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CHRONICLE

## The work of the Kyiv Acclimatization Garden of Academician M.F. Kashchenko with medicinal plants

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### Abstract

A brief overview of the work at the Kyiv Acclimatization Garden (KAG) under the leadership of Academician M.F. Kashchenko is provided. In the KAG he founded, hundreds of fruit, technical, vegetable, medicinal, and ornamental plants that were not widely used at the time were tested. The work of the KAG with medicinal plants is investigated. It is shown that M.F. Kashchenko significantly expanded his work with medicinal plants in 1914, when, after the beginning of World War I, the import of medicinal plant raw materials from Germany became impossible, and, as a result, demand increased significantly. In the KAG, studies of not previously cultivated medicinal plants were conducted. Scientists from the KAG were also engaged in introducing local wild plants into culture, the collection of which did not meet demand. At the same time, selection work was carried out. Currently, the scientific work begun by Academician M.F. Kashchenko continues in the M.M. Gryshko National Botanical Garden (NBG) of the NAS of Ukraine, and work with medicinal plants is carried out in the laboratory of medical botany of the NBG.

**Keywords:** M.F. Kashchenko, Kyiv Acclimatization Garden, medicinal plants, *Rhodiola rosea*, *Podophyllum peltatum*, *Podophyllum emodi*, *Valeriana officinalis*, *Digitalis purpurea*

**Authors' contributions:** Natalia Chuvikina: conceptualization, writing – original draft. Nadiia Dzhurenko: writing – original draft.

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The scientific legacy of Mykola Feofanovych Kashchenko (Fig. 1), one of the founders of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences and one of its first 12 academicians, is exceptionally significant. At various stages of his eventful life (1855–1935), he devoted himself to embryology, zoology, acclimatization, and plant breeding. He achieved significant success in each of these fields. At the Kyiv Acclimatization Garden (KAG), which he founded, hundreds of fruit, industrial,

vegetable, medicinal, and ornamental plants rare at the time were tested.

Our current study focuses on his work with medicinal plants. This study employs a historical-chronological approach and source analysis methods. It draws on printed and manuscript materials held in the collections of the History Museum of the M.M. Gryshko National Botanical Garden of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine (NBG).

Mykola Kashchenko began working on plant acclimatization in Kyiv shortly after moving there from Tomsk, Siberia. At first, during his time in Tomsk, plant acclimatization was his hobby. “The scientific acclimatization of fruit and flowering plants became my favorite way to unwind from my zoological work,” he wrote (Gryshko, 1951).

The acclimatization garden in Kyiv (Fig. 2) was established by Mykola Kashchenko in 1913 based on the Kyiv Polytechnic Institute (now the National Technical University of Ukraine “Igor Sikorsky Kyiv Polytechnic Institute”), where he served as a professor of zoology. In 1922, when he resigned from his position as a professor at Kyiv Polytechnic Institute, he was forced to vacate his official apartment and the plot of land occupied by the garden. Most of the plants were moved to Dorogozhytska street (now Yuriy Illenko street), where Mykola Kashchenko had his own small house with a plot of land. Later, in 1925, Mykola Kashchenko recalled: “We overcame the shelling, we overcame the famine, we even overcame the destruction of our first garden in 1921. With incredible effort, and even without resources, we restored it in a new location, almost exactly as it had been before” (Kashchenko, 1925).

Kashchenko’s Acclimatization Garden (KAG) became one of the very first scientific institutions of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, established in November 1918, where he served as head of the Department of Acclimatization. It was here that he began to develop acclimatization as a distinct field of scientific research (Klymenko & Chuvikina, 2001; Chuvikina & Rubtsova, 2024).

The early 1930s marked the peak of the KAG’s prosperity. Its area expanded up to 12 ha, where ca. 500 plant species grow across five plots. Many of them were tested for the first time under the conditions of northern part of Ukraine, specifically in the KAG (Klymenko & Kustovska, 2025). Mykola Kashchenko defined the goal of the KAG as the acclimatization of plants and animals with beneficial properties.

