

Exploring Plant Conservation and Education at Canadian Botanical Gardens and Arboreta

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“Investing in Nature: A Partnership for Plants in Canada” is taking root!

A Partnership for Plants in Canada, funded as part of *Investing in Nature*, focuses on plant conservation through education and communication. Canadian botanical gardens and arboreta will become more involved in promoting greater public awareness of the importance of plants, the threats they face, and the actions needed to protect them. In January 2003 Laurel McIvor was hired to begin co-ordinating these efforts.

Conservation research and educational programming differs considerably at botanical gardens and arboreta across Canada. While there are between 70 and 100 Canadian facilities that maintain plant collections and are open to the public, not all of these have a scientific basis for the collections or thorough documentation. Of those institutions that could be classified as botanical gardens or arboreta, most are small, seasonal operations. Some are associated with universities, some publicly administered, and a few are privately owned. While we do not have our own national botanical gardens association, the Canadian Botanical Conservation Network works directly with botanical gardens, arboreta and related organisations, individuals and others to increase their participation in plant conservation and biodiversity programs.

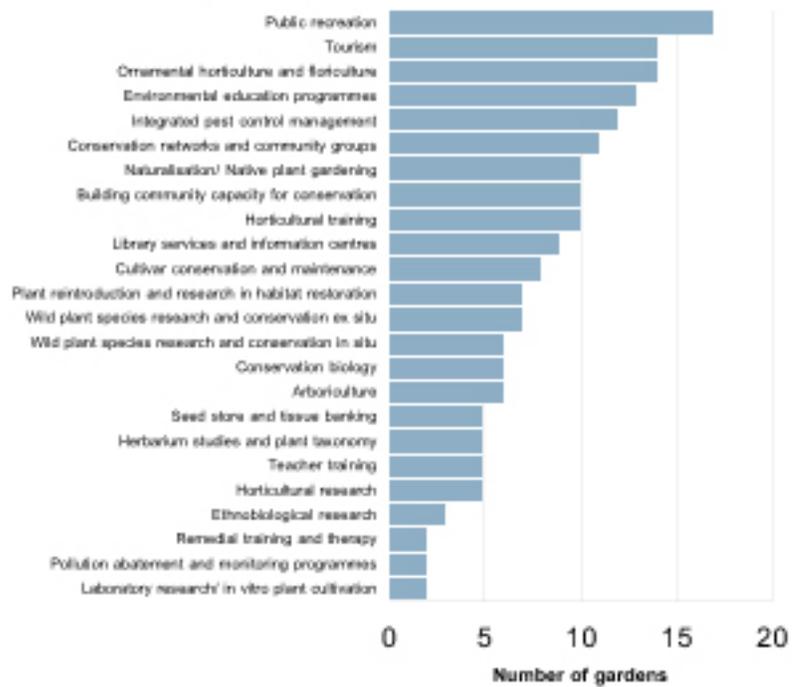
To better understand the various botanical garden/ arboreta operations and circumstances, Laurel started investigating what types of plant conservation efforts and biodiversity education programmes are currently happening across the country. During the past six months she has been visiting and/ or communicating with professional botanists, educators, administrators and volunteers at various Canadian botanical gardens and arboreta. (Figure 1: Investing in Nature: A Partnership for Plants in Canada Participants).

In addition to introducing the *International Agenda for Botanic Gardens in Conservation*, they have been looking at plant conservation and education programmes and discussing what information, educational resources, training and networking are needed to enhance plant conservation education. While each institution is indeed quite unique, she is discovering some common issues and needs and collecting a number of valuable suggestions that they are preparing to address through the “Partnership for Plants in Canada” project.

