The Botanical Society of America Merit Award is the highest honor the Society can bestow. Awardees are chosen based on their outstanding contributions to the mission of the Society. The award is bestowed on recipients who have demonstrated excellence in basic research, education, public policy, or who have provided exceptional service to the professional botanical community, or who may have made contributions to a combination of these categories.

Committee membership:

The committee typically consists of five to seven members appointed by the President of the society for a two year term and should represent the breadth of the disciplines in the society. The Chair of the committee is appointed by the President for a one year term.

The Merit Award Committee for 2013 was composed of the following members: Bruce Baldwin, Spencer Barrett (Chair), Pat Gensel, Susan Kalisz, Toby Kellogg (President), Pam Soltis and Alison Snow.

In 2012 the process got off to a slow start and required an extension of the deadline. This problem was not encountered in 2013 as a result of more effort in canvassing nominations. Thus, by the March 15 deadline the committee had received five nominations: Charles Beck, Sean Graham, Pat Herendeen, Lucinda McDade and Virginia Walbot.

Two rounds of consultation, recommendations and voting were undertaken by e-mail during late March and early April and three worthy Merit Award winners were agreed upon and were submitted to the President and accepted: Charles Beck, Pat Herendeen and Lucinda McDade.
The two main issues that the committee confronted this year in their selection of nominations were:

1) A lack of clear guidelines on how many awards should be given. Numbers have ranged from 1-6 and at the initiation of the award many more.

2) Strong heterogeneity among nomination packages. For example, consider the number of supporting letters for each person - McDade (17), Beck (10), Herendeen (8), Graham (3) and Walbot (2). CVs also varied with Walbot providing only selected publications and nothing since 2003.

Clearly, not only should the BSA Executive decide on whether a fixed number of awards should be given each year, but should also make the requirements for the nomination package more specific (e.g. 6 letters of recommendation; full publication list) to reduce the heterogeneity.

Spencer C.H. Barrett (submitted on behalf of the committee)
July 16, 2013