



STRATEGIC PLAN  
2023 – 2028

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Finally, it is totally appropriate for this Board to recognize itself in forwarding these efforts to pass down to future Boards a blueprint for action regarding the wild plants of New York State.

## INTRODUCTION

The New York Flora Association (NYFA) is a non-profit organization dedicated to the study and appreciation of New York State's flora as well as the conservation of NYS's native flora. It was founded in 1988 and consists of botanists, ecologists, educators, and enthusiasts who share a common interest in understanding the state's plant life and preserving the native species. NYFA faces several internal and external challenges to be able to attain its mission. Some of these challenges can be met quickly and directly by Board actions; other challenges will require methodical and indirect work. As an all-volunteer organization with much work to do, we decided we needed a strategic plan to help us define who we are, who we want to be, and how we will get there.

As we began the planning process, we identified and prioritized the threats that impact how NYFA does its work. First, we are concerned that native plants are threatened by human activities including invasive species, deer herbivory, land use change, and climate change. Second, we have noticed that people don't prioritize plants in conservation, so native plant conservation isn't funded and planned for during these efforts. And that may be due in part to the third threat, which is the lack of botanical programs at all levels of education.

A botanically-interested constituency is needed to support NYFA's mission. Developing a base of public support can be difficult due to the lack of general scientific knowledge by the general public and the lack of botanical education. Other topics perceived by the public to be of more immediate impact on their lives receive more attention and funding. Recently, invasive species and climate change have gotten traction with certain groups of New Yorkers, but plants generally receive much less conservation attention.

There are some positive signs too. We have noticed a growing public interest in plant identification through apps like PictureThis, LeafSnap, Seek, and iNaturalist, as well as NY plant-focused social media. We also know that many folks are interested in plants in NY, with more than 10,000 NY Flora Atlas users each quarter and nearly 3,000 combined followers of NYFA and NY's seven regional botanical groups. Interest in native plant gardening is growing. To grow our constituency we need to meet plant-lovers where they are, providing programming of interest and cultivating appreciation of native and naturalized plants.

Although our intentions are good, and there is a large community of botanically-minded citizens and groups within the State, we know we can communicate more with most of them. **If** we can effectively engage with the diverse group of people from all of the state who appreciate wild plants and are interested in the conservation of the native species, there is the potential for considerable energy to be unleashed and coordinated into a unified voice advocating for the State's native flora. By doing so, we hope New Yorkers from all walks of life appreciate our wild flora and work to protect native plants as an essential part of diverse and healthy natural areas.

## ABOUT NYFA

NYFA focuses on the wild plants found throughout New York State. This includes species that are native to New York as well as those introduced to the state from other regions or parts of the globe, but which grow outside of cultivation in the state. NYFA distinguishes the flora of New York in the following ways:

1. **Wild Plants:** Wild plants in NYS are the plants that grow in the state that are not under cultivation. This includes native and nonnative species. NYFA recognizes that all plants that occur in NYS, regardless of their origin, are a fascinating and interesting part of the natural world and play a role in ecology.
2. **Native Plants:** New York's native plants are those plants that currently occur in New York not as a result of human assistance. Included here are plants that occurred in New York but were subsequently extirpated as the result of human activities. NYFA places special emphasis on native plants due to their importance in the conservation of biological diversity and their ecological significance,

3. **Naturalized Plants:** Naturalized plants are nonnative species that have established self-sustaining populations in the wild. While some of these nonnative plants threaten New York's native species and we have no interest in protecting them in the state, they, nonetheless, are a fascinating and interesting part of the natural world.

NYFA is interested in the conservation of NY's native flora and native ecosystems. At times this will result in managing and controlling nonnative species. Still, NYFA aims to help illuminate the beauty and foster the appreciation of all wild plants that occur in the state. Therefore, we encourage the stance that people should enjoy and be fascinated by all of the wild flora, including the nonnative species, even as we encourage the management and control (i.e., removal) of nonnative species when needed.

NYFA engages our community through four primary activities: our newsletter (*Mitchelliana*), field trips and workshops, the NY Flora Atlas, and botanical research awards. Every year NYFA publishes four issues of *Mitchelliana*. This newsletter covers a wide range of botanical topics, including updates to plant distributions and new state plant records, botanical research, natural history observations, identification of difficult plant taxa, taxonomy, ecology, announcements of botanical and conservation activities in NY, and field trip reports.

