

Fascination of Plants Day
Plant research is a priority ... now!
University of Milan
Botanical Gardens at Città Studi and at Brera
18-24th May 2015

Milan, 18th May 2015 - World population is growing fast: in 1970 it was half what it is today; it reached 7 billion in 2012 and is expected to reach 8 billion in 2024. By the end of the century there will probably be 11 billion people on planet Earth. Today about one billion people do not have enough to eat.

Combined with decreasing availability of water, increased consumption of meat and reduced availability of arable land, it is clear that a solution is required soon. In the last 50 years, cereal production per hectare has almost tripled (FAO). This demonstrates how much scientific research can help in this race against time.

Research has made many advances in understanding how plants function, although little money has been invested in such research: only 5% of the world research budget is invested in plant research.

At the University of Milan, for example, there are research groups studying how to increase seed yield per hectare, how to improve seed quality by increasing the content of essential nutrients, how to monitor or modify blooming times to ensure harvests, how to optimise photosynthesis to increase biomass production and how to make plants more resistant to drought.

Fascination of Plants Day is celebrated on 18th May in 52 countries with 865 events, 89 in Italy alone, to demonstrate that plant research can find desperately needed solutions, while at the same time being an occasion to remember the central role of plants in our lives, something that is often overlooked.

Martin Kater, Italian coordinator of the event and lecturer in genetics at "La Statale", explains the value of this event in the following terms: "The event is dedicated to the public at large and aims to demonstrate the importance of plant science in daily life and for society. We depend on plants for everything: they give us oxygen, food, medicines and many industrial products from wood to cotton. Demographic increase is challenging agriculture and there is a pressing need for new ideas for sustainable agriculture."

On *Fascination of Plants Day*, the University of Milan is holding a week of exhibitions, workshops, shows, guided tours and conferences for adults and children, to remind people not only that plants are beautiful but also of their importance for our lives. All events are at the two Botanic Gardens of the university at Brera and at Città Studi.

Programme at: www.plantday.it/unimi
www.lastataleperexpo.it
www.facebook.com/lastataleperexpo

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