Plant Lives (New Haven, 11 Apr 26)

New Haven, CT, Apr 11, 2026
Deadline: Jan 16, 2026

Katie Anania

Plant Lives: Sacred Interdependencies in the Arts of the Americas. A planting event and conference hosted by the Yale Institute of Sacred Music.

In 1831, the preacher Nat Turner testified that hieroglyphics had appeared to him on leaves and corn stalks, relaying divine messages that inspired him to lead a rebellion of enslaved Virginians. The capacities of plants to transmit divine insights across time is the starting point for this one-day conference, which explores the ways in which plants perform, evoke, and embody sacred relations throughout the Americas. In addition to considering plants as agents of divination, the conference and the subsequent planting celebration will look to plants as a means of reviving sacred interdependencies in art and musical practices. Coconut shells and seed beads frequently appear in contemporary Santeria divinations; the banjo is a cousin of gourd-based stringed instruments originating in Africa and Brazil; African American eco-feminist musicians have revived shekere and coconut percussion instruments since the 1980s. Images of plants are also powerful reminders of the tastes, smells, and other sensory experiences lost to migration.

We are interested in 20-minute papers or performances that discuss plants, planting, or plant-derived materials in relation to ecology and the sacred. On the evening of the conference, the Yale Institute of Sacred Music will host a public groundbreaking for a gourd garden at the Urban Naturescapes Native Plant Nursery in New Haven's Newhallville neighborhood. We hope the event will activate questions such as: How have plants sustained spiritual relationships across geographic contexts? How can we see plants as living archives that impact what we remember in the here and now?
Some possible topics include:
• The role of plants in precolonial or Indigenous cosmologies
• The production of plant-based musical instruments
• The cultural patrimony of sacred plants
• Plants and planting in sacred music repertoires
• Planting and agricultural work as teaching tools
• Plants that defy normative categorization, e.g. weeds
• Artworks or institutions that preserve sacred plant lineages, such as through seed banks or community food projects
• Motifs in sacred art and architecture
• Queer intimacies with organic matter or vegetation
The Yale Institute of Sacred Music will cover the cost of hotel accommodates in New Haven and will provide a $250 stipend toward travel. Interested participants should send a 250-word abs-

tract, along with the presenters' name/s and affiliation/s, if any, to plantlivesconference[at]gmail.-com by 16 January 2025. All abstracts will receive a response by 23 January 2025. Questions can be directed to Katie Anania at katie.anania[at]yale.edu.

Reference:

CFP: Plant Lives (New Haven, 11 Apr 26). In: ArtHist.net, Nov 30, 2025 (accessed Nov 12, 2026), <https://arthist.net/archive/51254>.