Field trips are a highlight of the NYFA community. Field trips provide the community with opportunities to learn about plants, explore unique plant communities around the state, develop and foster relationships with fellow plant lovers, and add to the rich knowledge of where plants persist across the state. NYFA's field trips are open to all and do not require prior knowledge of plants to attend. Though in the early years of NYFA the field trips focused on engaging professional botanists, in recent years, NYFA has aimed to engage all individuals who are curious about plants by launching its "Learn 10" series designed for those with little or no botanical expertise. All of NYFA's field trips are open to the public and we have expanded the number and locations of field trips each year.

The New York Flora Atlas is a comprehensive online database documenting the distribution, habitat, status and ecological characteristics of the state's plants, as well as keeping the taxonomy of the plants of the State up-to-date. This Atlas, which is maintained by the NYFA, provides researchers, land managers, and the general public with access to information about New York's flora. The Atlas is used by individuals throughout the U.S. and around the world.

NYFA currently has two kinds of botanical awards. The NYFA Research Grant award is designed to promote student botanical research in the state of New York. The research grant program started in 2004, and since 2013 NYFA has awarded \$13,700 to twenty five students who conduct research relating to the flora of New York. The New York Native Plant Conservationist of the Year Award honors a person who has made significant contributions towards the conservation of the native flora of New York.

NYFA is managed by a Board of Directors that currently includes 16, botanists, plant enthusiasts, and educators from across the state. In 2023, our directors collectively have over 300 years of experience managing, protecting, and advocating for the conservation of wild plants. Bolstered by their enthusiasm for New York's flora and the vision of NYFA, each director volunteers their time to the organization, and this structure often limits what NYFA can do. This includes the ability to learn about and grow the organization's membership, which may in turn be able to help NYFA take additional steps to implement its vision.

In the coming years, we aim to continue to be a leading resource for the protection of native plants and the conservation of natural ecosystems. We also aim to foster an appreciation and fascination of all wild plants including nonnatives. We hope that our activities bring together professionals and enthusiasts alike, to nurture a sense of connection and shared purpose that transcends barriers of expertise and background. We help people **see plants**.

## REGIONAL BOTANICAL SOCIETIES IN NEW YORK STATE

Although the New York Flora Association is the only botanical group that aims to serve all of New York State, there are seven active regional botanical societies throughout the state. Combined, the groups have more than 2000 members. Because we have similar missions, we talked to leaders of the seven regional botanical societies as part of our strategic planning process to gauge their awareness of NYFA, and to consider how NYFA might collaborate with these groups on mutual interests in plant appreciation and native plant conservation.

The seven regional botanical societies serve most areas of the state (see below/appendix). Four of the seven are incorporated as independent 501(c)(3) non-profits; they collect dues and have a web presence. Three are informal; the largest regional group is an informal group in the Capital Region.

Through our conversations, we learned that awareness of NYFA among the regional groups is high, but that it is perceived as a group for “experts.” Most of the regional botanical groups would welcome increased interaction with NYFA through shared events and greater communication.

As a result of this process, NYFA intends to communicate with regional botanical societies on a regular basis and will initially focus on increasing collaboration with the regional botanical societies on field trips and workshops as well as cross-listing calendars. As we develop capacity, we plan to facilitate communication among the regional groups and alert them to issues confronting the flora of NYS for which united action is needed. NYFA will also explore the possibility of sponsoring chapters in regions of the state that currently do not have botanical societies.

