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**For Immediate Release**

**MISSOURI BOTANICAL GARDEN PUBLISHES 32<sup>ND</sup>  
VOLUME OF FLORA OF CHINA**  
*Information In Flora Important to Conserving China's Rich Botanical Diversity*

(ST. LOUIS) The Missouri Botanical Garden, in collaboration with ten institutions around the world, has published the 32<sup>nd</sup> volume of the Flora of China, an international collaborative project to publish a comprehensive catalog of wild plants in China. The volume, dedicated to the Orchidaceae (orchid) species, is the definitive work on all Chinese wild orchids, written by 15 of the world's best experts from China, U.K., U.S., Netherlands, and Australia.

“This book describes in detail and in English 1,388 orchid species in 194 genera, with 11 genera and 491 species found nowhere else in the world,” said Nicholas Turland, associate curator and co-director of the Flora of China project. That compares to only 208 orchid species in 71 genera in the U.S., which without Alaska is essentially the same size as China. In Europe, also about the same size as the U.S. and China, there are fewer still: 113 species in 35 genera.

China contains about 31,500 species of vascular plants (about ten percent of the world's total), compared with some 19,500 in the U.S. and Canada combined and about 12,500 in Europe. Information about Chinese plants is essential to the study of the evolution of North American and European plants, because several groups that were widespread in the northern temperate zone in prehistoric times now survive only in China.

“The differences are explained not only by the fairly extensive area of true tropical forest in China, but also by the fact that one of its principal mountain ranges, the Hengduan Mountains and

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## **ADD ONE: Flora of China**

their southern extension and related ranges, extend well down into the tropics,” said Dr. Peter H. Raven, Garden president and co-chair of the editorial committee of the Flora of China. “This means that species migrating south would have had a greater chance of survival there than on the other two continents.”

Because of China’s moderate climate, the country has had a higher rate of survival of species of plants and animals than the other two areas, and a much higher degree of evolution of new species on its numerous mountain ranges. Therefore, plants like lady’s slipper orchids, *Cypripedium*, have 36 species in China, 25 found only there. That compares to 11 species in the lower 48 states of the U.S. with 4 species found nowhere else; and only 3 species in Europe.

Since 1988, the Flora of China project has nurtured productive collaborations between hundreds of Western and Chinese scientists, and by 2013 will have described in detail all wild plants of China, both online and in 24 printed volumes of text and a further 24 of illustrations. The international committee of the Flora of China will meet in Edinburgh, U.K., in May 2010 to plan the final few years of the project. Completing such a massive and complex task within 25 years is an exceptional achievement. This immense resource will provide the core information desperately needed to conserve the richest area of temperate-climate vegetation on Earth.

Chinese plants are important to the world because of their medicinal value. For thousands of years, the Chinese have used plants extensively for medicinal purposes. Several thousand Chinese species are actively traded and used medically. Other Chinese plants are important sources of drugs, waxes, and oils, all of them useful. The Flora of China will provide a ready means of locating, understanding, and utilizing these plants.

During the course of the project, Garden and project researchers work to identify rare, vulnerable and endangered species of Chinese plants. This will help to identify the species at risk and evaluate them, thus making it possible to set in place appropriate conservation measures. Overall, the Flora will help enlist the participation of the international community in all aspects of China’s wonderfully diverse plants, including their preservation.

Volumes of the Flora of China project are jointly published by the Missouri Botanical Garden Press (St. Louis) and Science Press (Beijing). All of the published information is freely available online at <http://flora.huh.harvard.edu/china/>. The Missouri Botanical Garden is the non-Chinese coordination center. Other centers in the West are the Smithsonian Institution; the California Academy of Sciences; Harvard University; the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh; the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew; and the Musée National d’Histoire Naturelle, Paris.

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The Missouri Botanical Garden is the oldest continually operating botanical garden in the nation, celebrating its 150th anniversary in 2009. *Missouri Botanical Garden: Green for 150 Years*.

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**NOTE: A digital color image is available by request. Download media materials at [www.mobot.org/press](http://www.mobot.org/press).**

The Missouri Botanical Garden's mission is "to discover and share knowledge about plants and their environment, in order to preserve and enrich life." Today, 150 years after opening, the Missouri Botanical Garden is a National Historic Landmark and a center for science, conservation, education and horticultural display. *Missouri Botanical Garden: Green for 150 Years*.