Conservation-related Activities:

To date we have been able to consult with 17 different institutions. The capacity for each institution to actively participate in plant conservation research varies:

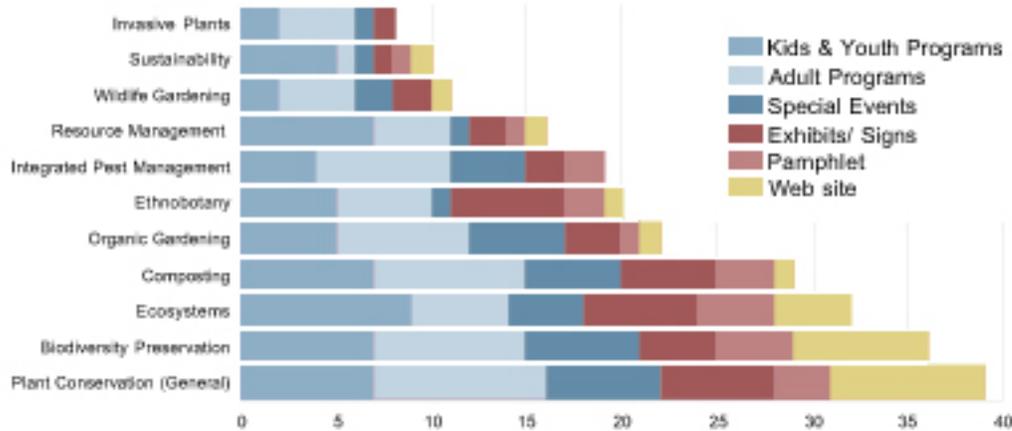
Figure 1: Major Conservation Activities



Conservation Related Education

While some botanical gardens do not have the capacity to participate in research, many have a variety of educational programmes that directly present and involve participants in plant conservation issues and efforts.

Figure 2: Plant Conservation Education



Identifying Needs:

In the discussions with botanical garden and arboreta professionals, the needs for enhancing plant conservation and biodiversity education at botanical gardens and arboreta have consistently been identified as:

- Increased financial resources
- Increased awareness of value of botanical gardens and related facilities
- Greater public awareness of importance of plant conservation
- Increased conservation training opportunities for botanical garden professionals
- Sharing of resources/ information between gardens
- Educational resources: exhibits, presentations, photos, resource sources...

Preparing to address the needs:

The needs that have been identified complement the goals of the “*Investing in Nature: A Partnership for Plants in Canada*”, therefore, within the scope of this project, we are preparing to address these needs by the following actions:

- Proposing national educational products
- Distributing copies of the International Agenda and registration booklet
- Researching and developing educational resource products
- Developing network/ communication forums
- Contributing to the development of a Global Botanical Garden Pack (for teachers)
- Developing a Canadian pack (to complement the international pack)
- Contributing content to BGCI and CBCN internet sites
- Assisting in developing capacity to contribute to recovery plans
- Liaising with governments and NGOs to identify roles in recovery planning
- Identifying a variety of additional funding sources and opportunities
- Assisting with funding application/ proposal writing
- Investigating and encouraging collaborative funding opportunities

Summary

The Investing in Nature: A Partnership for Plants in Canada project has been greeted with enthusiastic support and genuine interest increasing conservation efforts. Currently, Canadian botanical gardens and arboreta are actively involved in the conservation of 18 nationally listed species at risk and over 100 provincially listed species. Collectively they host about 3.5 million visitors a year, and deliver educational programs to at least 500,000 people. The co-operation and interest demonstrated are further indications that co-operatively, botanical gardens and arboreta in Canada and worldwide can make significant contributions to the conservation of international biodiversity.

Thank you to the following institutions for their time and input:

Royal Botanical Gardens, Hamilton, ON
Montreal Botanical Garden, QC
University of Guelph Arboretum, Guelph, ON
Sherwood Fox Arboretum, London, ON
Niagara Botanical Garden and School of Horticulture, Niagara Falls, ON
Devonian Botanical Garden, Edmonton, AB
VanDusen Botanical Display Garden, Vancouver, BC
UBC Botanical Garden, Vancouver, BC
Toronto Zoo, Toronto, ON
Reford Garden, Mont-Joli, QC
New Brunswick Botanical Garden, St. Jacques, NB
Memorial University Botanical Garden, St. John's, NF
Milner Gardens and Woodland, Qualicum Beach, BC
Tofino Botanical Gardens, Tofino, BC
Morgan Arboretum, McGill University, QC
Muttart Conservatory, Edmonton, AB
Assiniboine Park Conservatory, Winnipeg, MB