### [Adirondack Botanical Society](#) (ABS)

- Founded in 2011
- Serves Adirondack Mountains, North Country and the ecoregions.
- 63 members on Google Group
- Informal/not incorporated

Montgomery Cos and Oneida, Fulton, and Herkimer outside of the blue line

- 50 people on email list
- Informal/not incorporated

### [Capital Region Native Plant Society](#) (CRNPS)

- Founded in 2011
- Focuses on the Albany, Troy, Schenectady, and Saratoga area.
- 1600 followers on meetup.com (1/2 are active)
- Informal/not incorporated

### [Long Island Botanical Society](#) (LIBS)

- Founded in 1989
- Serves Long Island including Brooklyn, Queens, and neighboring islands
- about 180 members
- Incorporated as a 501(c)(3)

### [Finger Lakes Native Plant Society](#) (FLNPS)

- Founded in 1997
- Focus is on Finger Lakes area, and includes Syracuse
- 100 members, 190 on the mailing list
- Incorporated as a 501 (c)(3)

### [Niagara Frontier Botanical Society](#) (NFBS)

- Founded in 1983
- Serves eight western NY counties and the Niagara Region of Ontario, Canada
- 70 members, 75 people and institutions on the mailing list
- Incorporated as a 501(c)(3)

### [Leatherstocking Botanical Society](#) (LBS)

- Founded in 2015
- Includes Chenango, Otsego, Broome, Delaware, Madison, Schoharie, and

### [Torrey Botanical Society](#) (TBS)

- Founded in 1871
- Serves metro NYC and northern NJ with its programming.
- 260 members (reduced with pandemic)
- Incorporated as a 501(c)(3)

## CORE PLAN

### VISION

A vision describes our aspirations for the future. It expresses what we want to happen differently in the world because of our work. Our vision is the future we hope for.

The New York Flora Association envisions a future where...

- Native plants thrive within diverse ecosystems throughout New York, in cities, suburbs, and rural areas.
- New Yorkers from all walks of life appreciate the wild flora and work to protect the native species, which are an essential part of biodiversity and healthy natural areas.

We believe that by fostering a deeper understanding of the native and nonnative plants around us, we build stronger connections to the natural world, and inspire people from all walks of life to conserve the native flora and ecosystems that support our collective well-being.

### MISSION

A mission is what we do to make the vision a reality.

To help people enjoy and learn about the wild plants of NYS and promote the conservation of native species.

### TAGLINE

A tagline is a short, memorable phrase that succinctly captures an organization's mission and purpose.

Helping people **see** plants.

### GOALS, STRATEGIES, AND DECISION-MAKING

There are five goals that outline the major program areas that will help NYFA move toward its vision. Each goal has strategies and planned actions that will implement the goals.

Goal 1: Build a larger and diverse community of people who are curious about plants

Goal 2: Provide educational experiences for people to engage with New York's wild plants

Goal 3: Continue to be a resource for high quality scientific information about NY's flora

Goal 4: Promote the conservation of NY's native plants and ecosystems

Goal 5: Ensure NYFA is a sustainable organization that has enough resources to implement the goals

Because we cannot anticipate every action, our work isn't necessarily limited to what is written in the plan. NYFA's strategic plan is a living document that the board will use throughout the year, including an annual review to address progress and adapt as needed. Though there is some detail in the activities and measures, the plan is not intended to be a to-do list, rather it is a framework for decision-making; an annual work plan will be developed by the board to achieve the strategic goals. The Strategic Plan workplan is a shared google spreadsheet.

Prioritizing activities can be difficult when there are so many things the NY Flora Association can do that will make a positive difference. To do so, we will consider not only whether an activity is a good thing to do, or whether we can do it, but also if it will move us toward our vision better than other options or can assist the organization in growing its team. The board can use the following strategic questions to prioritize activities when decisions need to be made about which programs to implement or opportunities to pursue.

1. How will it move us towards our vision, implement our mission, and achieve our short-term and/or longer-term goals?
2. Is this the right opportunity for the New York Flora Association or might it be a better fit for one of our partners?
3. If we take this opportunity, is there anything we will not be able to do given current capacity? Or, will we be able to expand our capacity to take on this project/activity?
4. What are the ramifications of not doing the project/activity?
5. What will success look like for this opportunity? How will we know that the results will make progress toward our goals and vision?

Answering these questions can help the plan be a useful navigational chart that helps guide our direction, rather than dictating it.



**GOAL 1: BUILD A LARGER AND DIVERSE COMMUNITY OF PEOPLE WHO ARE CURIOUS ABOUT WILD PLANTS**

We are creating a community where the curiosity about wild plants is the common thread that binds us together. We seek to involve people from all backgrounds and include anyone who wants to learn more about the wild plants around them, along with plant enthusiasts and professionals who study or use plants in their work. We know that many more people are interested in our work than our membership would indicate, and we know that is in part because we are perceived as a group for experts. Further, our communications with members have not been wide-ranging, consistent, or persistent. In the coming years, we commit to regularly communicate and engage with the diverse communities who are interested in New York’s wild flora.

