



Vine
LINE



Summer 2022

Meet our New Director of Horticulture. Discover a Whimsical Wonderland in My Big Backyard.
Enhance Your Next Nature Walk.



Greetings to All

As I write this, many thoughts are going through my head since this will be the last issue that I will contribute to the Vine Line. I will be retiring on September 5 after almost 27 years of working here at MBG. It has been a great job! Certainly not one without problems and challenges but it's been a very rewarding one. At the time I started working here there were two other horticulturists and five individuals on the grounds crew. We all had to be really dedicated to get everything accomplished. At that time each of the major gardens were supported by their own plant society who volunteered and helped with care of that individual garden.

Since then, our staff has grown to about 25 people for Horticulture and Maintenance combined, and we have added many new gardens and redesigned others. Live at the Garden has been a big part of our revenue stream along with special events and rentals for weddings and other events. On top of that, our Spring and Fall Plant Sales have grown into Nursery at the Garden, which has increased every year and has been managed by some very dedicated volunteers. It's been a lot of change in a little over a quarter of a century. I can't really take credit for any of it, but I am pleased to have been a part of it and have enjoyed working in a place that most people in the community regard as a place of natural beauty.

Many people have expressed concern that I won't have anything to do in retirement. I really don't think that will be a problem. I am really looking forward to reclaiming my own garden after years of neglect. You know the old story about the shoemaker's kids that don't have shoes! I also intend to do some traveling, and I have a few hobbies I will now have time to pursue.

When I read through the articles submitted for this issue of the Vine Line I was reminded that some of the younger members of our Horticulture Team are really quite creative and talented. It is always good to know the younger generation has some of the same interests and goals as your own! Mary Glenys Espey will tell you about planning and implementing the Alice in Wonderland themed Idea Garden in My Big Backyard. Both she and Anna Vo worked very hard planning and planting this involved exhibit space. Adam Gann, who takes care of our Sensory Garden, has an interesting perspective about observing nature and using it as a way to regenerate from our busy lives.

Daniel Grose is now the new Director of Horticulture at MBG. He started in May and has hit the ground running. As you would expect, he brings a new perspective from a younger and fresh point of view. I feel he will continue to keep MBG on a steady course as it moves into the future. I will let him make his own introduction to be sure all the facts are accurate. My wife and I intend to stay living in the area so instead of saying goodbye, I will hope to see some of you somewhere in the community. Maybe even at an event at MBG!

Happy Gardening,
Rick



MBG Director of Horticulture Emeritus



Greetings Fellow Plant Enthusiasts!

by: Daniel Grose - Director of Horticulture

My name is Daniel Grose, and as you probably know by now, I started on May 1 as the new Director of Horticulture at the Garden. While I am looking forward to sharing my love of plants with you, as my first article for the Vine Line I wanted to tell you a little about who I am and the vision I have for the Memphis Botanic Garden going forward.

My History - The Early Days

My love of nature, like many of us, began when I was a child. My grandparents on my father's side had an 80 acre property where my grandfather raised bird dogs and quail. They were of a generation that still kept a garden, cows, horses, chickens, and raised fish in the pond. I spent countless weekends there with free run of the place, riding the four-wheeler, fishing with a cane pole, and tagging along with the grown ups in their work. I was too young to remember this day,

but I have a picture of my grandmother teaching me to plant squash when I was about four years old. When I reach back in my memory to what I love most about landscapes and nature, it is those gentle hills of broom sedge and bluestem, fence lines with sumac, goldenrods, blackberry, and elderberry, my grandmother's flowerbeds of "ditch" daylilies, hosta, rose of sharon, and hydrangeas, the spring blooms of dogwoods and redbud, the plants of that place are imprinted in my memory. Nostalgia is a powerful thing, and the nature we connected with in our childhood and adolescence, even if we weren't aware, often brings us a sense of peace and groundedness in our adulthood. This is something that plays a big part in my vision for the Garden going forward.