Just one year after KAG’s foundation, Mykola Kashchenko began building a collection of bees that included up to six breeds, notably the local Ukrainian, Japanese, and Caucasian breeds, all of which were characterized by their long proboscis. By 1915, the apiary



Figure 1. Mykola Feofanovych Kashchenko, 1927.

consisted of 17 hives, but unfortunately, they were lost during the move from the grounds of the Kyiv Polytechnic Institute (Kalachevska, 1933).

Later, there was another attempt to acclimate the animals, prompting the KAG leadership in 1926 to contact the Zoological Station in Buenos Aires, Argentina, to request eggs from Darwin’s rhea, which is native to Tierra del Fuego. During this period, the country was going through difficult times, and there was a food shortage. Therefore, using the meat of such large birds would have been appropriate. However, no positive response was received, after which Mykola Kashchenko was forced to abandon the acclimatization of animals and focus more attention on plants (Kalachevska, 1933).

Mykola Kashchenko began working with medicinal plants, including fruit-bearing, ornamental, and other species, from the



**Figure 2.** Mykola Kashchenko's younger children in the acclimatization garden on the grounds of the Kyiv Polytechnic Institute in 1919. On the right is *Digitalis purpurea*, and on the left is *Rheum palmatum*. (Museum of the History of the M.M. Gryshko National Botanical Garden of Ukraine of the NAS of Ukraine).

very beginning of the KAG's establishment. However, with the outbreak of World War I in 1914, interest in medicinal plants increased. Before the war, many medicinal plants and herbal medications were imported from Germany, and these supplies were then interrupted (Kashchenko, 1915; Rubtsova et al., 2014). Mykola Kashchenko understood this problem well, as he was a doctor of medicine, so he immediately began assembling a living collection of medicinal plants, both native and introduced. During this period, work focused specifically on medicinal plants became a priority.

Particular attention was paid to medicinal plants, for which there was a shortage of raw materials not only during wartime but also in peacetime. To address these important issues, an eight-member commission, headed by Professor Mykola Kashchenko,

was established. The commission held four meetings, during which it clarified several important issues regarding the list and volumes of medicinal plant harvesting, which were to be further refined. Based on the results of the analysis, important data on medicinal plant raw materials and their volumes were presented (Kashchenko, 1915).

At first, Mykola Kashchenko considered the KAG's primary mission to be the study and acclimatization of medicinal plants that had not previously been cultivated in our region. Still, he very quickly realized that an equally important task was to introduce local wild plants into cultivation, as the harvest of these plants could not keep up with demand. Although they are commonly found in the vicinity of Kyiv, their price has risen significantly compared to the pre-war period. Such plants include *Valeriana officinalis* L.,

*Rosa canina* L., *Vaccinium myrtillus* L., and other species. Some plants were studied under various cultivation conditions (in sunny and shaded areas, and in drier or wetter areas). Detailed observations were made on the plants' growth and development. At the same time, plant specimens with the highest content of active pharmaceutical ingredients were selected and studied. The respective breeding work with these selected plants was conducted. In 1915, the KAG's collection of medicinal plants numbered 114 species (Kashchenko, 1915). The collection gradually expanded, reaching 145 species by 1916 and 160 species by 1917 (Kashchenko, 1916, 1918).

During the Civil War, he treated the residents of Kyiv with tinctures made from his own plants (Klymenko & Kustovska, 2025). Seeds from the medicinal plants in the KAG were in high demand. There were even attempts by the authorities to requisition them. For example, in 1919, Mykola Kashchenko appealed to the Joint Assembly of the Ukrainian Academy of Sciences, requesting that it issue him a certificate of protection for the seeds and raw materials of medicinal plants from the KAG against "the relevant authorities". Mykola Kashchenko wrote in his appeal, "On Wednesday, April 30 of this year, N.M. Toroptsov appeared at the office of the acclimatization garden... and, presenting a requisition certificate issued to him by the Council of People's Commissars, requisitioned a significant portion of the medicinal plant seeds I still had in my possession. Since these seeds had already been prepared for free distribution to another person (who also held a mandate), no major harm was done to the cause in this particular case. Nevertheless, the requisitioning of materials from the acclimatization garden gives cause for concern that such actions may be repeated" (IMNLU, 1919).

