



plants



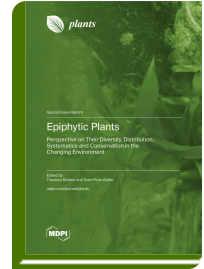
Special Issue Reprint

Epiphytic Plants

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Epiphytic plants are vital components of tropical and subtropical forests, contributing significantly to biodiversity, ecosystem function, and structural complexity. Despite their importance, they remain understudied and face increasing threats from environmental change. This Special Issue, entitled “Epiphytic Plants: Perspective on Their Diversity, Distribution, Systematics and Conservation in the Changing Environment”, is a compilation of nine articles, whose authors deepen our understanding of the divergent roles of epiphytes, i.e., plants that germinate and root non-parasitically on other plants, primarily on trees. These are a conspicuous and integral component of tropical forest ecosystems in relation to local and regional plant diversity, especially in the Neotropics. Roughly 10% of all vascular plants in the world are epiphytes, which are distributed in about 900 genera and 80 families. However, 85% of the more than 27,600 species recorded globally belong to only five taxonomic groups—Araceae, Bromeliaceae, Orchidaceae, Peperomia, and Pteridophytes. Vascular epiphytes fulfill diverse ecological functions in tropical ecosystems, such as the accumulation of water and nutrients, in addition to amplifying biodiversity by providing microhabitats and food to different taxa (e.g., invertebrates, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals). Due to their dependence on host trees and atmospheric water sources, epiphytes are considered one of the most endangered plant groups. Landscape fragmentation and forest degradation resulting from human activity are among the major threats to their survival.



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