

Dr. Rinny E. Kooi

Botanical Curator
Singelpark
Leiden, Netherlands

Dr. Rinny Kooi is currently a botanical curator at the Singelpark in Leiden. She was awarded Knighthood in the Order of Orange-Nassau for her service to society. She has worked for the University of Leiden since 1970. Her undergraduate education was in biology and she has research experience in evolution biology, ecology and insect-plant relationships. Dr. Kooi is also a published author, and some of her works are 'Trees in Leiden', 'Darwin in Leiden', and 'Japanese Cypress'.



Tell us a bit about yourself and your trajectory, how did your interest in plants and aspiration for a career in the field come about? What advice for our readers, especially younger students thinking about future careers, on path(s) you followed?

As a little girl I loved plants and animals. I studied biology and obtained my PhD in 1990 with a dissertation on insect-plant relationships. I am now 73 years old and have been retired since 2013. After my retirement, the Municipality of Leiden appointed me as the botanical curator of a park, which was volunteer work. At the University, I taught many students about biodiversity, and they know my social involvement. I have always been interested in current affairs and what is going on in the world, and participated in actions against the use of nuclear weapons.

How did you learn about Green Legacy Hiroshima and why did you feel it was important?

A Japanese student and former UNITAR intern, Shuhei Nishiyama, came to his professor at Campus the Hague for advice regarding bringing atomic bomb survivor trees to Leiden. She then contacted me about the project. Thereafter I contacted GLH for help with bringing these to the Leiden botanical garden. The seeds were sent to the botanical garden through Nassrine and Yuko.

GLH is about peace and nature — how can we use it to inspire the next generation, and generate interest in science education. How important is it in current society?

Communication is an important factor in inspiring and generating interest in science education. I'm thinking of attention via TV, radio, newspapers, social media. It is also important that administrators support it and promote these efforts.



As a biologist, how do you see botanical gardens evolving in the future — and with all the challenges of climate change and loss of biological diversity, impacting especially poor countries — what worries you, and what gives you hope?

Botanical gardens are a source of knowledge. They can help disseminate knowledge about planting and caring for species for the future. A major project is underway in Leiden to give attention to wild plants that grow in streets. They also promote extra attention for garden parks, etc. The Hortus in Leiden is part of the large public park Singelpark. From my position for this park I have a lot of contact with the Hortus.

Leiden and Japan have a long history — how do you see the seeds from Hiroshima continuing this legacy?

There is a long history between Japan and Leiden, and a great deal of cultural exchange. This can be seen from the Japanese and Von Siebold garden at the Hortus Botanicus Leiden. There is a lot of enthusiasm in Leiden for this project. The first seeds were brought to the Leiden Botanical Garden in 2017 and in 2020 a Hiroshima Ginkgo was planted in [Blekerspark](#). The director of the Japan Museum has communicated that she believes it is a wonderful project.

Your favorite trees?

I have no special preference. I always look at every tree with interest, and publish a lot about them.

What has been your experience as a woman in the field of science?

It was very difficult and challenging when I was younger, as a woman in the field. However, I do have more respect in Leiden now, so things have changed.



Shuhei Nishiyama offering the Hiroshima saplings to Leiden Botanical Garden.



Dr. Rinny Kooi presenting an atomic survivor plant sapling to the Peace Palace in Hague.