As of 1933, the registry book (maintained since 1915) documented and listed the plants under the study. This list comprised 3,875 taxa. Hence, over 18 years, more than 4,000 plantings were carried out and monitored. At that time, the collection of medicinal plants numbered over 300 species and served as a reliable source of medicinal raw materials (Kalachevska, 1933).

Over time, as various industrial sectors developed, the range of plants grown in the

KAG expanded significantly to include rare food crops, industrial crops, and essential oil crops. Besides this, medicinal plants formed the basis of the KAG's exhibit at the Agricultural Exhibition held in Kyiv on November 3, 1927. Since insufficient space had been allocated to the KAG at the exhibition, the display featured only the most interesting specimens in the form of whole or partial dried plants (e.g., roots, seeds, and medicinal material). Still, the list of plants on display at the exhibition was impressive (Bryantseva, 1929): *Digitalis Tourn. ex L.*, *Valeriana officinalis* L., *Ricinus communis* L. var. *praecox* Lukjanov, *Rheum palmatum* L. var. *tanguticum* Max., *Iris florentina* L. var. *alba* (Savi) DC., *Podophyllum peltatum* L., *Cannabis indica* Lam., *Matricaria recutita* L., *Aconitum napellus* L., *Ecballium elaterium* (L.) A.Rich., *Lavandula angustifolia* Mill., *Salvia officinalis* L., *Pyrethrum carneum* M.Bieb., *P. cinerariifolium* Trevir., *Mentha × piperita* L., *Althaea officinalis* L., *Hyssopus officinalis* L., *Melissa officinalis* L., *Dracocephalum moldavica* L., *Lithospermum officinale* L., *Ruta graveolens* L., *Foeniculum officinale* All., *Glaucium luteum* Crantz, *Papaver somniferum* L., *P. hybridum* L., numerous *Datura* L. species (i.e., *D. stramonium* L., *D. inermis* Juss. ex Jacq., *D. ferox* Nees, *D. quercifolia* Kunth, *D. metel* L., *D. tatula* L., and *D. aegyptiaca* Vis.), as well as a collection of medicinal plant seeds. In many cases, both wild-type and cultivated plant specimens were presented to vividly demonstrate KAG's achievements. This exhibition definitely attracted visitors' interest (Bryantseva, 1929).

Following the serious illness of Mykola Kashchenko, which occurred a year before he died in 1935, the KAG became a division of the Institute of Botany of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR. After 1945, it became part of the Department of Fruit Plant Acclimatization at the Central Republican Botanical Garden of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR (now the NBG). In 1975, the site of the KAG (5 ha at the time) was designated for construction, and the garden ceased to exist. Young plants, cuttings, and seed samples were transferred to the Central Republican Botanical Garden (Chuvikina & Rubtsova, 2024). Today, the scientific work begun by Academician M.F. Kashchenko continues at the NBG.

December 15, 2025, marked the 45th anniversary of the founding of the Department of Medicinal Plants and Phytotherapy (known as the Department of Medical Botany since 1984 and as the laboratory since 2004), which was established in accordance with Resolution No. 570 of the Presidium of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR dated December 29, 1978, “On the Development of Research on Medicinal Plants and Their Application in Medicine,” and based on the available capabilities of the Central Botanical Garden of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR (Central Botanical Garden of the Academy of Sciences of the Ukrainian SSR) (Order No. 228-K dated December 15, 1980).

