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THE NAPLES BOTANICAL GARDEN

The Naples Botanical Garden is one of the most prominent botanical gardens in Europe for the relevance of its collections and the number of species in culture.

It was founded as an autonomous institution ("Real giardino delle piante"- Royal Garden of Plants) with scientific, educational and technical purposes, with a Decree dated in 1807.

The origins

The opportunity of establishing a "public" botanical garden was indicated in the reform acts by the Spanish Viceroy *Count of Lemos* (1615). This garden was never realized; however, between the end of the XVI and the beginning of the XIX centuries, various small private gardens were founded in Naples, often by prominent scholars (e.g., *Giovan Vincenzo Pinelli*, *Giovanni Battista Della Porta*, *Domenico Cirillo*). Such private gardens were patronized by Italian and foreign botanists, in this way keeping alive the need for a public botanical garden.

The foundation

The decree of foundation of the Garden had a quite complex history, both for political vicissitudes and for the technical complexity of the project.

After the relocation of the University from the ancient "Palazzo degli Studi" (today, the National Museum) to the "Palazzo del Salvatore", an official message by *Ferdinand IV* (October, 1st, 1777) on the future use of the former "Palazzo degli Studi" provides for the establishment of a natural history museum and a botanical garden in that area.

Almost 20 years later, in 1796, a first decree is published, ordering the foundation of the Naples Botanical Garden in its present location. This decree, and the next (1802) as well, were fruitless.

The decree which indeed caused the works to start was signed by *Giuseppe Bonaparte* on December, 28th, 1807.

Two later decrees (February, 19th, 1810, by *Joaquin Murat* and July, 26th, 1812, by queen *Maria Carolina of Austria*) detailed on the required size and magnificence of the layout. In fact, the preparation of the garden lasted several decades, employing large sums of money and the best scientific intellects of the time.

The collections

At present, the Naples Botanical Garden hosts several thousands of plant, shrub and tree species, kept in the open or in controlled environments; We succeed in cultivating representatives of almost all floras from the different regions of the world, also because of the favorable climate, in which subtropical species often survive well. Various important specimens are listed in international catalogs.

The greenhouses (warm, temperate and cold) cover approx. 5000 sq. meters.

Among the most important collections, we may mention: the cycad collection, which is one the reference collections world-wide; our collection of succulents, from the African, American, Asian and Australian deserts; the tree fern collection, one of the few in Europe; the palms; the Italian orchids and the bulbs; the air plant collection; the Citrus grove. The Naples Botanical Garden also hosts a wide sample Italian and exotic plants of economic importance (cultivated especially in the Experimental Section for medicinal plants).

Mission

The Naples Botanical Garden, one of the largest and most biodiversity rich in Italy, carries out a variety of research, educational, technical and, generally speaking, cultural activities, which contribute in making one of the leading scientific institutions in southern Italy.

Its main functions are:

- conservation and growth of the living collections;
- fundamental research in various areas of plant biology;

- applied research on the plants of economic importance;
- conservation of plant diversity in danger of extinction;
- conservation of ancient or neglected cultivars of fruit trees and horticultural plants;
- Teaching of botany;
- Environmental education.

Sections

The Naples Botanical Garden hosts the Museum of Paleobotany and Ethnobotany, the Herbarium, a botanical library and a seed bank.

The paleobotanical section of the Museum illustrates the evolution of land plants, with the help of fossils, reconstructions and texts, starting from the earliest vascular plants to the present.

The ethnobotanical section illustrates the various uses of plants, displaying objects, products, pictures and plant specimens; special attention is given to daily activities and interaction with plants of several disappearing ethnical groups.

The Plant Biology building, with classrooms, an Herbarium and a botanical library, was the location of a university department and has been recently acquired by the botanical garden. The Herbarium still belongs to the Department of Biology of our University.

The seed bank keeps fruits and seeds collected in the garden and in nature, both to preserve plant biodiversity and to exchange them with other botanical gardens in the world.

The educational section organizes educational displays in the Garden and takes care of guided tours for students (we receive approx. 20.000 students from primary and secondary schools per year).

Periodically, guided tours are organized for the general public; study visits by Italian and foreign scientists are organized upon request.

The garden is open to visitors on weekdays (Saturday excluded) upon phone reservation

- 1) Arboretum
- 2) Gymnosperms area
- 3) Area of the flowering plant families
- 4) Citrus grove
- 5) Palm grove
- 6) Fern garden
- 7) Rock garden
- 8) Beach area
- 9) Epiphytic plants
- 10) Peat bog
- 11) Aquatic plants area
- 12) Succulents
- 13) Mediterranean shrubland
- 14) Orchids and bulbs

- 15) Aldo Merola monumental greenhouse
- 16) Luigi Califano greenhouses
- 17) Paolo De Luca tropical greenhouse
- 18) Experimental Section for the medicinal plants
- 19) Bible plants
- 20) Castle (Museum of Paleobotany and Ethnobotany, Administration)
- 21) Plant biology building (classrooms, herbarium, library, laboratories)

- Restrooms
- Restrooms for persons with reduced mobility