We will grow community using the following strategies:

Strategies	Representative Actions
Regularly communicating with people who are interested in our work in addition to current members	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Build a larger mailing list starting with current and former members, field trip participants, and Atlas users.</li> <li>● Share news about New York’s wild plants, and NYFA activities and resources more often via email and social media</li> </ul>
Tapping into people’s broad interest in wild plants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Draw from the survey and interview results to develop messaging and programming that taps into people’s diverse interest in wild plants</li> <li>● Hold more online workshops that cover a range of relevant plant topics</li> <li>● Increase NYFA’s presence at a variety of events to reach new plant-loving audiences</li> <li>● Creating and sharing brief videos on plant topics of interest to people who are curious about wild plants</li> <li>● Partnering with NY’s regional botanical groups to identify topics and coordinate communications</li> <li>● Increase communications with gardening club groups and offer presentations to their membership.</li> <li>● Develop a document explaining native plant material and reliable sources for acquiring native plant stock.</li> </ul>
Ensuring NYFA is welcoming to plant lovers of all experiences and backgrounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion training and/or consultant to support the board</li> <li>● Include board members and volunteers with different skills and experience</li> <li>● Partner with affinity groups like Outdoor Afro, Latino Outdoors, the Outdoor Rx Coalition, or Disabled Hikers to create more inclusive/welcoming experiences at NYFA’s online and in-person events.</li> </ul>

We will know we are successful if:

- We regularly share information with people on our mailing list.
- New people participate in NYFA events and become members.
- Online workshop registrations increase over time.

**GOAL 2: PROVIDE HANDS-ON EXPERIENCES FOR PEOPLE TO ENGAGE WITH NEW YORK’S WILD PLANTS**

We want people to do more than know about wild plants, we hope all people enjoy them and interact with them regularly. NYFA does this by hosting field trips and workshops all over the state. In 2023, we hosted 13 workshops and more than 23 field trips in 27 counties in the state. We will partner with other groups to reach all parts of New York and include plant topics of interest.

We will provide hands-on experiences for more people by using the following strategies:

Strategies	Representative Actions
Hosting and co-sponsoring more field trips in more places and in leaf-off season.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Working with every regional botanical society in NY</li> <li>● Partnering with botanical-adjacent groups like land trusts, Audubon, and the Xerces Society</li> <li>● Offering winter plant identification field trips.</li> </ul>
Hosting in-person workshops	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Include topics like genetics, horticulture, and plant identification focusing on wetland delineation.</li> </ul>
Coordinating field trip and workshop calendars with NY’s regional botanical groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Determine the geographic distribution and topical gaps in field trips and workshops</li> <li>● Create an efficient mechanism to include all workshops and field trips on NYFA’s website</li> </ul>

We will know we are successful if:

- More people participate in field trips and workshops (especially new people).
- We coordinate on field trips and workshops with NY’s regional botanical groups.
- The number of field trips that NYFA co-sponsors with other organizations increases over time.

**GOAL 3: CONTINUE TO BE A RESOURCE FOR HIGH QUALITY SCIENTIFIC INFORMATION ABOUT NY'S FLORA**

NYFA started as an organization for academic botanists. Over thirty years later, we aspire to be an expert-level resource that is accessible to all who love wild plants. The NY Flora Atlas is a unique, highly used science-based resource that is in the process of continuous review and update to provide all with up-to-date taxonomic, ecologic and distribution information about NY's wild plants. We currently support student botanical research through small grants. We share plant distribution, research, and identification information through our newsletter, and moving forward, we seek to find more ways to support plant research and researchers.

