

Plant and people: a new online platform for sharing ethnobotanical knowledge

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The Hortus Botanicus Leiden is creating an online platform for knowledge about the use of plants called “Plant and People”. This is a new initiative formed through co-creation with (local) experts focusing on the usage and personal experiences of people with plants. This online platform serves as a place for safeguarding and sharing the stories about the use and relationship of plants by humans. The platform will cover a wide range of uses: plants as food, medicine, dye, clothing, building material, for ritual purposes etc. By collecting, recording and sharing knowledge, the Hortus wants to safeguard this intangible cultural heritage. This will hopefully open the eyes of a much broader target group than today's green lovers to the importance, beauty and wonder of plants. In organizing science cafés, we want to start the conversation with the general public, companies and researchers. We will challenge users to record their memories, methods and recipes; a co-creation process of botanic gardens, related partners and the public. Plant and People always focuses on a specific plant family, explains a number of characteristic uses of that family, and encourages participants to gather experiences with this plant family in their own area or culture and to share this information with the community. The project combines science cafés, filmed interviews and personal memories, which are made available in a database. This flexible system can be adopted by other gardens to increase the reach to many times higher than what one garden could achieve. The films consist of shorter, informative parts of five to ten minutes. Biodiversity is declining rapidly, but the loss of global cultural diversity and degradation of natural environments is accelerating even faster. By raising cultural awareness, we want to contribute to measures and behaviour to preserve our global cultural heritage.