



## **Spectacular Blooms Turning Heads at the Botanical Garden**

### **An Agave Plant Native to French Guyana Blooms: an Extremely Rare Occurrence**

**Montréal, October 6, 2009** – Montréal's Nature Museums are inviting Montrealers to witness the very rare blooming of an agave plant, a Mauritius hemp (*Furcraea foetida*), in the Arid Regions Greenhouse at the Montréal Botanical Garden. The flowers of this approximately 25 year old plant will open in the next few days, for the first and last time. The agave will produce thousands of bulbils on the flower stalk or offsets at its base, which will allow it to reproduce vegetatively. As the plant's Latin name suggests, while these blooms may be extraordinary, not everyone will necessarily be very fond of the flowers' fragrance! Once it has finished flowering, the plant will gradually die back, as is the case for most members of this family. For the time being, the Mauritium hemp flower stalk is growing several centimetres a day, and is already nearly 9 metres tall! Part of the glass in the greenhouse roof has had to be removed for it, in fact.

#### **A very special plant family**

The Agavaceae family, native to the Americas, includes nearly 300 species with fibrous leaves arranged in a rosette. It takes these perennial plants a number of years to grow and flower, with most of them growing for eight to twenty years before the inflorescence finally develops, starting in the centre of the rosette of leaves.

#### **From Marie-Victorin to Denis Barabé ...**

Denis Barabé, a botanist at the Botanical Garden, brought this Mauritius hemp to the Botanical Garden in 1986, after collecting a plantlet in the wild, on Mount Bourda, in Cayenne, French Guyana. It was entered in the Garden's records on December 3 of that year, becoming the 2,182nd plant entered in the 1986 collection records. Mr. Barabé has worked at the Montréal Botanical Garden since 1976 and is also a researcher at the plant biology research institute (IRBV).

Since its earliest days, the Montréal Botanical Garden has had a team of botanists responsible for collecting numerous specimens both in Quebec and abroad and for adding to its collections by exchanging plants with other botanical gardens. Even today, visitors can admire a number of plants collected by Brother Marie-Victorin, the Garden's founder, and by Henry Teuscher, its designer, landscape architect and first curator.

The **exhibition greenhouses** are open daily from 9 a.m. to 9 p.m. during **The Magic of Lanterns**. While you're here, don't miss the **Under the Cuban Sun, with Marie-Victorin** exhibition and the **Tropical Food Plants** greenhouse.

*Montréal's Nature Museums – the Biodôme, Insectarium, Botanical Garden and Planetarium – helping people enjoy nature to the fullest.*

– 30 –

#### **Information:**

Karine Jalbert, Communications Co-ordinator  
Telephone: 514 872-1453  
karinejalbert@ville.montreal.qc.ca

François Ouellet, Marketing Representative  
Telephone: 514 872-3232  
fouellet\_2@ville.montreal.qc.ca

**Visual available on request.**