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U.S. BOTANIC GARDEN SHOWCASES HEIRLOOM PLANTS

Conservatory Terrace Exhibit on Display Through October 12, 2003

June 10, 2003 - Washington, DC - *Growing Our Inheritance: Heirloom Plants* has opened at the U.S. Botanic Garden. The exhibit on the terrace surrounding the Conservatory will run through October 12, 2003.

An heirloom is thought of as “something of special value handed on from one generation to another.” Heirloom plant varieties, typically more than 50 years old, are the flower and vegetable plants of our history, brought by immigrants - or developed locally - and passed on. In recent years thousands of these varieties have been lost because of the decline of small regional seed companies, increased urbanization, and professional plant breeders’ focus on marketable traits such as shelf life, yield, and transport qualities. The heirloom plant varieties that do still exist have survived because gardeners who valued their specialized attributes, such as flavor or fragrance, grew the plants and then passed seeds or cuttings on to others. In recent years, seed exchanges, seed companies, and the U.S. government have joined in the effort to save these treasured varieties.

The exhibit *Growing Our Inheritance: Heirloom Plants* showcases over 200 varieties of heirloom vegetables, fruit trees, antique roses, and annual flowers. The exhibit reflects the emphasis of American home gardening on vegetable and fruit production in the early 1900’s, and it resembles the victory gardens of World War II. Many of the featured plant varieties, however, were discovered much earlier and were grown during the 1800’s by Thomas Jefferson and other famous plantsmen.

In conjunction with the exhibit, various workshops, lectures, and demonstrations related to heirloom plants will be held at the U.S. Botanic Garden throughout the summer and fall, including a July 11 lecture on historic plants from Jefferson’s Monticello. Visit www.usbg.gov for the complete schedule of programs.

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