The Chicago Botanic Garden in 2020:
The power of plants and nature

“I think that what this pandemic has done, in a very strange way, is made an awful lot of people suddenly aware of how valuable and important the natural world is to our psychic well-being.”

Sir David Attenborough

At the Chicago Botanic Garden, we recognize the therapeutic potential of nature. It is reflected in our mission: We cultivate the power of plants to sustain and enrich life. In 2020, that mission was never more important. In a year filled with turbulence and uncertainty, the Garden offered important connections to nature and inspired hope for the future. Here are just some ways the Garden delivered on its mission in 2020.

After an 82-day closure, the Garden opened to offer respite. The Garden closed in mid-March, following state mitigations to slow COVID-19. Like many organizations, our business instantly changed. Our primary focus was, and still is, the health and safety of our staff and visitors. Our horticulture staff at the Garden moved from working in large teams, aided by our dedicated volunteers, to small staff-only teams focused on keeping our living museum alive. Other staff shifted to working from home. We reopened in June with new procedures and limited, timed entries in place. Those restrictions remain today.

Because of COVID restrictions and restricted capacity, Garden attendance dropped below one million visitors for the first time in eight years; we welcomed nearly 815,000 visitors in 2020. We are grateful to be able to offer people the chance to find comfort in nature and to celebrate the beauty that nature brings.

It was a challenging year fiscally, and we had to make some painful budget and staffing decisions and cut back on expenses. We lost revenue because of the Garden’s extended closure this spring and limited reopening. We are thankful for our donors and members, who were responsive to the Garden’s needs and mission. We had 900 additional donors to the Annual Fund, and many others increased their giving levels. Your generous support helped annual giving grow 4 percent, to $4.9 million.

Urban agriculture programs served Chicago communities during the COVID-19 pandemic. Despite restrictions in operating procedures because of COVID-19, our urban agriculture programs maintained their service to communities and continued without disruption. VeggieRx distributed more than 7,500 boxes of vegetables in 2020, almost tripling the number distributed in 2019 to food-insecure patients with diet-related diseases. Windy City Harvest teams on 15 urban farms grew local produce, with 75 percent of that produce going back to the community. The American Public Gardens Association honored Windy City Harvest with its 2020 Program Excellence Award, which recognizes “a truly innovative spirit in the development of an original program.”

We recommitted to making the Garden a welcoming place for all. Black Lives Matter ignited a new civil rights movement and caused our organization to reflect on equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility. We instituted an employee resource group that is creating a foundation for change at the Garden, and the Board of the Chicago Horticultural Society continues its diversity and inclusion work begun in 2019 with a program facilitated by the American Alliance of Museums. We recommit to live our mission and values as we strive to make the Garden a welcoming place for everyone. We have a lot of work to do. We know our work is just beginning.
We embraced the virtual world. The pandemic forced us to shift our focus online. As the world shut down in the spring, the Garden’s social channels and website allowed people to experience nature from their homes. We reached more people than ever, and views to our website grew 26 percent over 2019. People from across the country signed up for new online classes, in topics from horticulture to photography to yoga, from the Joseph Regenstein, Jr. School of the Chicago Botanic Garden. The Woman’s Board Fall Bulb Sale offered the entire catalog online for presale, and the sale sold out of its inventory. Thanks to a new e-book initiative, Garden members could access more than 7,000 horticulture and gardening titles in the Lenhardt Library collection.

We reconfigured events because of COVID-19 to allow a safe way to enjoy the holiday season. In response to the pandemic, we reduced capacity and instituted new procedures for both our Halloween event Night of 1,000 Jack-o'-Lanterns and our outdoor holiday trail Lightscape. Even with restrictions, demand for both events was high, and they sold out before they even began. We know the importance of cultural institutions, especially in turbulent times, and recognize that so many others were unable to be open. We were happy to be able to offer families a way to celebrate the joy of the holiday season and spend time together outdoors.

We continued to protect plants and their habitats. Our work to understand biodiversity loss and the impacts of climate change reached across the country, despite the challenges of COVID-19. The Negaunee Institute for Plant Conservation Science and Action’s work was featured in publications including *The New York Times* and *Conservation Biology*. Negaunee Institute scientists conducted virtual sessions with students in the joint graduate program in plant biology and conservation with Northwestern University and managed field site operations, including seed collection and research in the western United States. We planted nativar gardens at three Forest Preserves of Cook County nature centers as part of the Garden’s Budburst community science program, and our Garden teams produced more than 15,000 plugs of native species for Forest Preserves restoration efforts. And our natural areas team worked to keep invasive species such as garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolata*) at bay in our McDonald Woods.

Hope for the future. As we move through 2021, we expect that pandemic mitigations will continue. We will innovate and pivot to meet the changing needs of our Garden and our members while at the same time actively plan to get back on the trajectory of growth in 2022. We missed welcoming visitors last spring, so for 2021, we are thinking big: More than one million bulbs, perennials, shrubs, and trees are set to bloom at the Garden. That colorful display is always such a sign of hope. I look forward to sharing it with you.

