

The U.S. Botanic Garden Today

WHEN the Botanic Garden first began to “collect, cultivate and distribute” specimens in the 1820s, the world of plants held tremendous mystery and hope. Though believing in the importance of plant study, the Founding Fathers could not have imagined how plant discoveries and plant science would transform humankind. Today, there is no better place to gain an understanding of the essential relationship of plants to people than the renovated U.S. Botanic Garden. Through living displays that feature the biodiversity of plants from around the world, the Botanic Garden brings to light the many benefits derived from plants, including oxygen, food, medicine, fiber, fragrance, shelter, and inspiration. From lush jungle to dry desert, from primitive ferns to fragrant orchids, the Conservatory’s beautiful exhibits delight the senses while informing visitors about the irreplaceable value of plants.

In support of its innovative exhibits, the Botanic Garden provides workshops, lectures, tours, and demonstrations. Educational programs include botany and gardening, as well as hands-on activities that use plant materials. Renowned botanists and other specialists present lectures on conservation and other timely topics.

Partnerships are another important way for the Botanic Garden to share its resources and to extend its mission to a national audience. Present partners include the Smithsonian Institution, the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), the Denver Botanic Gardens, the Chicago Botanic Garden, other domestic and international botanic gardens, the National Wildlife Federation, the National Gardening Association, and the Corcoran College of Art + Design. With each partner, the Botanic Garden plans outreach programs that include exhibits, educational programs, lectures, and conservation activities.



(ABOVE)

DOCENT WITH DISCOVERY CART.

Volunteer docents are indispensable at the Garden. They conduct tours, help with record-keeping and maintenance, and circulate the discovery carts that contain artifacts and activities related to the exhibits.

(OPPOSITE)

A NOURISHING ENVIRONMENT.

State-of-the-art environmental systems in the renovated Conservatory enhance plant growth, permitting the inclusion of a wide range of plants in the displays. Each of the 12 rooms now has its own distinct environment with controls augmented by custom shades for light management, mists for cooling and humidity control, and automatic venting.

Plant Collections



(ABOVE)

PLANTS OF HAWAII.

An exceptional collection of rare and endangered Hawaiian plants was given to the U.S. Botanic Garden in 2003. Loss of habitat and invasion by exotic species threaten these plants on their native islands. By adding rare plants to the permanent collections, the Botanic Garden can preserve, propagate, and display them, educating visitors about their plight.

(RIGHT)

PLANT TAGS.

Keeping track of so many plants is a challenge, but an accurate database is necessary for cultivation, conservation, and research. When acquired, each plant is documented and tagged with its scientific name, common name, description, range, and source. Its physical location in the collection is also noted. The information is used to retrieve plants for display, follow plant propagation history, and maintain documentation on rare and endangered plant populations.

PROMOTING botanical knowledge is an important part of the Botanic Garden's mission, and maintaining an ordered collection of plants is essential to that end.

The Botanic Garden currently cultivates more than 13,000 plants, which are used for exhibition, study, and exchange with other institutions. The Garden's noteworthy collections include economic plants, medicinal plants, orchids, carnivorous plants, cacti and succulents, bromeliads, cycads, and ferns. Strict criteria have been established to build the modern collections, especially the medicinal plants and orchids, so that they represent a broad diversity of species.

