

## Nurturing future botanists and conservationists

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In highly urbanised cities, youths may have reduced exposure to or interest in the natural environment. One of the consequences of this is a declining enrolment in undergraduate botany courses worldwide, which in turn has led to universities curtailing such courses and degrees. Should this trend continue, skills in plant identification, protection and conservation will be lost. The Department of Biological Sciences at the National University of Singapore (NUS) and the School of Biological Sciences at Nanyang Technological University (NTU), in partnership with the Singapore Botanic Gardens (SBG), are seeking to reverse this alarming trend in the tropical city-state of Singapore. Here we focus on NUS and SBG who are collaborating on teaching, writing and public exhibitions to enhance students' learning and create public awareness. In 2022, an advanced undergraduate course entitled 'Vegetation and Plant Diversity of Southeast Asia' was launched. The lectures and practical classes are conducted in SBG's in-house researchers, giving students access to expertise and the Gardens' living and preserved plant collections. Also, as part of the NUS undergraduate course 'Comparative Botany', selected student write-ups and photographs were curated and displayed in an exhibition called 'Uncommon Market Vegetables' held at SBG's Centre for Ethnobotany from December 2022 to June 2023. This enabled students to learn more about Singapore's botanical and cultural heritage and engage with the general public. Another significant move was the launch of a Minor in Botany in 2023 as a collaboration between NUS and SBG. NUS, NTU and SBG continue to explore ways to deepen research and educational collaboration, including through undergraduate and postgraduate co-supervision of research projects in the fields of taxonomy, ecology, conservation, and the propagation of plants and fungi. Through these efforts, we intend to keep alive students' exposure to and interest in the botanical sciences.