



# NATIONAL TROPICAL BOTANICAL GARDEN

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## Gómez-Pompa To Receive David Fairchild Medal

October 6, 2005 (Kalaheo, Kaua‘i, HI USA) - Noted biologist and ecologist Dr. Arturo Gómez-Pompa has been selected as the 2006 recipient of the highly regarded David Fairchild Medal for Plant Exploration. The award will be presented at a black-tie dinner on February 3 at The Kampong of the National Tropical Botanical Garden in Coconut Grove, Florida.

Dr. Gómez-Pompa's lifetime of work in tropical ecology, the conservation, restoration, and management of tropical forests, ethnobotany, and floristics made him a natural choice for the award. He was one of the first voices to draw attention to the problem of rain forest destruction and offer solutions for this critical environmental problem. His discovery of *Theobroma cacao* (chocolate tree) in the ancient sacred groves of the sinkholes of Yucatan brought to light aspects of agricultural knowledge and practices of the Maya civilization, which further paved the way for research in the domestication of tropical trees. His explorations also led to the discovery of new tropical taxa. Dr. Gómez-Pompa was one of the first to recognize the potential value of computers in tracking botanical information when, in the 1960s, he created a database for the Flora of Veracruz project, which contains data gathered during decades of research and which is still being expanded to this day. This became the model for the databases that now exist at many respected botanical institutions.

In 1975, Gómez-Pompa founded the influential National Research Institute of Biotic Resources (INIREB) and pioneered research in agroecology, analyzing the agricultural techniques used by people inhabiting the rain forests in his native country of Mexico. He has served as the Advisor to the President of Mexico on Tropical Ecology Issues, as well as recently being named a member of the Board of Governors of the University of Veracruz. His work with the United Nations includes having held the post of Chairman of the International Coordination Board of UNESCO's Man and the Biosphere program, which promotes international cooperation and a focus for the coordination of related programs aimed at improving the management of natural resources and the environment.

Dr. Gómez-Pompa is also a prolific writer and educator. He has authored or co-authored over 200 books, papers, and articles. His most recent, "The Role of Biodiversity Scientists in a Troubled World," in *BioScience* magazine, discusses obstacles to biodiversity research and the possible solutions. He taught botanical courses for the University of California, Riverside, for nearly 20 years, having held the title Distinguished Professor of Botany until being named this year as the 29th University Professor of the University of California system and Professor Emeritus. The title "University Professor" is reserved for scholars of international distinction who are recognized and respected as teachers of exceptional ability.

Gómez-Pompa has served on a number of boards and advisory councils, including the Board on Biology of the National Academies of Science, the Board of the American Institute of Biological

Sciences, the panel of the Smithsonian Council, and the Advisory Committee to the U.S. House of Representatives' Committee on Science, Space, and Technology. He has been recognized by his counterparts through election as a Fellow or member to such eminent organizations as the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, the American Association for the Advancement of Science, and The Third World Academy of Sciences. He is a past recipient of the Chevron Prize in Conservation and the Tyler Prize for Environmental Achievement, to name a few, as well as having been awarded a Guggenheim Fellowship.

“It is a great honor to receive the esteemed David Fairchild Medal for my work in plant exploration,” commented Gómez-Pompa. “I would like to share this distinction with all my former students and my amazing local assistants and colleagues with whom I travel all over the tropics studying vegetation and the amazing flora of these regions.”

The Fairchild Medal is awarded each year to a scientist who has demonstrated distinguished service to humanity by continuing the legacy of Dr. David Fairchild by exploring remote areas of the world, using innovative travel itineraries, conveyances or techniques to discover new plant species or cultivars; bringing into cultivation new and important plants that hold significant promise as agricultural or horticultural varieties; and playing crucial roles in the conservation of endangered plant species. Fairchild medalists receive a bronze medal, a cash award, and a citation lauding their dedicated and courageous exploration. Dr. Gómez-Pompa will be the eighth recipient of the award. Nominations for the award were made by an international panel of botanists and plant explorers.

“We are very pleased to present this prestigious award to someone who has achieved so much in the botanical world and who really exemplifies the spirit of David Fairchild,” said Chipper Wichman, CEO and Director of the National Tropical Botanical Garden. “Dr. Gómez-Pompa’s numerous accomplishments certainly inspire all of us who explore and protect the flora of the tropics.”

Dr. David Fairchild, one of the greatest and most influential horticulturalists and plant collectors in the United States, devoted twenty-five years of his life to plant exploration, searching for useful plants suitable for introduction into the U.S. As an early “Indiana Jones” type explorer, he conducted field trips throughout Asia, the South Pacific, Dutch East and West Indies, South America, Egypt, Ceylon, China, Japan, the Persian Gulf, and East and South Africa during the late 1800s and early 1900s. These explorations resulted in the introduction of many tropical plants of economic importance to the United States, including sorghum, nectarines, unique species of bamboo, dates, and varieties of mangoes. In addition, as director of the Office of Foreign Seed and Plant Introduction of the United States Department of Agriculture during the early 20th Century, Dr. Fairchild was instrumental in the introduction of approximately 75,000 selected varieties and species of useful plants, such as Duram wheat, Japanese rices, Sudan grass, Chinese soy beans, Chinese elms, persimmons and pistachios.

Fairchild and his wife, Marion Bell Fairchild, daughter of Alexander Graham Bell, purchased property in South Florida in 1916 and created both a home and an “introduction garden” for plant species found on his expeditions. He named the property “The Kampong,” the Indonesian word for “village.” The unique tropical species he collected from Southeast Asia in the 1930s and 1940s are still part of the heritage collections of The Kampong, which operates today as part of the non-profit National Tropical Botanical Garden ([www.ntbg.org](http://www.ntbg.org)). The NTBG includes five

gardens and three preserves in Hawaii and Florida and is dedicated to conservation, research, and education relating to the world's rare and endangered tropical plants.

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