

Preface

The richness of tropical plant diversity is widely recognized, and the full range of this diversity is often not well appreciated. This wide diversity includes wild relatives of existing crops or landraces and also many neglected or underutilized species having potential as food sources and medicinal or ornamental uses. The rapid loss of these plant species is also very much recognized as they are under threat from a rapidly increasing population pressure and from natural and man-made disasters. The importance of germplasm conservation is being increasingly realized with expanded effort to conserve tropical plant species by a wide range of countries and international agencies.

In situ and ex situ approaches are both needed for optimal conservation. Research on utilization, characterization of the germplasm, and development of conservation techniques is being carried out in order to fully safeguard the diversity and to obtain the best storage available for the collections. Information on these approaches is scattered in journals, book chapters, and technical reports from scientists in all corners of the world, but not readily available to all interested parties. Hence, we feel that it is timely to present these various conservation efforts all in one place. To this end, we approached researchers involved in conservation of tropical plant species with diverse viewpoints and from various locations to contribute to this book.

We hope to provide a review of the methods and current status of conservation of a range of tropical plant species. Plants included in this volume are from the major crops, fruit, oil palm, coconut, and forestry species. In addition, ornamentals, with a focus on orchids, and spices and medicinal plants are represented. This book also provides information on the richness of tropical plant diversity, the need to conserve, and the potential utilization of these genetic resources. Future perspectives of conservation of tropical species are discussed. Besides being useful to researchers and graduate students in the field, we hope to create a reference for a much wider audience interested in the conservation of tropical plant diversity.

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