

The Importance of Herbaria **American Society of Plant Taxonomists Position Statement**

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The American Society of Plant Taxonomists affirms the crucial role of natural history collections, and of plant collections in particular, in research, teaching, and public outreach. Collections of plant specimens (herbaria) are the foundation for all studies of plant diversity and evolution. Specimens provide enormous economic and scientific returns to society and are irreplaceable resources that must be preserved for future generations.

Specimens provide the foundation of nomenclature, the basis for identification, the common reference for communication, and the vouchers for floras, as well as for evolutionary and genomic studies. Molecular and morphological characters can be obtained from them that allow us to reconstruct the history of life. All fields of biological science from the level of molecular biology to ecosystem science are dependent on collections, not just for application of names, but as the basis for referencing all aspects of biodiversity.

Beyond their scientific importance, herbarium collections offer many benefits to society by providing data or reference materials for critical endeavors such as agriculture, human health, biosecurity, forensics, control of invasive species, conservation biology, natural resources, and land management. Herbarium collections provide a wealth of information on our natural heritage and extend back hundreds of years; thus they provide the *only* reliable, verifiable record of the changes to our flora during the expansion of human population.

Because natural history collections play such an important role in societal endeavors, continued physical and financial support is absolutely critical. Collections are most valuable in their original institutional and geographical context. Therefore, ASPT strongly advises institutions to maintain their collections in perpetuity. Once an institution divests itself of a collection, it can never be regained and all benefits associated with the collection are lost to future generations.

The membership of the American Society of Plant Taxonomists is a body of considerable expertise with regard to all aspects of herbarium curation, research, education, and outreach. It is imperative that minimum standards regarding environmental conditions and pest control must be met so that specimens can be maintained for hundreds of years into the future. ASPT hereby offers to provide expertise to institutions to help develop management plans for maintaining collections and to integrate herbarium collections more effectively into research, education, and outreach activities.