

## A new Museum of Botany - Escola Superior Agrária de Beja, Portugal

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**Abstract.** Authors communicate about the new Museum of Botany at Escola Superior Agrária de Beja, Instituto Politécnico de Beja (Portugal), briefly describing its collections.

**Key words:** Beja, Economic botany, Environmental education, Ethnobotany, Museum of Botany, Portugal

A new Museum of Botany has been opened at Escola Superior Agrária de Beja, Instituto Politécnico de Beja (Portugal), a polytechnic institution devoted to research and teaching. (<http://www.esab.ipbeja.pt/museu/index.htm>).

The Museum is the newest one of its kind in Portugal. It has permanent exhibitions of items from the collections of economic botany of the Department of Environmental Sciences. The economic botany collections began to be assembled in 1995 and since then they have been enriched with items donated by individuals and private enterprises, and items collected during fieldwork. The Department has given several lectures and short courses on economic botany and decided to open a museum to maintain a permanent display of exotic and local items, thus allowing visitors to increase their knowledge of the botanical world and to enhance the consciousness for the conservation of traditional plant crafts and knowledge.

The museum displays the items and organizes the collections according to modern techniques (BRIDSON & FORMAN 1998) but the philosophy inherent to its existence is directed rooted in the Museum of Economic Botany opened in the

Royal Botanic Gardens at Kew in 1847, which had economic and educational purposes (DRAYTON 2000; MCCRAVEN 1997).

Since 1998 several economic botany courses were held in Escola Superior Agrária de Beja, with an increasing number of applications, allowing the local community to interact with the museum collections and information. The museum has organized three thematic exhibitions: Vegetable Gums and Resins (1999); Aromatic and Medicinal Plants in Ancient Egypt (2000); and Botanical Treasures (2001). It also promotes ethnobotany research with undergraduate students from local schools.

The collections have circa 1500 items (2001), from raw materials to man made objects. They include very fine samples of exotic spices, plant fibers, plant dyes, gums and resins, and medicinal and aromatic plants, among many other categories.

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