

Recreation, Education and Research Through Plants

By WILLIAM J. ROBBINS

Director, The New York Botanical Garden

During the half century plus two that the Bronx Board of Trade has been making its influence felt in the growth of The Bronx into the populous, prosperous Borough of Universities that it is today, the New York Botanical Garden, started about the same time, has been developing into one of the world's greatest institutions of its kind. To the 1,400,000 residents of The Bronx — as to the rest of New York City and adjacent areas — the New York Botanical Garden is a recreational ground where they may stroll and feel refreshed in the presence of flowers and trees the year around. But to the many thousands of visitors from afar, the Garden is a world-famous institution, known on every continent for the extent of its plantings and for the scientific research performed by members of its staff.

According to Dr. William J. Robbins, Director, "A botanical garden which functions fully is far more than a well cared for park. It is, in fact, a university devoted exclusively to plants. For the enjoyment of the public it displays as wide a variety of attractive plant materials as can be cultivated there. It aims to accumulate and preserve knowledge about plants, to disseminate reliable information about plants through its publications, lectures and correspondence, and, by research, to add to the body of knowledge that now exists."

Thus is the standing of The Bronx in the field of learning upheld by an institution that has long been looked upon by residents essentially as a park.

The educational program of the New York Botanical Garden actually touches very closely the lives of the people in The Bronx. Free lectures which they may attend are given on Saturdays during the autumn, winter and spring; radio programs are broadcast on alternate Fridays over the City station, WNYC; monthly programs are given for

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members of the Garden; and special conferences on horticultural subjects, such as roses or chrysanthemums, presenting authorities from this and other institutions, are arranged at suitable seasons. These too are free to the public.

Formal courses of study are also given — a Two-Year Science Course for Gardeners, a Two-Year Course in Practical Gardening (both with classes meeting evenings), and other courses, some in the afternoon, in Nature Study, Field Botany (identifications of trees, shrubs, wild flowers and ferns), Garden Construction, and other topics. Certificates are offered upon completion of the two-year courses, and alertness credit may be arranged for teachers who enroll in Nature Study and Field Botany.

No small part of the New York Botanical Garden's educational program is its information service—informal but effective in the way that an estimated 20,000 questions are answered every year by telephone, by letter, or in person. These ques-

tions vary all the way from "When do the azaleas bloom?" to "What should be planted in a new botanical garden being established in Egypt?" Half of the questioners find their answers in the library, where there are more than 50,000 books dealing with all phases of botany, gardening, and allied subjects, and three times that many magazines, pamphlets and other sources of information. The library is used by students, teachers, artists, writers, lawyers, doctors, business men, scientists in other fields of learning, and by gardeners, both professional and amateur, who are seeking new information on some phases of their occupation or their hobby.

On the grounds of the New York Botanical Garden there are cultivated 3,000 different kinds of trees and shrubs, more than 7,000 varieties of roses in a tree-bordered garden on the east side; daffodils by the acre, irises, waterlilies, peonies, dahlias and chrysanthemums and many other groups of favorite flowers in colorful collections.

The Thompson Memorial Rock Garden, with its cascade and miniature stream coursing the glade southeast of the Museum Building, attracts visitors by the thousand on pleasant Sundays, particularly in Spring. The vegetable garden, the plots of herbs, ten acres of woodland azaleas, magnolias, daylilies and other plantings bring their share of grateful crowds from season to season. A folder containing a map and describing briefly each of these choice plantings is available from the botanical Garden without charge.

But the beauty of the New York Botanical Garden represents only one side of its existence. Scientists the world over look to the institution for the results of the research of its scientific staff. Through the Plant Pathology department at the Garden, the problems of keeping plants healthy are continually stud-

(Continued on Page 63)

RECREATION, EDUCATION AND RESEARCH THROUGH PLANTS

(Continued from Page 44)

ied; diseases are analyzed, and remedies worked out and recommended. An authoritative book on diseases of ornamentals has been prepared by this department at the Garden.

In an adjacent laboratory on the top floor of the Museum Building, plant breeding is studied, and in a specially built experimental garden, breeding experiments are carried out. One result of this work has been the introduction into gardens of new varieties of daylilies some of which are red or pink instead of the old-fashioned tawny or lemon-yellow, and some of which have extra-large showy flowers, while others are of a specially developed miniature size, with many flowers blooming together on a stalk. From this department also has come expert breeding work on hybrid seedless grapes for culture in the Northeast — one of which has been named "The Bronx;" also breeding work on fast-growing poplars to aid in reforestation.

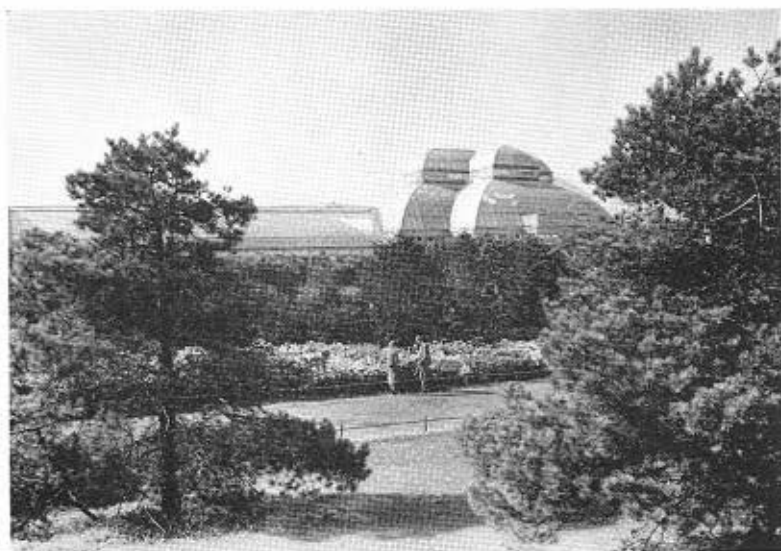
Down in a basement laboratory, presided over by Dr. William J. Robbins, Director of the New York Botanical Garden, new disease-combating substances are being derived from molds. The discovery of six of these which show great promise was announced during the garden's fiftieth anniversary celebration last spring.

But the greater portion of the scientific staff works on the basic problem of plant identification. This means far more than the mere ascribing of names to plants. It is a task which is fundamental to the science of botany, because unless man knows the identity of the plants with which he is dealing — whether that plant be a tree to provide fruit or lumber, a flower for ornament or for a perfume, a mushroom to eat or to avoid, or a fungus to furnish a remedial substance such as penicillin — he can

not use plants effectively. And plants are of fundamental importance to all life on the earth.

Thus the New York Botanical Garden combines the function of ornamental horticulture with those of scientific research, with education along the way. While the trees and shrubs and flowers that it grows for study and display bring pleasure to thousands — even hundreds of thousands — every year, the scientific research concerns itself with the very basis of life. The plants that are grown are a portion of the world's

stock of living green plants without which there would be no life of any kind on the earth. The leaves of every tree that gives pleasurable shade are giving off oxygen we breathe. Plants not only provide us with food, drink, shelter, clothing and medicine, but they give us the means of keeping alive through the air that goes into our lungs. Without the oxygen in that air, we could not stay alive. Without the green plants of the earth to provide it through their leaves, the oxygen would not be present.



Every October, vivid masses of Chrysanthemums flaunt their colors against the evergreens outside the greenhouse at the Botanical Garden.

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