Jean M. Franczyk, President and CEO

Fred Spicer Garden Update

Garden Update shares important information from Fred Spicer, Executive Vice President and Director of the Garden.

COVID-19 has affected all of us and that includes activities at the Garden. The plants and gardens still need care and attention which has been achieved under strict guidelines. Other projects have been completed and future planning has taken place.

The Shida Evaluation Garden and Shoreline Restoration work goals have been completed for the year. Barring floods, we expect a smooth 2021, and to finish in the fall of 2021. The bulk of the shoreline plantings, hedging, and other plants will go in starting April, 2021. The shoreline plantings will start closest to the water, then the water is raised, planting higher and raising the water, etc. It is a gradual process, planting the aquatic plants which have not grown in water prior to their planting to get them acclimated to their new permanent environment.

Hedging will be done differently. In the past, the hedge plants were brought in fairly mature but for this project, the plants will be quite young, and shaped and pruned as they mature, up to a height of 6 feet or more. The hedges will be deciduous and very dense. Several of the species being used, European beech and European hornbeam, hold onto some of their brown leaves through the winter.
Fred Spicer Garden Update cont’d.

This is termed marcescent, which means withered but attached. This same training technique will also be utilized on the crabapple tunnels and hornbeam arbors, starting with young plants. An erosion control problem is being addressed along the Skokie River near the North Weir (a low dam) close to the Learning Campus. This will be completed in the spring.

Plans are being finalized for the new Welcome Plaza which will be started in the late summer. These plans will include a Picnic Glade where the old Butterflies & Blooms pavilion was located. A new roof was installed on part of the Grainger Center and some of the solar panels will be removed from the nursery pavilion to the Grainger Center roof because of errant golf balls hitting the solar panels.

The 2021 budget has been approved by the Board of Trustees and includes some very exciting capital projects. Thestonework around the central fountain in the Heritage Garden will be replaced as well as the wooden benches that circle Heritage. Masonry repair and tuck-pointing is scheduled in the amphitheater in the Regenstein Fruit & Vegetable Garden. All of the wood decking will be replaced in the Aquatic Garden and a new railing system will be installed as well. Repairs will be done on the arched bridge leading to the Japanese Garden, including work underneath and on the columns to protect them from moisture. The cedar edging in some areas along the water’s edge, called rangui, will be replaced as part of ongoing maintenance.

The giant loader machine that “lives” in the landscape waste area, and is used to turn the compost and leaf mold, is in constant use and will be replaced. New plant documentation software has been budgeted that will support plant collections, plant production, and also store digital images which are now stored in various places that do not interface with the current software.

As you can see, the Garden is looking to the future and not dwelling on the past. We look forward to seeing better times in 2021.

Ken Krebs

Visitor Events and Programs Update

Because of the COVID-19 health crisis, we have had to cancel, modify, or postpone some programs, classes, and exhibitions at the Garden. This list will be updated as new information is available. Please check the Garden’s website www.chicagobotanic.org if you have any questions about a particular event. We apologize for any inconvenience and thank you for your understanding.

Canceled in 2021:
- Super Seed Weekend, the Seed Swap, and all related programs
- Story Time in the Lenhardt Library
- The Orchid Show and all related programs, including Orchids After Hours
- Science Festival
- Easter Egg Brunch
- Midwest Bonsai Society Spring Bonsai Exhibition
- Garden Chef Series
- Tuesday Morning Music
- Evening concerts
- Kite Festival

Temporarily closed:
- Garden View Café
- Regenstein Center Greenhouses

Modified:
These programs will operate with a modified schedule or reduced capacity because of social distancing guidelines.
- Camp CBG
- Model Railroad Garden: Landmarks of America
- Grand Tram Tours
- Butterflies & Blooms
- Herb Garden Weekend
- Heirloom Weekend
- Harvest Weekend

Rescheduled:
- Picturing the Prairie exhibition and supplemental programming: new dates, May 1 - Sept. 12, 2021
- Gardens that Heal, Healthcare Garden Design Certificate Seminar: new date, May 2022

Important Volunteer Reminder

When visiting or volunteering, all volunteers are required to enter the Garden at the main Lake-Cook Road entrance, and exit at Lake Cook Road when leaving. In the future, volunteers approved to return to a few select volunteer service areas at the south end of the Garden may enter at the Dundee Road service entrance on their day of service only. These service areas include Bonsai, Living Plant Documentation and Plant Production. It is of the utmost importance that vehicular traffic is limited on the Greenhouse road, which includes a newly re-aligned intersection just beyond the Construction building. Unauthorized vehicles will be re-directed to the Lake-Cook Road entrance as needed. Please contact Judy Cashen with any questions via email at jcashen@chicagobotanic.org. We thank you for your cooperation.
Thank you Jim Steffen

It is difficult to imagine McDonald Woods without Jim Steffen at its helm, but we will soon have to, as he has announced his plan to retire as of March 31, 2021.