NYFA will provide high-quality information about plants using the following strategies:

Strategies	Representative Actions
Maintaining and improving the Atlas as New York's foremost resource on the state's wild flora	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Work with regional botanical groups on Atlas needs</li> <li>● Develop a video on how to use the Atlas</li> <li>● Support efforts to digitize herbarium records, improve distribution information, and incorporate them into the Atlas.</li> </ul>
Supporting botanical research through small grants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Continue the student grants</li> <li>● Consider grants for other botanical research as resources allow</li> <li>● Evaluate the effectiveness of the grant program</li> </ul>
Sharing information about plant distribution, taxonomy, and identification via the Newsletter	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Coordinate with regional botanical societies on content</li> </ul>
Support efforts to document and disseminate information about NY's Flora	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Could include funding for NY Flora Manual</li> <li>● Might include NYFA Symposium, and State of the Plants</li> </ul>

We will know we are successful if:

- Atlas use remains high
- More people apply for research grants
- We regularly evaluate the effectiveness of the atlas and research grants

**GOAL 4: PROMOTE THE CONSERVATION OF NY'S NATIVE PLANTS AND ECOSYSTEMS**

NYFA is deeply interested in conserving rare native plants and native plant communities as part of healthy ecosystems and communities with high quality plant diversity, soil health, and insect populations. To date, we have focused on honoring native plant conservationists annually. NYFA also occasionally advocates for the state to take action on plant-related issues. Although NYFA has limited capacity to actively participate in conservation, we want to have a greater role in conservation education. We hope to become a resource to individuals and organizations who manage land and have the opportunity to conserve plants and ecosystems.

NYFA will promote plant and ecosystem conservation by:

Strategies	Representative Actions
Raising awareness of native plant and ecosystem conservation issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Develop positions or policies around conservation issues related to plants and ecosystems</li> <li>● Actively supporting policies and programs that advance NYFA's goals</li> <li>● Ask the state legislature and agencies to take actions that support native plants and ecosystems</li> <li>● Partner with NY's regional botanical societies on conservation issues</li> <li>● Sharing information about plant and ecosystem conservation with NYFA's community</li> </ul>
Recognizing NY's botanical leaders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Native Plant Conservation Award</li> </ul>
Serving as a resource to other conservation groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● How to conserve native plants and promote ecosystem integrity</li> <li>● Highlighting plants and ecosystems on protected lands (e.g., signage, checklist)</li> </ul>

We will know we are successful if:

- We have positions and policies on native plant conservation issues
- We engage our community in conservation issues
- Groups seek guidance from NYFA about native plant conservation issues
- More people are nominated for the Native Plant Conservation Award

**GOAL 5: ENSURE NYFA IS A SUSTAINABLE ORGANIZATION THAT HAS ENOUGH RESOURCES TO IMPLEMENT THE GOALS**

Fulfilling our mission and vision requires individuals dedicating time to accomplishing identified tasks. The volunteer Board of Directors has given selflessly of their time but are stretched thin. Paid administrative and field staff is the logical next step for the organization, but, although solvent, NYFA does not have consistent and sufficient resources to hire staff yet. We commit to developing long-term strategies for the organization’s growth and stability, including diversifying our membership and board, fundraising, and building partnerships for financial and resource support.

NYFA will promote organizational resilience with the following strategies:

Strategies	Representative Actions
Increasing revenue through increased membership and Atlas sponsorship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Reciprocal memberships with regional botanical societies</li> <li>● Clarify membership benefits</li> <li>● Renewal reminders</li> <li>● Increase promotion of the Atlas sponsorship program.</li> </ul>
Diversify funding by seeking gifts, bequests, and grants for projects and operations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Consider actively soliciting planned giving (e.g., <a href="https://nonprofits.freewill.com/">https://nonprofits.freewill.com/</a>)</li> </ul>
Recruiting more volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Including non-board members on committees of the corporation</li> <li>● “Microvolunteers” for specific tasks</li> <li>● Specific needs: Web developer, fundraising, communication, marketing, landscape architecture, grants administration, online event organizer (to run/host webinars)</li> <li>● Tap into the 172 people who offered their organizational, botanical, education, or database skills to support NYFA’s mission</li> </ul>
Strengthening NYFA’s board	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Potential new board roles: regional botanical society liaison, volunteer coordinator, corresponding secretary, board historian, board librarian</li> <li>● Regularly evaluate programs and strategic plan</li> <li>● Build organizational information systems and institutional memory</li> <li>● Add board members with more diverse backgrounds.</li> </ul>

