

For immediate release
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Plants of Japan in Illustrated Books and Prints
To be Featured in the LuEsther T. Mertz Library
At The New York Botanical Garden

October 20, 2007–January 13, 2008

The history, culture, and art of Japanese gardens will be celebrated by The New York Botanical Garden in the fall of 2007 in a Garden-wide exhibition, *Kiku: The Art of the Japanese Chrysanthemum*. One component will be an exhibition of beautiful rare books and prints from the LuEsther T. Mertz Library, which illustrate the horticultural and cultural exchange between Japan and the West over more than three centuries. Titled *Plants of Japan in Illustrated Books and Prints*, this exhibition will be located in the William D. Rondina and Giovanni Foroni LoFaro Gallery of the Mertz Library and will run from October 20 to January 13.

Images and text from the collections of the Mertz Library will explore several interrelated horticultural themes, including Japanese gardens, trees and shrubs, chrysanthemums, the nursery trade, useful plants of Japan, Western botanical exploration of Japan, the Japanese aesthetic as exemplified in garden design, and the Japanese tradition of viewing flowers. The exhibition will highlight the importance of Japanese and other Asian plants in American horticulture.

East-West Exchange

The exchange of ideas and perspectives between Japan and the West has been ongoing and mutually beneficial. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the botanical and horticultural arts and sciences.

The earliest botanical information from Japan came to the West through the Dutch East India Company in the 17th century, during the period of Japan's foreign isolation. One early work that will be on display is Engelbert Kaempfer's *Amoenitatum exoticarum...* (1712). Kaempfer (1651–1716), who lived in Japan from 1691 to 1692 with the Dutch East India Company trading mission, first revealed to the Western world the soybean and its utilization as a food plant. This work also offers the first botanical description of the ginkgo tree, the seeds of which Kaempfer later brought to Europe.

Carl Peter Thunberg (1743–1828) was a pupil of the celebrated Swedish botanist Carl Linneaus. In 1775, he visited the Dutch East India Company trading mission on Deshima, a man-made island in Nagasaki Bay. He was able to collect many plant specimens and wrote the first detailed description of the island flora, *Flora Japonica*, in 1784. Images on display of a lily, rose, and maple, examples of the many plants named for Thunberg, commemorate his great contribution to horticulture.

Commodore Matthew Perry opened the doors of Japan to the West in 1852–1854. His *Narrative of the expedition of an American squadron to the China Seas and Japan* published in 1856, which chronicles his expedition, will also be included in the exhibition.

The cultural exchange also influenced the Japanese, who were eager to learn Western science. A group of scholars, the *rangakusha*, developed early on. On display will be good examples of their work such as illustrations by Iwasaki (1786–1842) in *Honzo zufu*, one of the most important publications of Japanese systematic botany during the Tokugawa period (1603–1867).

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The Flora of Japan

Plants of Japan in Illustrated Books and Prints will also display images of some of the most popular and intriguing plants of Japan, including hydrangeas, Japanese maples, Japanese iris, clematis, and chrysanthemums—many of which have also become favorites in the West. Artwork in both Japanese and Western styles will be included.

Japanese nursery catalogs from the 19th and 20th centuries will offer artful depictions of plants available from Japan, such as *Iris kaempferi*. Suppliers of a wide assortment of Japanese plant material to the West included the Yokohama Nursery Co. and L. Boehmer & Co., which produced beautiful catalogs with especially charming and whimsical art.

Images of garden scenes reflecting the Japanese aesthetic will also be shown. The exhibition will also illustrate selected trees and shrubs of the country and some of the many uses of plants in Japan.

A schedule of guided tours of the exhibition will be established closer to the opening date. An illustrated checklist of the exhibition's contents will also be published as a guide for visitors.

From Illustrated Books to Living Plants

After viewing Japanese plants as represented on paper, visitors can also enjoy many living specimens of Japanese plants in the Botanical Garden's exhibition in the Enid A. Haupt Conservatory. From October 20 to November 18, different styles of *kiku* (chrysanthemums) as well as maples, bamboos, and other traditional Japanese garden plants will be featured in the elegant Courtyards of the largest Victorian-style glasshouse in America. In addition, many Japanese plants, including a majestic grove of Tanyosho pines near the reflecting pool at the Leon Levy Visitor Center, can be enjoyed year-round on the grounds.

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.

Generous donors to the exhibition Kiku: The Art of the Japanese Chrysanthemum and its ancillary programs include:

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Exhibitions in the Enid A. Haupt Conservatory are made possible by the Estate of Enid A. Haupt.

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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. For more information, please call 718.817.8700 or visit our Web site at www.nybg.org

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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