Jim has worked at the Garden for nearly 31 years, transforming the Garden’s McDonald Woods (as well as the Lake Cook Natural Area, Plant Conservation Science Center Woods, and Barbara Brown Nature Reserve) from buckthorn-invaded thickets to flourishing natural areas supporting thousands of plant and wildlife species.

Not content to just manage the woods to support diversity, Jim has worked hard to also document changes over time at all levels of the ecosystems he has been restoring, including through innovative and diligent monitoring and sampling approaches at all levels (including his most recent work with micromoths and leaf miners).

Thanks to his work, we now have woodlands that are among the highest quality in the region – quite a legacy, and he leaves very big shoes to fill. Please join me in thanking him for all that he has done, and wishing him well as he transitions to retirement.

I am thrilled that Jim intends to continue investigating the scientific aspects of the moth and leaf miner collections that he has built, working to identify new species and understand the diversity that we have in our woods – we are grateful that he wants to continue working on this, and look forward to continue seeing him at the dissecting microscope in the ecology lab.

Thank you, Jim, for all that you have done. And in this transition, we are dedicated to preserving all of the progress Jim has made in restoring and managing our woodlands, and to continuing it into the future. A search for his replacement will soon be underway.

Andrea T. Kramer
Director of Restoration Ecology & Conservation Scientist

Photos by Robin Carlson

In 2013, Jim Steffen, featured right, accepted Chicago Wilderness’ Excellence in Ecological Restoration Gold Accreditation for McDonald Woods

Jim Steffen leading a Woodland Walk training session for educators. Over the years, Jim has led many such walks and trainings for volunteers, staff and visitors.

Thank you Jim!
Who’s Who in the Garden?
A profile of someone you should know

Denise Walsh
Senior Registrar, Visitor Services

This issue of the Grounds Cover features an employee who has been with the Chicago Botanic Garden for a quarter of a century, providing information and service to callers in her most affable and effective manner. She is Denise Walsh, Senior Registrar of the Visitor Services Department.

You can find Denise, during non-pandemic times, at the Regenstein Center, but for now she works from her home in suburban Wheeling as a voice of the Garden. She is a valued member of the Garden family, and is described by Judy Cashen, Director, Volunteer Administration and Engagement, as “one of the kindest and most capable people that I have ever worked with.” Denise handles registrations, ticket sales, and membership renewals over the phone, answers questions, and takes on assignments where needed.

Originally from Long Island, New York, Denise worked in banking for 11 years before she moved to the Midwest. Prior to joining the Garden, she was focused on her home and family, raising three children who now work in education, healthcare, and information technology. When she returned to the working world, she was sent by a temporary agency to the Garden. She was soon hired, at first as a part-time employee and then full time. She started with Adult Education, and recalls how her work evolved from taking information on paper over the phone for a handful of Adult Education classes. This soon morphed to working in and building more sophisticated registration software. The call and entry volume grew quickly, and the move from phone to computer was difficult at first, Denise says, but it was different every day and afforded the opportunity to learn new things, her favorite endeavor.

Denise holds she would not have been able to accomplish her work without the help of the many volunteers and employees she met over the years at the Garden. She talks warmly of her Garden family and the many friendships she formulated. These friendships helped Denise develop her people and computer skills, and she is appreciative that her co-workers enabled her to master the art of good communication. She is able to field questions easily and make suggestions, all while learning on the job which continues to be an exhilarating experience for her, and one she enjoys to the fullest.

Working during the pandemic at home is a challenge, according to Denise, but she continues to register members for online classes and certification programs, answers questions about all departments, and assists with member phone renewals. Recently, she has been busy issuing tickets for the amazing Lightscape event and enrolling children in upcoming Camp CBG.

Denise reports to Karen Angel, Customer Support Manager, who has this to say about her: “It is a pleasure to work with Denise. She has been an integral part of the Registrar’s Office and Call Center for 25 years. She has a depth of knowledge about the Garden programs and interacts with students in a warm and personal way. Some of these students have been taking classes for years. Although her specialty is supporting Adult Education, she has added her expertise to the Call Center, answering questions about events, Camp CBG, membership, and parking with a good-natured attitude and a smile on her face.”

Ginger Burns

Joseph Regenstein, Jr. School of the Chicago Botanic Garden

Register for a class today! Additional information regarding Adult Education, Youth and Family classes, Teacher and Student classes, and Wellness and Fitness classes is available on the Garden’s website: https://www.chicagobotanic.org/education
## Calendar of Garden Events and Volunteer Activities

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>February 2021</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sun.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Happy Valentine’s Day! We LOVE our volunteers!</td>
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<tr>
<th>March 2021</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sun.</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>Daylight Saving Time begins</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sat.</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>First day of spring-hurray!</td>
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☞ The Grounds Cover Committee ☞
Ginger Burns, Judy Cashen, Marnee Kenny, Ken Krebs, Donna Lebovitz

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One of the treasures of the Forest Preserves of Cook County