The “Medicinal Plants” collection plot was established as early as the 1940s, primarily using specimens from the KAG, which at that time housed about 200 species of medicinal, aromatic, and useful plants. This gene pool, assembled by Academician M.F. Kashchenko, became the foundation for creating the collection of useful plants at the Department of Cultivated Flora of the NBG. The systematic development of the medicinal plant collection began in the 1970s through the acquisition of seed and planting material from the natural flora, primarily from Ukraine (collected during expeditions to various regions of the country). Some of the seeds were obtained through the International Seed Exchange among botanical gardens worldwide.

Since 2015, the “Medicinal Plants” collection has been designated a national heritage site (Decree of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine No. 59-r dated January 28, 2015; Decree of the Presidium of the National Academy of Sciences of Ukraine No. 73 dated February 10, 2015). Today, the collection holds exceptional educational and cultural significance (for thousands of visitors) as well as educational value (as a resource for students at medical and pharmaceutical higher education institutions).

Over time, the KAG's collection was reduced through active efforts to distribute plant material (both seeds and live plants) to numerous organizations engaged in propagating medicinal plants. At some stage, the KAG's work focused on conserving rare medicinal plants, either because their numbers were limited or because they were not listed in the Soviet Pharmacopeia. Among such plants

was *Rhodiola rosea* L., which, as of 1933, was cultivated only at the State Farm “Bitza” and the KAG.

*Rhodiola rosea* (Crassulaceae J.St.-Hil.) is a perennial herbaceous plant with a spindle-shaped, fleshy root that transitions into a woody, predominantly multi-headed rhizome (which is fragrant when dry) bearing scale-like, brownish triangular leaves. It grows in the Carpathians along the banks of mountain rivers and on rocky outcrops. For medicinal purposes, the rhizome with roots (*Rhizoma cum radicibus Rhodiolae roseae*) is applied. It is harvested from the end of the plant's flowering period until the end of the growing season. *Rhodiola rosea* preparations have adaptogenic properties: they induce a state of increased resistance in the body to adverse environmental factors (hypothermia, hyperthermia, oxygen deprivation, various types of stress, etc.). It is used in the form of an extract (a ready-made pharmaceutical preparation), and at home, a tincture or infusion is prepared (Grodzinsky, 1992). This classic nootropic agent, which stimulates the brain's integrated functions, has also been studied at the Laboratory of Medical Botany of the NBG, where it is included in the garden's collection.

This unique plant, which possesses adaptogenic properties, is one of the most effective remedies for internal bleeding, for which it was highly valued. In the late 1920s, its two-year-old rhizome was valued at 5 karbovanets (which corresponds to ca. 50 USD today). It turned out that growing this plant in cultivation was extremely difficult, as it is demanding in terms of soil, soil structure, and shading, but it can tolerate evening sunlight. There were reports that Americans used special shading structures to grow it. At that time, the KAG had only 400 specimens of *R. rosea*, which were placed in three plots under different environmental conditions to identify optimal growing conditions: along a fence that protected the plants from eastern and southern sunlight; in a ravine shaded by Amur grapevines; and under fruit trees, whose branches provided shade. In all experimental plots, the plants went through all stages of development and produced viable seeds, indicating complete acclimatization. It was established that *R. rosea* should be propagated vegetatively, specifically by dividing the bush,



**Figure 3.** Sowing and transplanting *Podophyllum* (Kalachevska, 1929).

since seed propagation is more complex (Kalachevska, 1933).

