



Gardens partner to expand opportunities for future scientists

ATLANTA (January 31, 2024) – The Atlanta Botanical Garden along with three others – California Botanic Garden, San Diego Botanic Garden and The Morton Arboretum – are joining forces to diversify the next generation of plant scientists through a paid training and mentorship program for individuals with bachelor's degrees.

Now in its second year, the Rare Plant RaMP (Research and Mentoring for Post-Baccalaureates) Network was developed to investigate the unprecedented global decline of plant biodiversity while also broadening the experience of individuals who were not able to participate extensively in research during their undergraduate studies. The program consists of yearlong opportunities to work alongside science teams at participating gardens, and is intended for first-generation college students, individuals from low-income households and those historically excluded from the science workforce.

“Through the RaMP program I have learned and grown so much,” said Max Meader, one of two current mentees at the Atlanta Botanical Garden. “Beyond the practical lab and field skills, this program has given me better insight into how plant conservation is achieved, the challenges that that entails and the best practices that help protect the planet’s most precarious plant populations.”

Funded by the National Science Foundation, the innovative network empowers mentees to perform both independent and collaborative research to advance their careers. Currently in the first year of the program, eight total mentees from across the country were selected to work at the four gardens on myriad hands-on projects focused on plant conservation, botanical surveying, seed banking dynamics, ecology, genetics and more to help safeguard rare and endangered plants against threats like habitat destruction and climate change.

For Barbara Garfinkle, another Garden mentee, the program is proving invaluable. “Not only am I getting inside knowledge about all aspects of conservation as a career but also making ever-lasting connections with peers and potential employers,” she said. “This feels like a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and I am incredibly grateful to be a part of it.”

Examples of mentorship project opportunities at each institution include:

Atlanta Botanical Garden: Assessing species boundaries in the North American carnivorous plant group, with a focus on the sweet pitcher plant (*Sarracenia rubra*).

California Botanic Garden: Conducting a population genetic study to develop tools that aid in the protection of succulent plants currently being targeted by poachers.



San Diego Botanic Garden: Analyzing rare medicinal plants such as yerba santa (*Eriodictyon*) for treatment of neurodegenerative diseases and *Artemisia* for antimalarial compounds.

The Morton Arboretum: Assisting in the creation of conservation groves for threatened oaks in the Southeast.

In addition to first-hand research experience, RaMP mentees participate in activities to foster professional development and networking opportunities, including bi-weekly meetings with peers from participating gardens; exchange visits and workshops at other academic, government or industry labs; and attending the annual Center for Plant Conservation conference to present research alongside their peers. A yearly stipend with benefits, including travel expenses to attend conferences and workshops, is provided.

Applications for the 2024 program are now being accepted through March 15. Eligibility applies to individuals who are first-generation college graduates, individuals from low-income households or those from groups historically excluded from the STEM workforce. Participants must have completed a bachelor's degree before participating in the program (Individuals must apply before or within four years of graduation, with extensions allowed for family, medical leave or military service). Individuals cannot be currently enrolled or accepted into a graduate program and must be U.S. citizens, U.S. nationals or permanent U.S. residents.

For more information, visit atlantabg.org/conservation-research/outreach-education-and-training/.

About the Partner Institutions

Atlanta Botanical Garden

The mission of the Atlanta Botanical Garden is to develop and maintain plant collections for display, education, research, conservation and enjoyment. Its Southeastern Center for Conservation is a hub for regional partners engaged in collaborative plant conservation research. The Garden is located at 1345 Piedmont Ave. NE, Atlanta, GA 30309. For information, visit atlantabg.org or phone 404-876-5859.

California Botanic Garden

California Botanic Garden is dedicated to California native plants, promoting botany, conservation and horticulture to inspire and educate the public and scientific community about California's native flora. The Garden is a living museum with curated collections of more than 22,000 California native plants, some of which are rare or endangered. Spread across 86 acres in Claremont, CalBG displays about 2000 taxa of California plants and includes those native to the California Floristic Province. Garden staff are also active in research, conservation, and restoration programs across Southern California. More info: calbg.org.

San Diego Botanic Garden

Established in 1970, San Diego Botanic Garden (SDBG) is a 37-acre urban oasis located in Encinitas, California, just north of San Diego. The Garden's four miles of trails and 8,000 square foot glass conservatory display more than 5,300 plant species and varieties. A premiere institution for botanical science and conservation, SDBG is actively involved in conservation horticulture, botany, and applied



plant sciences to address the biggest local and global challenges, from biodiversity loss to climate change, food insecurity to environmental degradation. SDBG has the largest public bamboo collection in North America; gardens representing different regions and flora of the world; and demonstration gardens showcasing fruits and vegetables, water-smart ornamentals, and native plants. Through an array of educational programming, events and activities for both children and adults, the Garden aims to create, share and apply plant wisdom to the world. Learn more at sdbg.org.

The Morton Arboretum

The Morton Arboretum is an internationally recognized tree-focused botanical garden and research center near Chicago in Lisle, Illinois. Its 1,700 acres include specialty tree and plant collections, 9 miles of roads and 16 miles of hiking trails, a central Grand Garden, Children's Garden, educational programs and a Visitor Center. Additional information about the Arboretum's scientific work and how it contributes to a greener, healthier world for future generations can be found at mortonarb.org.

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