

Contributions of Public Gardens to Tree Gene Conservation¹

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American Public Gardens Association, founded in 1940, represents over 600 member gardens spanning North America and 24 countries. Its diverse membership includes botanic gardens, arboreta, and other public gardens which contribute to tree gene conservation. Some maintain *ex situ* collections nationally accredited through the Association's Plant Collections Network, a 21-year collaboration with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) Agricultural Research Service. This program promotes excellence in curatorial practices while facilitating a continent-wide approach to germplasm preservation. Some collections have a global scope while others focus on a particular plant type or even historic cultivars. An increasing number of gardens are developing and strengthening collections for conservation purposes. A recent partnership with the USDA Forest Service focuses on tree gene conservation emphasizing those species which cannot be preserved through traditional seedbanking. Horticultural expertise and facilities at public gardens assist restoration efforts. Gardens manage herbaria of both wild-collected and cultivated plants. A number of gardens steward natural lands on their properties. Some public gardens have active research programs which include a focus on tree conservation, plant evaluation, and breeding. Individuals are trained as first detectors of high consequence pests and diseases through the Association's Sentinel Plant Network, while the Plant Heroes youth program provides educational materials. Public gardens provide a valuable role in raising conservation awareness among their 70 million annual visitors through displays, interpretive materials, and educational programs.

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