

Sustainability in the Middle East – insights from the Jerusalem Botanical Gardens

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In Jerusalem's unique climate, at a historical period of the country's development, our garden was established to acclimate plants from all over the world in a single site. Those plants were then used for gardening, afforestation, and replanting in the wild, all over the county. In those early times, the gardens played an important role in creating a better, greener environment for the people who lived in our semi-arid situation. Over the years, the country has changed, and the conceptions of "what is a good" sustainable environment for people to live in, also changed. Over the last two years, the Jerusalem Botanical Gardens has been exploring to understand and define what the role of botanical gardens should be in creating a better, more sustainable, and diverse environment. How does that feed into our daily work and operations in Jerusalem? Given that sustainability is a broad concept that also encompasses issues such as biodiversity and famine, we are exploring ways to integrate sustainable practices into our gardens, which are in one of Israel's cities with major issues in food security and environmental destruction. This talk will be presented by Ayelet El-Boher who has held the position of the head of sustainable development – a role created by the gardens for the first time to address these pressing issues. Ayelet's presentation aims to give insight into what the gardens have discovered once dedicating a full-time employee to this topic and how the gardens have benefited or changed due to this focus. The talk will also detail present projects dealing with monitoring pollinators, through waterwise plants and endangered plant propagation, to programs aiming to create collaborations between environmental entrepreneurs and organizations in the Jerusalem sustainability arena.