ASSESSING THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF PLANTS IN CULTIVATION IN UK BOTANIC AND HISTORIC GARDENS AND ARBORETA

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In the UK in 2016 there will be national focus on garden history as we celebrate the 300th anniversary of the birth of one of the World’s most well-known landscape designers, Lancelot (Capability) Brown. Many of our botanic gardens and arboreta are historic landscapes. The Royal Botanic Garden Kew is designated as a World Heritage Site. We recognise, protect and legislate for the historic designed and built fabric of our gardens. We understand the conservation and amenity value of planting within the gardens we manage and increasingly appreciate how our gardens function as visitor attractions, and as part of our cities’ green infrastructure and cultural heritage.

Do we, however, understand the heritage value of some our collections and, indeed, individual plant specimens as living artefacts in their own right?

Initial feedback from many UK botanic gardens and collection holders has indicated that collections managers are in some instances recording historical significance. This includes first introductions, planting original to the garden, the garden owner, Champion trees and local significance. Others currently do not, but recognise that they have historical and unique specimens, but are yet to resolve the assessment process and would welcome guidance.

How do we place a heritage value on living accessions that may not be rare or endangered but are unique?

Association with a historic event: Isaac Newton’s apple tree. Malus pumila ‘Flower of Kent’ the variety is rare but here it is significant due to its association with Isaac Newton’s ‘falling apple’ discovery.
Are there models within existing heritage designation criteria that we can consider when assessing and ascribing value in relation to living artefacts?

**Plant Heritage** encourage the conservation of cultivated plants in the British Isles through National Plant Collections and the Threatened Plants Project. This project is developing a system to assess which cultivars they most need to conserve, based on rarity, economic value and heritage. Five marks accorded to horticultural merit, three marks for heritage merit and two for usefulness, for example, for food or medicine.

**National Trust**, owner of over 200 gardens in England, Wales and Northern Ireland and potentially the largest plant collection holder in Europe is adapting the Historic England (HE) 'listing' process of Grade I, II* and II significance.

### Heritage value typologies:

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<td>• Aesthetic</td>
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<td>• Cultural</td>
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<td>• Recreational</td>
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**Is this heritage value transferable or tradeable?**

Apollo 14 launched in 1971, astronaut Stuart Roosa, former Forest Ranger, carried tree seeds as a joint NASA and the United States Forestry Service project. Upon return to Earth, the seeds were germinated by the Forest Service. The seedlings were planted throughout the United States and are known as *Moon Trees*.

Now *Half Moon* trees, germinated from seeds of the original *Moon Trees* are also considered to have a degree of heritage value.

*NASA Moon Tree Emblem © NASA*

**PlantNetwork** aims to support all aspects of the heritage value of plant collections, and the communication of their significance to a wide audience.

The plant collections of Britain and Ireland are diverse in content, age and history, forming an interesting and vital part of our national, scientific, horticultural, cultural and biological heritage. Plant collections have played a significant role in the history of the UK for more than 400 years. We have, therefore, inherited assets that have been designed and refined for at least 15 generations.

**To maintain these achievements, PlantNetwork will:**
- encourage recognition and recording of the heritage value of gardens and plant collections
- support the sharing of heritage garden expertise through workshops and training

**In 2016 PlantNetwork will hold a conference to consider how we can assess, record and ascribe significance to our historic plants.**

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