



# NATIONAL TROPICAL BOTANICAL GARDEN

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### **Dr. Michael S. Dosmann to be Awarded Fairchild Medal for Plant Exploration for 2019**

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Kalāheo, Kaua`i, Hawai`i, USA (January 15, 2019) — Dr. Michael S. Dosmann, Keeper of the Living Collections at the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University, has been named the 2019 recipient of the David Fairchild Medal for Plant Exploration. In an announcement from its headquarters in Hawai`i, the National Tropical Botanical Garden (NTBG) recognized Dosmann for his outstanding contributions to botanical exploration and horticulture.

The Fairchild Medal will be presented to Dosmann at a black-tie dinner at NTBG's historical garden and former residence of plant explorer Dr. David Fairchild, The Kampong, in Coconut Grove, Florida on February 1, 2019. The following day he will present a public lecture entitled "Today's Plant Explorer: Learning from the past to secure a better future."

As the Arnold Arboretum's Keeper of the Living Collections, Dosmann curates and manages a global collection of temperate woody trees, shrubs, and vines comprising some 15,000 accessioned plants. Dosmann joined the Arnold Arboretum as Curator of Living Collections in 2007. In 2017 he was named Keeper of the Living Collections, only the second person to bear that title (the first was Ernest Henry Wilson, 1927-1930).

The 147-year-old Arnold Arboretum, the oldest public arboretum in North America, comprises 281 acres of urban forests and green space. Both free and open to the public for recreation, the arboretum is an essential component of Boston's park system, as well as an important education, research, and conservation facility.

Since 2007, Dosmann has led and participated in multiple botanical expeditions to China, and Japan, as well regions in the Eastern United States including the Adirondacks of upstate New York, and the Ozarks of Arkansas. These expeditions to acquire wild-collected seed have contributed significantly to the expansion of the living collections as well as the Arnold Arboretum's herbarium, while also providing duplicate collections for local regional herbaria.

Dosmann's wild collections have focused on genera such as *Acer* (maple) and *Carya* (hickory), as well as other species of value to the Arboretum's collections, particularly those of conservation concern.

Dosmann explained he is committed to advancing plant exploration through the study and refinement of collection strategies, tactics, and protocols. In an effort to increase understanding and improve plant exploration, Dosmann began a research project nearly two decades ago to determine metrics to better measure the success of plant expeditions.

“Exploration is a wonderful, fantastic thing,” Dosmann said. “Many are excited to do it, but you may have just two weeks in the field and you’ve got to get it right. You want the results — the plants — to live on for decades, if not longer.” He has formalized a number of papers that can be used as a teaching tool and model for other gardens or arboreta and has made an exploration toolkit with the goal of contributing to greater expedition success.

Dosmann sees his work as an opportunity to generate and synthesize new knowledge for the betterment of arboreta and gardens around the world. He’s also an enthusiastic advocate of ordinary people exploring plants in their own surroundings. As he considers mankind’s relationship with nature and the environment, he worries people aren’t noticing the green around them. One of his professional goals is to bring the excitement of plant exploration to the public and inspire them to explore their own surroundings.

“I think plant explorers have a moral obligation to bring back not just the plants, but also share the inspiration with others,” Dosmann said.

Born in rural Indiana, Dosmann grew up on a small farm surrounded by plants and has been fascinated by science and horticulture from his youth. He noted the strong influence of his mother, who he called an “uber gardener,” and his father, a police detective with a deep interest in natural history.

After studying public horticulture at Purdue University, Dosmann earned a Master’s degree from Iowa State University before earning a Ph.D. in horticulture from Cornell University. Reflecting on his academic background, he said, “I always had botanical gardens in my mind, thinking about how to better curate with purpose.” Without hesitation, Dosmann added, “I am a proud horticulturist,” a title he relishes for the ways in which it allows him to integrate botany, ecology, and the sharing of plant knowledge.

Upon learning of his selection as recipient of the Fairchild Medal, Dosmann said he was “gobsmacked, dumbfounded, and honored to the tenth degree,” adding that he was greatly humbled to join the ranks of esteemed past Fairchild Medal recipients. Dosmann, who is in his mid-40s still has, in his own words, “a lot of gas left in the tank” with much to contribute in the years ahead.

Dosmann was nominated by Dr. William “Ned” Friedman, Director of the Arnold Arboretum of Harvard University who described him as “a true plant enthusiast, an extraordinarily knowledgeable plants-person, and an international leader in efforts to promote greater knowledge of the broad diversity of plants.”

Fairchild Medal nominations are solicited from botanical garden directors and research scientists around the world. The 2019 Fairchild selection committee was deeply impressed with Dr. Dosmann’s deep horticultural knowledge and noteworthy contributions to plant exploration. In a statement, the selection committee said Dosmann “exemplifies the passion and love of plants that was so much a part of David Fairchild’s life.”

NTBG President Chipper Wichman added, “We are excited to honor Dr. Dosmann for his extraordinary work leading plant explorations to remote areas in China and bringing back unique plant groups to build up the ex situ collections at Arnold Arboretum. He truly exemplifies the spirit of David Fairchild, not only through his incredible collections and plant introductions, but also through his very successful work popularizing plants through teaching and public education programs. It’s researchers like Michael Dosmann who will engage the hearts and minds of the next generation of botanists.”

Presented annually by the National Tropical Botanical Garden since 1999, the David Fairchild Medal for Plant Exploration is named for Dr. David Fairchild, one of the most influential horticulturists and plant collectors in the United States. Fairchild devoted his life to plant exploration, searching the world for useful plants suitable for introduction into the country. As an early “Indiana Jones” type explorer, he conducted field trips throughout Malaysia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, China, Japan, the South Pacific, the Caribbean, South America, the Middle East, and East and South Africa during the late 1800s and early 1900s.

These explorations resulted in the introduction of many tropical plants of economic importance to the U.S. including sorghum, nectarines, unique species of bamboo, dates, and varieties of mangoes.

In addition, as director of the Office of Foreign Seed and Plant Introduction of the U.S. Department of Agriculture during the early 20th Century, Dr. Fairchild was instrumental in the introduction of more than 5,000 selected varieties and species of useful plants, such as Durum wheat, Japanese rices, Sudan grass, Chinese soy beans, Chinese elms, persimmons, and pistachios.

Fairchild and his wife, Marian Bell Fairchild, daughter of Alexander Graham Bell, purchased property in South Florida in 1916 and created both a home and an “introduction garden” for plant species found on his expeditions. He named the property “The Kampong,” the Malay word for “village.”

The tropical species he collected from Southeast Asia in the 1930s and 1940s are still part of the heritage collections of The Kampong. The property is the only U.S. mainland garden owned by NTBG, which has four gardens and five preserves in Hawai‘i. The organization is dedicated to conservation, research, and education relating to the world’s rare and endangered tropical plants.

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