

FLORA OF POLAND ... IN A COMPUTER

S u m m a r y

Identification of a plant specimen is the key to the knowledge about it. Labeling a plant with its (scientific) name is crucial for gathering various facts pertaining to its ecology, distribution, practical uses, etc. When a human-based expertise is not available, the only way to determine the plant name is to use a diagnostic key. Until quite recently this kind of publications assumed a printed form exclusively. Nowadays, diagnostic keys can have a form of computer programs, too.

This paper provides a concise description of Polish multimedia flora ("Flora ojczysta"). The program's database covers above 1200 species of vascular plants. In a multimedia atlas the user can find over 3500 photographs showing the entire plant and its details (leaves, flowers, fruit). The program offers identification tools which are convenient and flexible enough to fit the user's specific needs. In the case of traditional, "paper" keys, the author has the initiative; the reader *volens*

has to follow the sequence of questions provided by the identification tree. A user of "Flora ojczysta" is to some extent free in selection of attributes he/she wants to use to recognize a specimen. Using a multi-access key, the main identification tool, the user can start with plant attributes that he feels sure about. The selection of proper character states is made easier by graphical menus and palettes. One of the distinctive features of the multi-access key is the automatic updating of the character list at each step of the identification procedure. Apart from the multi-access key, the system offers other identification tools, like traditional dichotomous keys (created dynamically for a chosen species group), an expert system mode (i.e., question/answer mode) and even a natural language interface. The user can freely switch between operation modes.

The system comes equipped with an extensive help file and a botanical dictionary with 700 entries.