

Religion, spirituality and science in botanic gardens: Environmental awareness, sustainability, and conservation for all audiences

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Abstract

Plant conservation and related themes of individual to ecological renewal is often presented in gardens based on scientific contexts of reality and truth. For many visitors, their fundamental spiritual or religious perspectives frame their beliefs, values and actions, including all aspects of plant conservation, education, and renewal. For gardens with conservation and educational missions, the continuum of secular to religious audiences in their communities must be engaged – yet how is this to be done with mutual respect among all parties, and with the institution maintaining its integrity?

Aims: to broaden this needed conversation and to outline the means by which a common conservation/environmental agenda can be developed for persons of all degrees of spiritual, religious, and/or scientific perceptions.

Objectives: to identify gardens working with this topic, define key issues of common concern, articulate underlying values, and create a working document to continue with this partnering.

Format: presentation of three perspectives and then a critique of a preliminary statement/strategy drafted by the three presenters. An open discussion on how to improve and implement a revised draft with key locally implementable action steps based on world-wide experience is desired.

Biographies

Prof. Khaled Sawalha. “Ecological Divine balance: plant biodiversity values in Islam with a focus on the Qura'n, speeches of the Prophet and the role of Moslem scholars in the history to use and teach plant biodiversity”

Religion: Islam. Assistant Professor of plant biotechnology at Al-Quds University – Palestine. Graduated from Kings College University of London. Scientific research, organization of seminars, publishing papers and books on plant biodiversity, biotechnology, Islam and science.

Keith Tomlinson. “The Spiritual Magnitude of Gardens: Are Garden Educators Fostering Divine Providence in Nature?”

Manager and Interpretive Naturalist, Meadowlark Botanical Gardens, Fellow Washington DC Academy of Science, Study Tour Leader Smithsonian Associates.

Dr. David C. Michener. “Respecting all citizens: integrity in a secular science garden in a community of diverse faiths, agnostics, and atheists”

Curator and adjunct professor, University of Michigan Gardens & Arboretum; Evolution Theme Semester committee, Museum Studies Program, program contact with several religious communities, author and public lecturer.