



Frédérique Guinel, Professor
Department of Biology
519-884-0710 ext. 2230 or fguinel@wlu.ca

Kevin Crowley, Director
Communications & Public Affairs, Wilfrid Laurier University
519-884-0710 ext. 3070 or kcrowley@wlu.ca

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Laurier conference to explore the hidden world of plants

WATERLOO – The Canadian Botanical Association/l'Association Botanique du Canada is holding its annual conference at Wilfrid Laurier University for the first time in its 53-year history.

The conference, which runs from **July 4 to 8** on Laurier's Waterloo campus, will bring together about 100 student and professional botanists from post-secondary and secondary schools, government, industry and area First Nations. It will feature two public lectures and an exhibition of botanical art.

The theme of this year's conference is "**The Hidden World of Plants.**" [Frédérique Guinel](#), a Laurier biology professor and chair of the conference organizing committee, says there is a lot most people don't notice or realize about plants – some even call it "plant blindness syndrome."

"Plants actually move, respond to their environments and even communicate with each other," said Guinel, who is vice-president (and a former president) of the Canadian Botanical Association. "For instance, if one plant is attacked by caterpillars, it might send out volatile chemicals that are picked up by its neighbours, which can prepare themselves by making caterpillar-fighting compounds. Students are amazed when we show them how plants respond to everything that surrounds them."

[Jan Sapp](#), a professor of biology at York University, will give a public lecture, "Evolution by Association: Symbiosis in a Neo-Darwinian World," **July 4 at 8 p.m.** Sapp will explore how plants, in the same way humans are hosts to trillions of bacteria, also have close relationships with microbes.

The second public lecture, on **July 5 at 8 p.m.**, will be by [Greg Thorn](#), an associate professor of biology at Western University. The title of his talk is "Some Fungi We Thought We Knew."

On **July 6, from 5 to 7 p.m.**, there will be an opening reception and awards ceremony for the [Botanical Artists of Canada](#) juried exhibition, "A Celebration of Canada's 150th Anniversary through Native and Indigenous Plants." The exhibition at the **Robert Langen Art Gallery**, which is located in the Wilfrid Laurier University Library, will run from **July 5 to 26**.

Other highlights of the conference include guided field trips, a botanical drawing workshop, and a discussion of the dense blazing star, a threatened native plant species used in traditional First Nations medicine.

Students will play a major role in the conference. There will be competitions for the best oral presentation and best poster, and a number of Laurier students will act as volunteers as well as participants.

In addition to sharing knowledge, the conference aims to raise the profile of Laurier as a centre for botanical research. Laurier boasts [master's](#) and [PhD programs in biology](#) and there are six faculty members who focus on plant science, which compares favourably to many larger institutions.

In addition to Guinel, Laurier faculty members on the organizing committee are [Mihai Costea](#), [Matthew Smith](#) and **Kevin Stevens**. The conference organizing committee also includes faculty members from the University of Waterloo: **Simon Chuong**, **Susan Lolle** and **Barbara Moffatt**.

For registration information and a full schedule, see <https://conferences.wlu.ca/conferences/cba-abc-2017/>. The public events are free and do not require registration.