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Ginkgoes are part of Smithsonian Gardens' living collection of nearly 2,000 trees.

A Long-Lived Species

The graceful ginkgo tree, with its distinctive fan-shaped leaves, lines urban streets all over the world. *Ginkgo biloba* is the sole survivor of an ancient seed-plant lineage that first appeared 200 million years ago.

By about 1,000 years ago, all *Ginkgo* species had gone extinct except for small populations in China. Monks began to cultivate the tree for medicinal use. Today, the ginkgo we know is both the last species of its kind—and perhaps humans' first conservation success.



Seed banks like this one, in Peru, preserve plant material for research.
International Potato Center, CC BY 4.0

Planning on Plants

Extinction has always been a part of life. Today, humans are increasing the rate of extinctions, as our activities warm the climate and change ecosystems.

But we can also ensure plant diversity is preserved. **Seed banks** preserve seeds in case of environmental disaster. **Gene banks** preserve plant DNA for scientific study.



Seed and gene banks aren't just "doomsday" vaults. They're more like libraries: lending out material that helps present-day researchers ensure plants have a sustainable future.

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