



# NATIONAL TROPICAL BOTANICAL GARDEN

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### Accomplished South Florida Horticulturist to be Awarded Plant Exploration Medal Fairchild Medal to be presented on February 6

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Kalāheo, Kaua'i, Hawai'i, USA (January 22, 2015) – Long-time horticulturist and plant hunter Larry M. Schokman has been named the 2015 recipient of the David Fairchild Medal for Plant Exploration. In an announcement from its headquarters in Hawai'i, the National Tropical Botanical Garden (NTBG) recognized Schokman for his contribution to tropical plant collecting, curation, and over three decades of caring for The Kampong, the former estate and private garden of the award's namesake Dr. David Grandison Fairchild which is located in Coconut Grove, Florida.

The medal will be presented at a black-tie dinner at The Kampong on February 6. The following day Mr. Schokman will present a public lecture entitled "Plant Exploration: Following the Footsteps of Dr. David Fairchild and Dr. Catherine Sweeney." In his presentation, Mr. Schokman will discuss collecting new cultivars of tropical fruit and flowering trees, shrubs, and vines to enhance the landscape of South Florida.

Schokman was nominated for the medal by Professor Sir Ghilleen Prance, who described him as "a true plantsman." Not only is Schokman regarded nationally and internationally for his lectures and written works, Prof. Prance said, "Larry knows and loves every plant at The Kampong and has done much to promote his love of plants to other people... I can't think of a more deserving recipient of the Fairchild Medal because he is the person who has faithfully cared for many of the original plants collected by David Fairchild."

Born in the highlands of central Sri Lanka, Mr. Schokman grew up on a tea plantation where he followed in his father's footsteps and became a tea planter. He left Sri Lanka in 1972 to travel around the world and eventually settled in the Miami area after Dr. Catherine "Kay" Sweeney asked him to help her care for Fairchild's legacy. Dr. Sweeney, who had purchased The Kampong in 1963, later gifted it to the nonprofit National Tropical Botanical Garden and Mr. Schokman stayed on to serve as Director of Horticulture and later Kampong Director. During this time, he introduced additional plants collected on his travels. Mr. Schokman was named Kampong Director Emeritus after his retirement in 2007.

Mr. Schokman's passion for plants has not been limited to the Coconut Grove property. He is well-recognized for advancing tropical horticulture in South Florida to this day. He served as president of the Tropical Flowering Tree Society; on the boards of the Rare Fruit Council International, TREE-mendous Miami, and Friends of Chapman Field; on advisory committees of the City of Miami Beautification and Environment, and the University of Miami Gifford Arboretum. He is the author of *Plants of The Kampong* and has contributed to Harvard Papers in Botany and numerous other publications.

Schokman was nationally recognized in 2000 by the American Horticulture Society with its Professional Award for the Director of a Botanical Garden in the United States. He was awarded the Florida International University Medallion in 2006 and its Outstanding Alumni Award in Recognition of Environmental Professional Leadership in 2007. The Garden Club Presidents of Miami-Dade County presented him with an Award of Excellence in 1993 and Outstanding Citizen Award in 1999.

Praising Mr. Schokman, NTBG's President and CEO Chipper Wichman said, "No one has embodied the spirit and passion of David Fairchild more than Larry Schokman. For the past 30 years Larry has perpetuated the legacy of Fairchild through his dedication and care of The Kampong."

Calling Mr. Schokman's knowledge of tropical plants "encyclopedic," Mike Maunder, current Director of The Kampong said, "There's a special wisdom that comes from dedicating your life to one institution, an understanding of a garden's identity, tempo, and heritage that takes years to earn."

Upon learning of his selection to receive the Fairchild Medal, Mr. Schokman said, "It was unexpected! I am totally humbled for several reasons, not only because my name was proposed by none other than Sir Ghillean Prance, but also because I will join an amazing group of scientists and scholars who preceded me. I am also the first Floridian to receive this award."

Dr. David Fairchild, one of the greatest and most influential horticulturalists and plant collectors in the United States, devoted his life to plant exploration, searching the world for useful plants suitable for introduction into the country. As an early "Indiana Jones" type explorer, he conducted field trips throughout Malaysia, Indonesia, Sri Lanka, China, Japan, the South Pacific, the Caribbean, South America, the Middle East, and East and South Africa during the late 1800s and early 1900s. These explorations resulted in the introduction of many tropical plants of economic importance to the U.S. including sorghum, nectarines, unique species of bamboo, dates, and varieties of mangoes. In addition, as director of the Office of Foreign Seed and Plant Introduction of the U.S. Department of Agriculture during the early 20th Century, Dr. Fairchild was instrumental in the introduction of approximately 75,000 selected varieties and species of useful plants, such as Durum wheat, Japanese rices, Sudan grass, Chinese soy beans, Chinese elms, persimmons, and pistachios.

Fairchild and his wife, Marian Bell Fairchild, daughter of Alexander Graham Bell, purchased property in South Florida in 1916 and created both a home and an "introduction garden" for plant species found on his expeditions. He named the property "The Kampong," the Malay word for "village." The tropical species he collected from Southeast Asia in the 1930s and 1940s are still part of the heritage collections of The Kampong. The property is the only U.S. mainland garden owned by NTBG, which has four gardens and five preserves in Hawai'i. The organization is dedicated to conservation, research, and education relating to the world's rare and endangered tropical plants.

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