We will know we are successful if:

- We have 700 members by 2028
- Our annual income is 50% more than current income
- We have enough volunteers
- Our board isn’t overwhelmed and regularly evaluates our work

## STAYING CONNECTED WITH THE PLAN AND REPORTING ON PROGRESS

A plan is only useful if it is used. The most effective way to keep the plan relevant over time is to integrate it into our regular operations. Therefore, we will:

- Use the goals as a framework for communicating within the organization, with our members and the community
  - At board meetings, activities reported by committees or board members could be organized by goal. That is, monthly reports would be organized by outreach activities, in-person engagement, scientific work, conservation, and organizational sustainability activities.
  - Use the strategic plan goals as a framework to report our outcomes to our community each year by asking the following questions:
    - What did we do to **grow our community?**
    - What did we do to **provide opportunities to interact with plants?**
    - What did we do to **share high quality information about plants?**
    - What did we do to **promote plant and ecosystem conservation?**
    - What did we do to **sustain the New York Flora Association?**
- Agree to accomplish specific items in the Plan during each calendar year.
- Use board meetings for periodic strategic plan updates. One idea is to assign a board member to report progress on one goal every three months.
- The board can review and update the strategies and measures each year in an annual work plan.

## APPENDIX A. BRIEF HISTORY OF THE NEW YORK FLORA ASSOCIATION

The idea for the New York Flora Association started in the late 1980s, when New York State Botanist Dr. Richard “Dick” Mitchell and The Nature Conservancy Stewardship Director Dr. Robert “Bob” Zaremba joined forces to promote the study of New York State’s Flora.

In 1988, an exploratory meeting at the NYS Museum was attended by more than 150 people and covered two main issues: the continuation of the New York State Museum’s Flora Project and organization of a group where professional botanists could work together to study and promote our wild flora.

In 1989, Drs. Mitchell and Zaremba founded the New York Flora Association as a not-for-profit subunit of the New York State Museum Institute, and both stayed involved until 2002, when they moved out of state. The initial goals and primary activities of the organization were outlined in the [first NYFA newsletter](#) as follows:

- to promote the study of New York State's native and naturalized plant life;
- to encourage the production of botanical publications that are educational to the public and beneficial to the scientific community;
- to provide an umbrella organization for field and herbarium botanists that can represent their points of view;
- to serve as an information exchange for botany clubs and botanists active in New York State, and to foster the pursuit of common interests;
- to gather information and voucher specimens leading to a complete atlas of New York state plant distributions;
- to develop "ecological profiles" of our native and introduced plant species to aid in our understanding of their distributions and interactions; and,
- to promote conservation and wise management of native plant resources and natural communities.

The first meeting of the New York Flora Association was held at the NY State Museum in September 1990, when 12 people were nominated for a new advisory council. The council first met in September 1991 and approved several guidelines for the organization, but not bylaws. Advisory council meetings were sporadic until formal board meetings started in August 2004.

Field trips for botanizing and socializing have always been part of NYFA’s work. The first field trip sponsored by NYFA was on September 30, 1989, when 13 botanists met at the Sam's Point region in the Shawangunks. Bob Zaremba served as coordinator of the field trips until he moved to Massachusetts in 2002.

Beginning in 1998 and continuing through 2008, there were informal membership meetings that coincided with the New York and Northeast Natural History Conferences in Albany. New bylaws were approved by the board in 2008 and one year later, as outlined in the new bylaws, the first annual members meeting took place. A group of eight members gathered that year at Joe McMullen’s camp in Chenango County for a members meeting, board elections, and a field trip. The meetings and accompanying field trips have continued each year since then with ever-growing numbers of participants.

In the fall of 2012, NYFA became a non-profit organization independent of the New York State Museum and financial responsibilities were transferred from the museum to NYFA. Since then, NYFA has continued to offer its annual programs of field trips and workshops, and provide botanical information through the Atlas, our website, social media, and the newsletter, now called *Mitchelliana* in honor of Dick Mitchell’s contributions to the organization.

