical Rain Forest Gallery* either sequentially or by clicking on a favorite plant. By clicking on the cacao tree, the viewer can access a description of *Theobroma cacao*, learn about its history, cultivation, and use in popular foods such as chocolate.

"I like that [my students] are able to take what I've been teaching them in class and find it on the [*Plant Hunters*] site and explore more. There's a lot more information on that site than I'm able to give them in 45 minutes." said Chantal Nelson, Science Teacher at C.S. 211–The Bilingual School in the Bronx. Students at the school also enjoyed the site.

"The Web site is very interesting because it shows you some plants you've never seen before," said Kenima Peralta, a third grader at C.S. 211. Her classmate Kye Spenser remarked: "I learned that there is such a thing as a rubber tree!"

"We played with *Plant Hunters* on family game night!" said Shanyah Lander, a fourth-grade student. Her schoolmate Hillary Rosario, a fifth grader, commented, "I really liked the fact that it is using the Botanical Garden as a place to help us learn about exotic plants and flowers. I enjoyed that it showed you the real Conservatory and you really get to see it in 360-degree mode."

Education Programs Make Botanical Garden a Leader in Environmental Education

The New York Botanical Garden is recognized as one of the country's leading environmental education institutions and as a pioneer in the field of informal science learning. The Garden provides children, families, and educators with unique programs to help better understand the important role plants play in everyday life. Each year, the Botanical Garden's Children's Education program enriches the plant science education of over 78,000 schoolchildren and provides approximately 3,000 teachers with professional development training in science education.

Science curricula developed by the Garden include: *SEEDS: Science Exploration and Education Discovery Series*, materials developed in 2004 for elementary school teachers, now distributed nationally by leading educational publisher Kendall Hunt as well as *FBI: Forensic Botany Investigations*, a unit designed to teach middle school students about plant science, ecology, and conservation, which was developed by the Garden in 2008 and is distributed by Glencoe, the science education division of McGraw-Hill. Information about the Garden's Children Education programs can be found online at: <http://www.nybg.org/edu/>

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Verizon

Helping students achieve through the Verizon Foundation's signature education program, www.thinkfinity.org

The Educational Foundation of America

Audio tour sponsored by Bloomberg

Design and development by Second Story

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The New York Botanical Garden is a museum of plants located at Bronx River Parkway (Exit 7W) and Fordham Road. It is easy to reach by Metro-North Railroad or subway. The Botanical Garden is open year-round, Tuesday through Sunday and Monday federal holidays. For more information, please call 718.817.8700 or visit www.nybg.org Read the Botanical Garden's popular blog, *Plant Talk: Inside The New York Botanical Garden* at www.nybg.org/wordpress

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.

The Verizon Foundation, the philanthropic arm of Verizon Communications, supports the advancement of literacy and K-12 education through its free educational website, Verizon Thinkfinity (www.thinkfinity.org), and fosters awareness and prevention of domestic violence. In 2009, the Verizon Foundation awarded \$67.9 million in grants to nonprofit agencies in the U.S. and abroad. It also matched the charitable donations of Verizon employees and retirees, resulting in \$26.1 million in combined contributions to nonprofits. Through Verizon Volunteers, one of the nation's largest employee volunteer programs, Verizon employees and retirees have volunteered more than 5 million hours of community service since 2000. For more information on the foundation, visit www.verizonfoundation.org

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B-roll available: <http://www.vimeo.com/11904285>

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