

## In Memoriam Gert Ausloos

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We mourn the tragic departure of our friend and colleague Dr Gert Ausloos, Head of Education (SEED) and member of the Management and Scientific Boards at Botanic Garden Meise who died suddenly on Sunday, March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2014 at the age of 47.

Gert Rene Jos Ausloos was born in Tienen on February 24<sup>th</sup> in 1967. He grew up in the rural village of Oplinter where he became fascinated by nature. In his final year at the O.L.V. College of Tienen, he was selected for the converted 'Jacques Kets Award' presented to young individuals demonstrating a love for nature.

Inspired, Gert continued his studies in the natural sciences and in 1985 started his degree in biology at the University of Leuven, which he achieved with Great Distinction. His thesis 'wound-induced signal transfer in *Lycopersicon*' encouraged him in the direction of plant physiology. He went on to conduct research in the lab of Prof. J.C Vendrig focusing on the function of proteinase inhibitors in the defence system and floral biology of Solanaceae, which gained him the degree of Doctor of Biology (Botany) with the Highest Distinction in 1996.

During his doctoral research he passed on his enthusiasm and love of botany to countless biology students while assisting exercises in microscopy and during excursions to the National Botanic Garden of Belgium. These wonderfully elaborated excursions and the Gert's work on the permanent scientific and educational plant museum in the Ghent Hortus Michel Thiery caught the attention of the management of the Garden, because when our Botanic Garden decided to invest more into education Gert was selected as best candidate.

He entered our Garden's service on January 20, 1997. Gert established the educational service from point zero and expanded it to a team of dedicated staff that, besides the pure education, also delivered communication, tourist reception, special events, graphic design and the volunteer service. Over 17 years Gert gave his heart to the Garden and achieved wonderful public exhibits about the lesser-known history of the rose, on botanic illustrator Albert Cleuter, orchids, ikebana, bonsai, aquarium plants and many others too numerous to mention. He was the enthusiastic leader of the renovation of the Plant Palace and always a welcome guest at international meetings of botanic gardens and the force behind guide training under the umbrella of the Belgian Network of Botanic Gardens (VBTA), which he organised on four occasions.

Gert loved to convince people that plants are dynamic organisms that play an essential role in our daily lives. The shock that reverberated through the Botanic Garden at his sudden passing will long remain, but his legacy to the world of botany and on all those he encountered will never diminish.