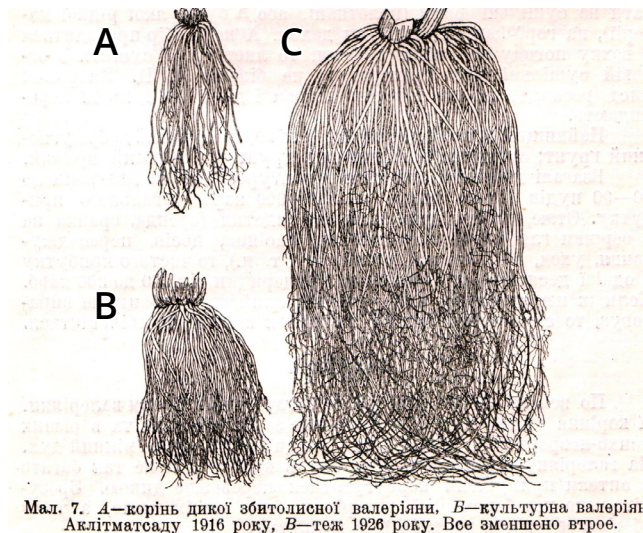
Among other rare medicinal plants cultivated at the KAG were two species of *Podophyllum* L. – *P. peltatum* L. and *P. emodi* Wall. ex Honigberger (Lukyanov, 1928; Fig. 3). Notably, both *Podophyllum* species survived for more than 10 years without care and were discovered during an inventory of the KAG in 1946. In addition, in 1946, the KAG still housed a collection of medicinal plants comprising 240 taxa (Shaitan, n.d.).

*Podophyllum* is listed in the American and European Pharmacopeias. However, at that time, *Podophyllum* species were still unknown in the Soviet Union, though there was already interest in them within the medical community. *Podophyllum emodi* is known as the sacred root of Mandrake, whose use was believed to bring enlightenment to the minds of the faithful. In contrast, *P. peltatum* produces delicious, apricot-like fruits with a pleasant pineapple scent, which is why it is considered a fruit-bearing plant. *Podophyllum* species were

also of interest as ornamental plants due to their attractive flowers and fruits. In the wild, *P. emodi* grows in the mountain forests of the western Himalayas, while *P. emodi* naturally occur in North America. *Podophyllin*, which is a mixture of resinous lignan compounds, exhibits cytostatic activity, as well as laxative and cholagogue effects, and inhibits the activity of the central nervous system.

*Valeriana officinalis* L. is widespread in Ukraine and is one of the most popular medicinal plants due to its sedative properties. It exhibits high ecological plasticity, enabling it to thrive in diverse soils and plant communities. Its largest populations are concentrated in the Chernihiv, Kyiv, Volhyn, Poltava, and other regions. In medicine, only the rhizomes with roots are used. They are dug up in the fall (after the fruits have ripened) or in early spring.

Mykola Kashchenko started his work on *Valeriana* L. as early as 1915. At that time, raw materials were obtained primarily from wild plants, so their natural reserves were rapidly



**Figure 4.** Roots of *Valeriana officinalis*. A – wild plant; B – specimen from the acclimatization garden taken in 1916; C – specimen from the acclimatization garden taken in 1926 (Lukyanov, 1928).

dwindling. In 1916, a form of wild valerian with a larger root mass and wrinkled leaves was discovered at the KAG. This form of valerian was named ‘zbytolistna’. Subsequently, by selecting forms with larger roots and better pharmaceutical qualities (Lukyanov, 1928), the KAG’s cultivar of *Valeriana* was developed. The root system of this cultivar had a dry weight of ca. 140 g (Figs. 4–5). In 1926, this valerian cultivar was presented at the All-Union Congress of Workers Engaged in the Cultivation of Medicinal Plants. The exhibited rhizomes impressed the attendees, as in natural habitats, the weight of rhizomes normally ranges from 6 to 10 g (Kalachevska, 1933).

Breeding work on valerian is currently underway. Two cultivars of valerian, ‘Kardiola’ and ‘Ukraina,’ have been developed at the Medicinal Plant Research Station of the National Academy of Agrarian Sciences of Ukraine.

