

The Royal Botanic Garden of Jordan

Did you know Jordan has 13 different habitats, over 2,550 vascular plant species, and at least 137 kinds of mushrooms?

The Royal Botanic Garden (RBG) is conserving this vast range of native biodiversity in Jordan while establishing a centre for research, education and ecotourism. And not only that. The RBG also serves as a demonstration site for sustainable development and works closely with the local community to improve lives.

The RBG was founded in 2005 by Princess Basma bint Ali, an advocate of biodiversity conservation whose passion for Jordan's native plants prompted her to take action. From an early age, while exploring Jordan's countryside with her father and visiting great gardens like Kew, Princess Basma was already formulating plans for Jordan's first botanical garden.

The Garden is located on 180 hectares of hillsides overlooking Jordan's largest dam, some 25 km north of the capital, Amman. With more than 300 m of elevation change and a variety of soil types and microclimates within the site, the RBG is able to host a high percentage of Jordan's wild native plants.

Five major Jordanian habitats are being re-created in the Garden, namely the deciduous oak forest, pine forest, juniper forest, Jordan Valley and freshwater habitats.

During its establishment phase, the RBG has been concentrating on establishing strong scientific foundations and rehabilitating the land. Initially, there was major opposition from local herders who used to use the site for grazing. Sheep and goats had ravaged the land (as they do everywhere in Jordan) and had to be fenced out.

Rather than work against the pastoral community, the RBG set up a [community-based rangeland rehabilitation](#) programme to assist herders with supplemental feed, veterinary services, improved flock management and health, and managed grazing regimes. As a result, the local herding families have turned into staunch protectors and supporters of the Garden.

As a non-governmental, non-profit organization, the RBG works closely with the Jordanian government and is playing a key role in the Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan prepared by Jordan's Ministry of Environment. The RBG is also establishing the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species for Jordan.

Early in 2012, the RBG initiated an FP7-funded programme known as the BOT-ERA project, to reinforce cooperation between the RBG and the European Research Area (ERA). Specifically, BOT-ERA is enabling close cooperation between the RBG and the Royal Botanic Gardens, Kew, the University of Birmingham, and Innoveo Consulting of Luxembourg to improve the scientific expertise and promote excellence in plant conservation and botanical research.

Major funders of the RBG include the government of Jordan, government of France, Agence française de développement, and Fond français pour l'environnement mondial.

To date, the RBG has set up a native plant nursery, national herbarium, [virtual herbarium](#), seed bank, and research programmes that focus on mushrooms, medicinal plants, natural

materials, and biological indicators of water pollution. A community income-generating program is also under way, training women from the nearby village of Tell Ar-Rumman to develop nature-related handicrafts.

The RBG's sustainable living component will showcase local natural materials and ecological alternatives, such as buildings made entirely out of earth, and a ceramic workshop.

When the RBG initially opens to the public, visitors will be able to enjoy certain areas of the Garden, while additional landscaping and facilities are being developed throughout the rest of the site.

Phase I will include beds of native Jordanian plants, interpretive signage, a visitors' orientation center and gift shop, earthbag buildings, bee exhibits, snack facilities, Bedouin tents and great views.

For further information, visit www.royalbotanicgarden.org.