## GETTING THE WORD OUT: THE NEWSLETTER

The NYFA newsletter was one of the first projects of the new association. It is our primary means of communicating with members and has recorded the history of what we have done as an organization over the last 30 years, and has published interesting and valuable work regarding the flora of New York. It features many articles on plants and natural history, documents field trips and their findings, features the botanists making important contributions to our flora, and much more.

Bob Zaremba and Dick Mitchell served as co-editors when the first issue was published in early 1990 until Dick became the sole editor in 1996. Dick always ensured there was something interesting to read, wrote many articles, and shared his strong opinions. One of his signature aspects of the newsletter for the first two years was a cartoon he produced on his computer and included at the end of each issue. In his 13 years as editor, Dick authored at least 50 articles, editorials, and reviews; many times stirring the pot to create interest and feedback.

After Dick retired and Bob moved to New England in 2002, they handed the newsletter over to NY Natural Heritage Program Botanist Steve Young and his wife Laura Lehtonen. Through the years, other board members also stepped in to help edit the newsletter including Gerry Moore of the Brooklyn Botanic Garden, Priscilla Titus of Fredonia, Connie Tedesco of SUNY Oneonta, and Aissa Feldman of the NY Natural Heritage Program. Beginning with the Summer 2013 newsletter (Vol. 24(3) Summer 2013) Anne Johnson from Madrid, NY began her tenure as editor and has been our editor ever since, producing great reading issue after issue.

In 2001, NYFA launched its website, [www.nyflora.org](http://www.nyflora.org), designed by Troy Weldy and Bob Ingalls. The website was updated in 2009 and again in 2018.

## HISTORY OF THE NY FLORA ATLAS

Homer H. House, who became the second state botanist in 1915, started a “card index system” for all the vascular plants of New York at the New York State Museum in Albany. The card files include information on the distribution of plants in the State and were used to create the Preliminary Vouchered Atlas of New York State Flora in 1990. The Preliminary Atlas was digitized and the county distribution data were converted into a spreadsheet format by John Kartesz. Some additional specimen data were gathered from herbaria.

In 2001, information was gathered by Troy Weldy, David Werier and others from herbaria across the state, along with Dick Mitchell’s original paper atlas of 1990, to create an online plant atlas for New York that was announced at the Northeast Natural History Conference in April 2002. In 2002, a static online atlas was created, which included the data from the Preliminary Atlas, as well as these new records. The data were eventually migrated to the present atlas in 2003.

In 2004, funding for the current dynamic atlas (i.e. when new records are added they are reflected in the distribution maps) was obtained from the New York State Biodiversity Research Institute with matching funds contributed by the New York Flora Association. The current atlas has been enhanced by using Werier's Catalogue of the Vascular Plants of New York State to create a scientifically based accounting of what species occur in the state and update the taxonomy and nomenclature of the species on the list. Additional species are continually added as they are found to occur in the state, as well as new information on each taxon and new distribution records. The Atlas uses an application developed by the USF Water Institute, University of South Florida.



## APPENDIX B. SUMMARY OF PLANNING PROCESS

The NYFA board and its strategic planning committee worked with Karen Strong of Strong Outcomes, LLC to create a new strategic plan to guide the work of NYFA. The consultant led the board and committee through a process shown below.



### PLAN TO PLAN

The first step was to define the purposes of the plan, which informed the plan's structure and overall content. In Winter 2022, the board reported

- We've had a number of false starts with strategic planning.
- Not having a plan has been an obstacle for moving forward on our ideas in an informed way.
- We never established any priorities; we do things as they come up. If we had priorities, and we knew what was the most important, we could put more resources into that. We want to decide who we want to be and where we can go.
- Could we become more like the New England Wild Plant Trust? How could we get to the place where we can hire people?
- As a state-wide organization, the board and members are spread out geographically and philosophically. A plan is a way to bring our diverse interests and possibilities together.

### LEARN AND VALIDATE

The next phase of the process focused on information collection, hearing from members and atlas users through a survey, learning about the experience of other botanical societies through interviews, and listening to the experience and needs of New York's regional botanical societies through interviews. Results from learning and validation are shared in Process the Data.

