

NYBG

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NYBG's 2023 Black History Month Celebration Explores the Enduring Botanical Legacy of the African Diaspora and the Contributions of Contemporary Advocates

Now through Tuesday, February 28, 2023

Bronx, New York—For Black History Month 2023, The New York Botanical Garden (NYBG) celebrates the African American experience through plants, honoring barrier-breaking pioneers in environmental science and agricultural education as well as contemporary activists and advocates who are creating and supporting communities that foster representation, identity, and diversity. Offerings online and at the Botanical Garden explore the enduring botanical legacy of the African Diaspora, revealing the inextricable link between Black history and American history through the lens of gardening and farming, horticulture and science, and arts and culture. From thought-provoking conversations and personal stories to inspiring lectures and programs for all ages, learn about the foundational contributions of Black Americans to our understanding of the plant world.

Online offerings are available at <https://www.nybg.org/event/black-history-month/>

Programs taking place at NYBG are noted below.

NYBG's 2023 Black History Month celebration features:

- **Welcome Message from New York City Councilmember Althea Stevens,**
Council District 16, the Bronx
- **The Story of Vanilla**
Select weekends beginning February 18; 11 a.m.–2 p.m.
Enid A. Haupt Conservatory, Lowland Tropical Rain Forest Gallery
In 1841 Edmond Albius, a 12-year-old enslaved Black child living on a plantation on Réunion island in the Indian Ocean, devised an innovative technique of hand-pollinating the orchid species *Vanilla planifolia*—initiating the global trade in vanilla, which would become one of the world's most popular spices. Explore the familiar—and surprising—fragrances, flavors, and foods that are produced from this orchid and other plants found in the Haupt Conservatory. A rotating selection of multisensory activities will be presented by NYBG staff, volunteers, and partners during *The Orchid Show: Natural Heritage*.
- **Kids Corner**
Gather the kids for activities to discover the cultural influences of the African Diaspora, and watch an interview about the importance of caring for the natural world.

- **Rooted in Plants**
Through February 28, 2023; Self-Guided Exploration: 10 a.m.–5 p.m.; Guided Activities: 1:30–4:30 p.m. (weekdays), 10 a.m.–4:30 p.m. (weekends); Storytime: 2:30 p.m. on weekends and holiday Mondays, weather permitting
Everett Children’s Adventure Garden
 Children can explore ways in which people of the African Diaspora have contributed to our understanding and uses of plants around the world by investigating seeds native to Africa and learning about West African indigo dyeing by making their own dyed bag. They can also create a pine cone bird feeder in celebration of New York City birder Christian Cooper and discover inspirational stories about Black botanists, herbalists, and environmentalists from history and today.

- **Celebrate Science!**
 In this online video, **Jalika Barrie**, Master Explainer at the Everett Children’s Adventure Garden, talks to **Eliot Nagele**, Director of NYBG’s Thain Family Forest, about how they discovered the natural world and the mentors who have been important to them.

- **Plants as Liberation**
 This wide-ranging series of interviews, which began in February 2022, continues as Manager of the Everett Children’s Adventure Garden **Arvolyn Hill** speaks with Black people in the plant world. From herbalists and houseplant enthusiasts to farmers and gardeners, viewers can listen and learn how they are using plants as a powerful expression of liberation and freedom.
 - **Leah Penniman**, Co-Founder and Farm Director, Soul Fire Farm; Grafton, New York
 Leah Penniman is a farmer, educator, food sovereignty activist, and author of *Farming While Black*.
 - **Suhaly Bautista-Carolina**, Herbalist, Founder of Moon Mother Apothecary
 Suhaly Bautista-Carolina is an Afro-Dominican herbalist, artist, educator and community organizer who works at the intersection of plant power and people power.
 - **Justin Robinson**, Ethnobotanist; Durham, North Carolina
 Justin Robinson is an ethnobotanist, musician, and historic foodways expert who explores the ways that foods of the African Diaspora shaped and influenced Southern foodways.
 - **Joshua Bennett**, Ph.D., Poet and Scholar
 Joshua Bennett, a professor of English at Dartmouth University, curated NYBG’s 2022 word and sound installation of Black poetry, *The Bond of Live Things Everywhere*.

- **Lectures and Symposia**
 Viewers can enjoy a variety of programs from 2022 that examine culture and identity, including the vital role of food traditions, especially when cultural heritage or languages have been prohibited and erased.

