



PRESS RELEASE
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

CONTACT: Jan Clark
PHONE: 202-226-7674
jclark@aoc.gov

NATURE'S BARCODES
NEW EXHIBIT OPENS AT U.S. BOTANIC GARDEN

February 1, 2007 - Washington, DC -- An exciting new exhibit has opened at the U.S. Botanic Garden. *Nature's Barcodes* explores how DNA from plants can be used to develop a rapid and accurate method of species identification. Cosponsored by the Department of Botany at the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History, *Nature's Barcodes* is on display in the Plant Exploration room of the USBG Conservatory through March 25.

We are all familiar with product barcodes and the revolution they have spawned in the retail marketplace. Such product barcodes are the envy of those who study plants and animals. Field surveys are the only way to study diversity and document changes in flora and fauna, but they take time and require skill. Enforcement of protected species regulation also would benefit from an automated and rapid method of obtaining an identification.

Accurate plant identification is important - not only in scientific studies, but also in the monitoring of plant product quality and many other applications. But anyone trying to identify plants has quickly discovered that it isn't easy, especially if one isn't a taxonomist. What we need is a "natural barcode" - and that dream is now closer to becoming reality.

In devising a natural barcode, scientists study an organism's unique DNA sequences, which can be easily extracted from tissue samples and then analyzed. Conceivably, this could be done for every species on the planet. The *Nature's Barcodes* exhibit tracks the progress of an ongoing joint project to develop such genetic "barcodes" for plants, as well as barcode "readers." Cosponsored by the USBG and the Smithsonian Department of Botany, the project uses medicinal plants as a pilot study.

The U.S. Botanic Garden Conservatory and the adjacent National Garden are open to the public, free of charge, every day from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. The Conservatory is located at 100 Maryland Avenue SW, on the west side of the U.S. Capitol. Visitors are encouraged to take Metrobus and Metrorail. Further information is available by calling 202-225-8333 or visiting www.usbg.gov.

###