Kashchenko’s research on medicinal plants is remarkable for its diversity and multifaceted nature. Among his notable achievements are the KAG’s activities related to the study of *Digitalis purpurea* L. under cultivation, research on which began in 1915. Under the direction of Mykola Kashchenko, researchers investigated not only the biological characteristics of this species but also its pharmacological properties. The chemical composition of KAG’s cultivated

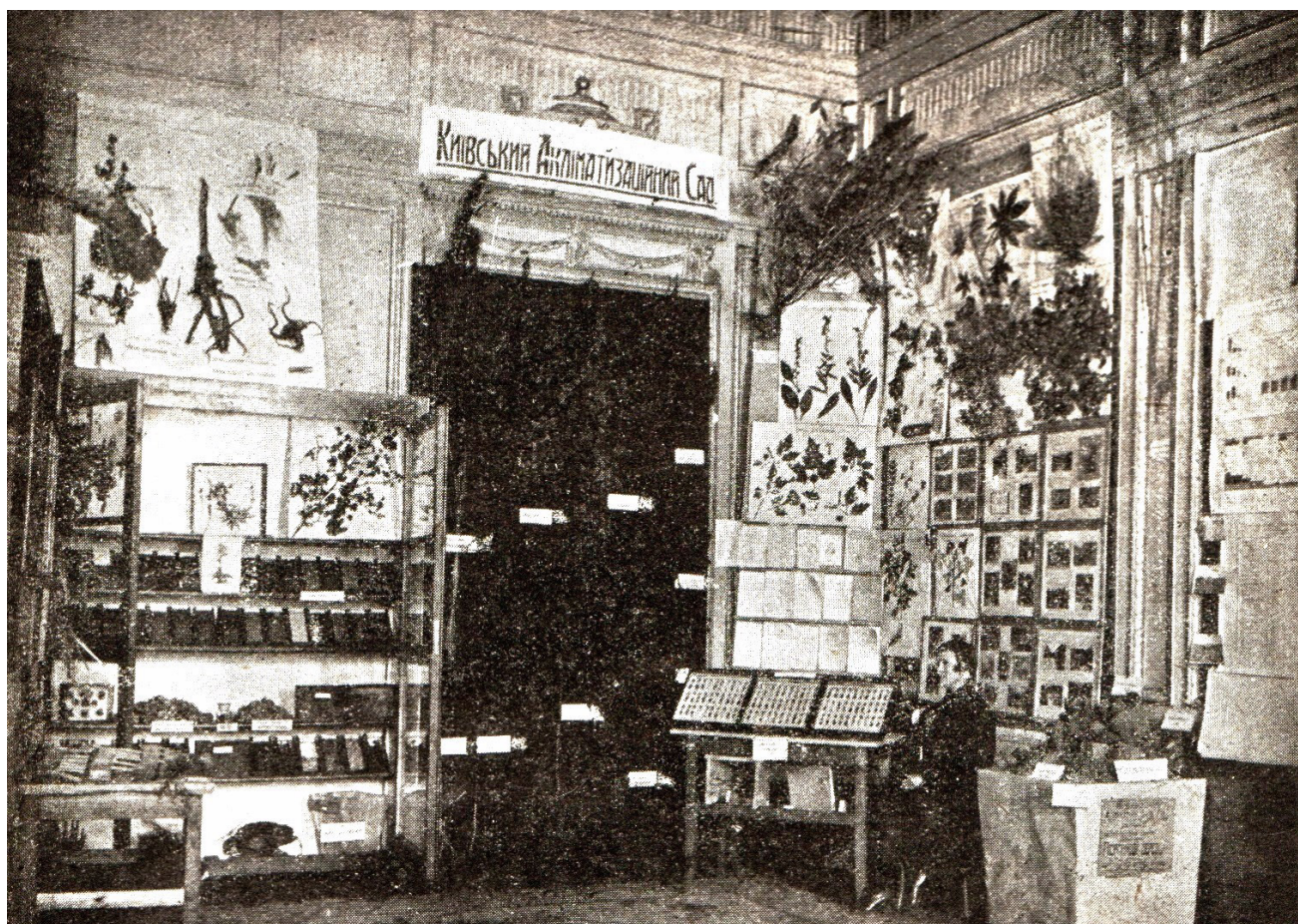
*D. purpurea* was studied in the laboratory of Professor V.Y. Chagovets (Kotukov, 1971). Phytochemical analysis of biologically active compounds was conducted at various stages of plant development – during flowering, as is customary, and at the end of the growing season (October) – which demonstrated the activity of the plant material during these periods, a finding confirmed by clinical trials. Chemical, clinical, and physiological tests showed that KAG’s cultivated *D. purpurea* has a beneficial effect on the heart and fully meets the requirements of the pharmacopeia (Lukyanov, 1928).