- **Afro-Indigenous Histories of Food and Gardening in the Bronx**
Exiled from their Caribbean homeland of Saint Vincent in the late 18th century, Garifuna Indigenous communities settled around the world. This video features Bronx community organizer and leading Garifuna culinary expert **Isha Sumner** and noted scholars of Afro-Caribbean culture **Julie Chun Kim** of Fordham University and **Christina Welch** of University of Winchester, United Kingdom. Together, they explore and personalize Garifuna food, knowledge, and uses of plants as defining elements of their culture and identity.
- **The Food Dialogues: Matthew Raiford in Conversation with Jessica B. Harris**
Matthew Raiford joins NYBG Trustee **Jessica B. Harris**, Ph.D.—America’s leading scholar of the food and foodways of the African Diaspora—for an in-depth conversation covering Raiford’s heritage-based approach to food and farming. After returning to Georgia and resurrecting his family farm on land his great-great-great grandfather Jupiter Gilliard began buying after he was emancipated, Raiford is at the center of a community brought together by the cuisine of his Gullah Geechee heritage.
- **Symposium: A Seat at the Table**
Two compelling sessions explore the long, ongoing struggle by Black farmers to acquire and keep their farms and regain their rightful place in America’s farming history.
 - **“Celebrating the African American Farmer”**
Natalie Baszile, author of the 2021 anthology *We Are Each Other’s Harvest*, joins NYBG Trustee **Jessica B. Harris**, Ph.D., America’s leading scholar of the foods and foodways of the African Diaspora, for a wide-ranging dialogue about the historical perseverance and resilience of Black farmers and the generations of Black Americans who continue to farm despite systemic discrimination and land loss.
 - **“Stories from the Farm”**
Farmer, urban gardener, food advocate, activist, and NYBG Trustee **Karen Washington** moderates a multigenerational panel discussion devoted to stories of Black farmers from many historical perspectives: North and South, Upstate New York and the Bronx, sharecroppers to family growers and urban farmers. Panelists include Gullah Geechee chef and farmer **Matthew Raiford** and farmer/cultural anthropologist **Gail P. Myers**, Ph.D.
- **The Bond of Live Things Everywhere Symposium**
Moderated by poet and scholar **Joshua Bennett**, Ph.D., this symposium featured a conversation about the role of Black ecological thought in the panelists’ work and life and drew from the poems featured in NYBG’s 2022 word and sound installation of Black poetry, *The Bond of Live Things Everywhere*. Panelists included **Abra Lee**, a horticulturist and author; **Arcelis Girmay**, a poet and essayist; **Leah Penniman**, a Black Kreyol farmer, author, and food justice activist; **Sonya Posmentier**, Ph.D., an associate professor of English at New York University; and **Terrance Hayes**, a poet and professor of English at New York University.

- **African American Gardens**

Supported by generous funding from the Mellon Foundation, The New York Botanical Garden will plant three African American Gardens between 2022 and 2024, each telling different stories of the African American experience through plants. All three gardens will be curated by NYBG Trustee Jessica B. Harris, Ph.D., America's leading scholar of the food and foodways of the African Diaspora.

- ***African American Garden: Remembrance & Resilience***

During NYBG's spring-summer 2022 exhibition *Around the Table: Stories of the Foods We Love*, the Edible Academy was the site of *African American Garden: Remembrance & Resilience*, which examined the history of the African American experience in the United States—telling the story from commodities such as cotton and tobacco that drove the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade to staples such as okra and greens that turned up on tables throughout the country during the Great Migration and beyond.

- ***African American Garden: The Caribbean Experience***

African American Garden: The Caribbean Experience will highlight the plants and gardening histories that are essential contributions to Caribbean foodways, including those that have been brought by Caribbean immigrants to the United States. *African American Garden: The Caribbean Experience* is scheduled to open on Juneteenth weekend 2023 at the Edible Academy.

- **Botanical Legacies**

Learn about the contributions of Black scientists to our understanding of the plant world, the rich legacy of plants and knowledge about their uses that enslaved Africans brought to America, and other plant stories.

- **Cowpeas and the African Diaspora**

Enslaved Africans brought the bean known as the cowpea with them to the New World, where it has become a staple of Southern cuisines and is generally associated with good luck and New Year's celebrations. In a series of three informative, wide-ranging *Plant Talk* posts, NYBG Associate Curator Benjamin Torke, Ph.D., explores the science and cultural history of cowpeas and the potential for herbarium specimens to fill in some of the gaps in that history.

- **Focus on Black Botanists**

This fascinating series highlights under-recognized Black scientists whose research and discoveries have contributed to our collective knowledge and understanding of the plant world.

- **Marie Clark Taylor—Botanist and Educator:**

Find out how to grow cosmos and the other colorful garden annuals that Dr. Taylor, the first Black woman to receive a Ph.D. in science from Fordham University, studied to understand the impact of light on plant development.

- **Thomas Gaither—Activist and Biologist:**
Behind each collection is the life of the collector, often lost to history. NYBG is excited to celebrate the contributions of Dr. Gaither not only through his fungal collections but also through his advancements in the fight for civil rights.
 - **Lafayette Frederick—Fungal Systematist:**
See a type specimen of a fungal species described by Lafayette Frederick, a mycologist who followed in George Washington Carver’s footsteps to understand and document all manner of plant pathogens.
 - **Thelma Perry—Mycologist and Teacher:**
Discover one of the “hidden figures” of groundbreaking fungal research at the USDA Forest Service.
 - **Dr. James Still—“Doctor of the Pines”:**
The life and legacy of a 19th-century herbalist is recounted.
- **Mertz Library Book Display**
Tuesday–Friday; 10 a.m.–4 p.m.
Visitors can explore titles by Black authors at the LuEsther T. Mertz Library.
 - **NYBG Shop**
A curated selection of books celebrating Black History Month is available at NYBG Shop online or at the Garden.

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The New York Botanical Garden is located at 2900 Southern Boulevard, Bronx, New York 10458. For more information, visit 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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