



THE NEW YORK
BOTANICAL GARDEN



Royal
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FOUR PROMINENT BOTANICAL INSTITUTIONS ANNOUNCE PLANS TO CREATE FIRST ONLINE WORLD FLORA

*The New York Botanical Garden; Missouri Botanical Garden; Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew;
and Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh Leading Effort to Develop World Flora by 2020*

The New York Botanical Garden (NYBG); the Missouri Botanical Garden (MBG); The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew (RBG Kew); and the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) have announced plans to develop the World Flora—the first modern, online catalog of the world’s plants—by the year 2020. This massive undertaking will include the compilation of information on up to 400,000 plant species worldwide. It will also achieve a primary target of the Global Strategy for Plant Conservation, an ambitious effort first adopted by the United Nations’ Convention on Biological Diversity in 2002, to halt the continuing loss of plant biodiversity around the globe. Representatives of the four botanical gardens recently met to organize a framework to guide their efforts and respond to this need for a baseline survey of the plants of the world that has been called for by the international community. A Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) detailing plans to create the World Flora was recently signed into effect by the four institutions.

“The world’s great botanical gardens are proud to lead this effort,” said Gregory Long, Chief Executive Officer and The William C. Steere Sr. President of The New York Botanical Garden. “Thanks to advances in our botanical knowledge and in digital technology, an online World Flora is within our grasp. It is imperative that we create this resource, which will help us assess the value of all plant species to humankind and be effective stewards to ensure their survival.”

Professor Stephen Hopper, Director, Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew said, “Using the wealth of resources available at our institutions, we will help to provide the baseline data needed to develop plant-based solutions for a rapidly changing world. Botanical institutions worldwide have much expertise to contribute to this effort to capture the information necessary to better conserve and sustainably use the planet’s plant diversity.”

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“Botanic gardens have led the way in spearheading international conservation strategies and programs, and are a natural partnership for mobilizing much needed information on plant biodiversity,” said Professor Stephen Blackmore, Regius Keeper of the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh. “This is a large task, but with many contributors we can deliver what is needed.”

“There are few institutions in the world that have the capacity to foster this project, and no one of us could do this alone,” added Dr. Peter Wyse Jackson, President, Missouri Botanical Garden. “We all want to see this come to fruition, and the entire international community will benefit from it. With the botanical resources and knowledge we each possess, it was implicit that our institutions would step forward to collaborate on this project.”

Plants are one of Earth’s greatest resources. They are sources of food, medicines, and materials with vast economic and cultural importance. They stabilize ecosystems and form the habitats that sustain the planet’s animal life. But they are also threatened by climate change, environmental factors, and human interaction. There are an estimated 400,000 species of vascular plants on Earth, with some 10 percent more yet to be discovered. These plants, both known and unknown, may hold answers to some of the world’s health, social and economic problems. A full inventory of plant life is vital if their full potential is to be realized before many of these species, and the possibilities they offer, become extinct.

The critical situation for plants, where at least 100,000 plant species are threatened by extinction worldwide, has been recognized by the U.N. Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). In 2002, a Global Strategy for Plant Conservation (GSPC) was developed and adopted by the Convention.

In 2004, a Global Partnership for Plant Conservation (GPPC) was formed, involving leading environmental, conservation and botanical organizations, which came together to support the achievement of the GSPC. The four botanical gardens involved in this new project are all members of the GPPC.

“An online Flora of all known plants” is the first of the GSPC’s targets for the period 2011-2020¹. Earlier work by the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and the Missouri Botanical Garden addressed one of the GSPC’s earlier targets for 2010 with the launch of The Plant List, an online portal containing the accepted names and synonyms of all known plant species. The forthcoming Flora will use The Plant List as a building block for something much more detailed, containing not just names but also descriptions, images and distribution information about every plant.

The team tackling the World Flora will build a collaborative partnership for this work and create a structure capable of incorporating data from institutions and individuals worldwide. In some cases, existing electronic data sets will be combined and augmented with the results of botanical research published over more than a century. As new plants species are named and described, they too will be added to the World Flora.

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“We look forward to working with institutions worldwide to produce a sustainable resource to aid conservation globally, regionally and nationally,” said Hopper.

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¹ Convention on Biological Diversity, Global Strategy for Plant Conservation. <http://www.cbd.int/gspc/targets.shtml>

NOTE: Digital images available by request or via [Flickr](#). Download media materials at nybg.org/media.

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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 great 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: www.nybg.org

About the Missouri Botanical Garden

Today, 153 years after opening, the Missouri Botanical Garden is a National Historic Landmark and a center for science, conservation, education and horticultural display. With scientists working in 35 countries on six continents around the globe, the Missouri Botanical Garden has one of the three largest plant science programs in the world and a mission “to discover and share knowledge about plants and their environment in order to preserve and enrich life.” Learn more: www.missouribotanicalgarden.org

About the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew

The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew is a world-famous scientific organization, internationally respected for its outstanding living collection of plants and world-class herbarium as well as its scientific expertise in plant diversity, conservation and sustainable development in the U.K. and around the world. Kew Gardens is also a major international visitor attraction. Its landscaped 132 hectares and Kew's country estate, Wakehurst Place, attract nearly two million visitors every year. Kew was made a UNESCO World Heritage Site in July 2003 and celebrated its 250th anniversary in 2009. Wakehurst Place is home to Kew’s Millennium Seed Bank, the largest wild plant seed bank in the world. The Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew and its partners have collected and conserved seed from 10 percent of the world’s wild flowering plant species (c. 30, 000 species) and aim to conserve 25 percent by 2020. Learn more: www.kew.org

About the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh (RBGE) is a leading international research organisation delivering knowledge, education and plant conservation action in more than 80 countries around the world. In Scotland its four Gardens at Edinburgh, Benmore, Dawyck and Logan attract nearly a million visitors each year. It operates as a Non Departmental Public Body established under the National Heritage (Scotland) Act 1985, principally funded by the Scottish Government. It is also a registered charity, managed by a Board of Trustees appointed by Ministers. Its mission is “*exploring and explaining the world of plants for a better future.*” Learn more: www.rbge.org.uk