Later, researchers established that a distinctive feature of the glycosides (digitoxin and gitoxin) found in *D. purpurea* is their ability to enhance heart muscle contractions while simultaneously reducing their frequency, thereby promoting cardiac relaxation and increased blood filling; that is, the indications for their use are chronic heart failure of various origins. It is this species of foxglove that is most widely used in medicine (Grodzinsky, 1992). With respect to its outstanding features, academician N.D. Strazhesko called purple foxglove the “queen of medicinal plants.”

Noteworthy are observations on the growth of *D. purpurea*, a biennial plant that grew within a single plot for three years (Bryantseva, 1929). At the KAG, researchers engaged in interspecific hybridization, involving various species of the genus *Digitalis*. To obtain a winter-hardy form of foxglove, numerous interspecific crosses were conducted, but they did not yield positive results until 1926, when M.O. Kasaeva obtained an interspecific amphiploid hybrid, *D. purpurea* × *D. grandiflora* Mill. This hybrid was named the “pink hybrid” in 1938. After that, the work on it was discontinued at the KAG. Currently, several *Digitalis* species are growing in the NBG collection: large-flowered foxglove (*D. grandiflora*), yellow foxglove (*D. lutea* L.), woolly foxglove (*D. lanata* Ehrh.), and purple foxglove (*D. purpurea*).

## Conclusions

1. With the outbreak of World War I in 1914, research on medicinal plants became a priority at Academician M.F. Kashchenko’s Acclimatization Garden, given the



**Figure 5.** The Kyiv Acclimatization Garden's exhibit at the Agricultural Exhibition in Kyiv in 1927 (Bryantseva, 1929).

impossibility of continuing to import medicinal plant raw materials from Germany.

2. Particular attention was paid to medicinal plants for which raw materials were in short supply, not only during wartime but also in peacetime. M.F. Kashchenko engaged in the research and acclimatization of medicinal plants that had not previously been cultivated in our region, as well as the introduction into cultivation of local wild plants, the harvest of which could not meet the high demand. Over time, the KAG's work focused on conserving rare medicinal plants and on breeding programs involving them.
3. Today, the scientific work on medicinal plants initiated by Academician M.F. Kashchenko continues at the Laboratory of Medical Botany of the NBG.

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## Робота Київського акліматизаційного саду академіка М.Ф. Кащенко з лікарськими рослина

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Надано короткий огляд роботи Акліматизаційного саду під керівництвом академіка М.Ф. Кащенко. Узаснованому нині Київському акліматизаційному саду (КАС) було випробувано сотні малопоширених на той час плодових, технічних, овочевих, лікарських та декоративних рослин. Вивчено роботу КАС з лікарськими рослинами. Показано, що М.Ф. Кащенко значно розширив роботу з лікарськими рослинами у 1914 р., коли після початку Першої світової війни став неможливим імпорт сировини лікарських рослин з Німеччини, а попит на них значно збільшився. В КАС проводилися дослідження лікарських рослин, які раніше не культивувалися на нашій території. Науковці КАС також займалися введенням в культуру місцевих диких рослин, збір яких не відповідав попиту. Одночасно проводилася селекційна робота. Нині наукова робота, розпочата академіком М.Ф. Кащенко, продовжується у Національному ботанічному саду (НБС) імені М.М. Гришка НАН України, а робота з лікарськими рослинами – у лабораторії медичної ботаніки НБС.

**Ключові слова:** М.Ф. Кащенко, Київський акліматизаційний сад, лікарські рослини, *Rhodiola rosea*, *Podophyllum peltatum*, *Podophyllum emodi*, *Valeriana officinalis*, *Digitalis purpurea*