#### SURVEY

The survey launched on 10/15/22 and closed on 11/21/22. It was shared with members through NYFA's email list, newsletter, and social media pages, popups on NY Flora Association website and the NY Flora Atlas website, as well as through social media, the NY botanical society interviewees, and invites from NYFA board members. The survey was completed by 526 people, an outstanding response that is larger than the membership. 93% of respondents were from New York, including 57 of NY's 62 counties. Tompkins County had the most respondents (34), followed by Monroe (31), and Suffolk (21). There were 26 out-of-state responses.

The survey was an opportunity to learn who is connected with NYFA and why, and what they think about plant issues of concern, what plant information or resources respondents might need, what they think about NYFA's tools and programs.

## INTERVIEWS

To learn from other statewide, out-of-state botanical societies, Consultant Karen Strong spoke with board members from the Florida Native Plant Society, the New Jersey Native Plant Society, and the Virginia Native Plant Society. They shared what they've done to be successful, how chapters work, and how they recruited and sustained staff and volunteers.

NYFA Board members talked with leaders from the seven regional botanical groups in NY about how they value NYFA, its tools and resources as well as potential opportunities for collaboration.

## PROCESS THE DATA

Overall, NYFA heard from 536 people from all over New York, highlights from which are summarized below. Additional detail can be found in the NYFA Strategic Plan stakeholder summary report.

<b>Survey of 526 NYFA Members and Lurkers</b>
What we learned: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The interest is there to grow your membership</li><li>• NYFA's resources are used by experts and hobbyists</li><li>• There is a need for a respected voice on plant issues in New York</li><li>• The Atlas is central to your relationship with members and others</li><li>• People want to help!</li></ul>
<b>Interviews with Board Members of Botanical Societies in FL, NJ, and VA</b>
What we learned: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Lots of ideas to learn from and build on</li><li>• All have much larger memberships</li><li>• All have chapters</li><li>• All find native plant gardening inclusive</li><li>• How to lead on plant conservation and advocacy</li><li>• Branding and fundraising ideas</li></ul>
<b>Interviews with a Leader from the Seven Regional Botanical Societies in NY</b>
What we learned: <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• All want more communication</li><li>• Some are interested in more cooperation</li><li>• Perception that NYFA is for experts, and the local groups are for hobbyists</li><li>• They highly value the Atlas</li></ul>

## DEVELOP THE PLAN

To develop the plan, the full board gathered for a full-day, in-person retreat at the Arkell Museum in Canajoharie, NY. During the retreat, we generated many ideas as we discussed the following questions:

- **What is the impact we want to have?** And what does the future look like as a result of NYFA's impact? What is new, different, better? Who (or what) benefits most from the vision becoming reality?
- **How can NYFA tap into the diverse needs and interests of people who like plants?** What is the role of native plant gardening in meeting people where they are? What might it look like to embrace native plant gardening without becoming a "garden club"? What botanical-adjacent organizations might NYFA build more relationships with to grow your impact?

- **What could be the role of regional botanical societies and future chapters in serving this large and diverse state?** How can we improve communication and coordination with local botanical societies? Should NYFA build the capacity to create and support local chapters?
- **What could be NYFA's role in conservation and/or advocacy?** Do you want NYFA to be a group that promotes plant conservation at the state level? How can NYFA help others understand NY's plant conservation issues? How could you support others in advocating at the state and local levels? What would that look like?
- **What is the future of the NY Flora Atlas?** How can NYFA leverage the Atlas to grow NYFA's membership? How could we invest in the Atlas to better serve the community? What's possible in the short, medium, and long term?
- **How can NYFA communicate with members more effectively?** Do you have the board capacity for more regular communication via email? How do you hear from them or get regular feedback?
- **What could NYFA do to be more welcoming to Black, Asian, Native, and younger plant enthusiasts?** What diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging training might board members need to do it well?
- **What is NYFA's role in botanical education?** What is the role of botanical associations in botanical education, as formal botany education is declining? What kinds of training for specific audiences might be useful?
- **What is the future of the New York Flora Association Research Grants?** Do you know if it is effective in achieving your intended objectives? What changes might be made to improve effectiveness?

The ideas generated in these retreats, along with the survey and interview results, were crafted into a vision, mission, goals, objectives, and priority actions. A draft plan was created with the strategic planning committee. Following a review from the committee, the final plan was presented to the board at the July 20, 2023 board meeting.