My Beginnings in Horticulture

My teenage years were fairly typical of a suburban kid growing up in Memphis in the 90s. My only connection to nature or landscape care was the occasional canoe trip to the Spring River or being made to mulch the flower beds when I would've rather been sleeping in. Having lived in Memphis all my life, after college I wanted an adventure, to see something different, so I moved to Los Angeles, California, for no better reason than I had a friend there who needed a roommate to help pay rent. As fate would have it, the first job I could find was at the Woodland Hills Home Depot Garden Center. I know what you are thinking - big box store employees typically don't know anything about plants. However, this particular Home Depot hit the lotto with Martha and Jane, two plant geniuses who, apart from being my surrogate mothers while I was so far from home, introduced me into the world of horticulture. The basics such as what are those three numbers on a fertilizer bag, how do you address pests on organically grown vegetables, what is soil pH and why does it matter? Laughingly, I realize I didn't even know the difference between an annual and perennial on day one. As fate would have it, a local landscaper came in one day and bought three pallets of bagged mulch. I helped him load up his truck and by the end of our interaction he had offered me a job. His name was Phillip, and he owned Nature's Plan Landscaping. Working for Phillip was quite an experience; his clientele consisted of high-end houses in the Hollywood Hills, and we worked as true gardeners, pruning and sculpting plants and always using the most environmentally friendly gardening practices. Phillip would often show up, waving his hands about in his eccentric way and yell "living sculpture, you must turn these into living sculptures; this is an ART!!" At first, I admit I did not know what he meant, but over time he taught me "aesthetic pruning." I learned different pruning techniques and how plants responded to different types of cuts, to think of how my work would shape the plants' form and structure years down the road. My time there laid the foundation for the skilled and naturally minded gardening services that I would offer in my own business later.

My Professional Career

In 2009, my soon-to-be wife Rachael and I decided to move back to Memphis. We were married in July of 2009, and I started my landscape company Set Apart Landscaping. Beginning a marriage and a business at the same time, I had no idea what I was in for. Looking back, I believe it is only the naivety and ambitiousness of youth that has the audacity to embark so confidently on such a thing. It took me a few years to find my niche with Set Apart Landscaping, and I learned many lessons on the way. I started as a mow and blow company that also served as a job training program for individuals who for one reason or another were "unhireable" to other companies. When

Rachael and I found out we were having our first child in the fall of 2011, I knew I needed to switch to a more profitable model. I started building the company the way many do, I wanted to have a big commercial maintenance and installation business. I pursued this for three years, and did learn a lot of lessons, but the main lesson I learned was the bigger we got, the less in touch I was with plants, nature, and the true horticulture practices and principles that I had learned in California. In 2014, I decided to let go of the big commercial company dream, and Set Apart would offer a niche service centered around offering fine gardening and natural landscape design services with an emphasis on utilizing native plants. We split the time between design and maintenance services, with the goal of always offering the highest quality, and the most personal and knowledgeable service. I have read countless books, attended seminars, workshops, conferences, etc. for my own continuing education, but nothing has taught me more about planting here in the Mid-South than my years of experience putting plants in the ground and watching landscapes come to life in the fullness of time. It has been my good fortune to have had many wonderful clients who have given me creative license to try things, some of which worked out better than I could've



hoped for and some that have failed despite my best efforts. That is part of the joy of gardening, there is always more to learn, always new things to try, always beautiful moments of serendipity that you could not have planned for.

The Future at the Garden

I can not speak to the future until I first acknowledge the past. As Rick touched on in his article, the gardens at MBG have come such a long way under his leadership over the past 27 years. He is handing off to me a beautiful place and wonderful team, and I am humbled to follow in his footsteps and provide our guests with beautiful and inspiring gardens. I look forward to gleaning all the wisdom and horticultural knowledge that I can from Rick as time goes on. Earlier I mentioned the power of our child experiences with nature to connect us to it as adults and the powerful ability nature and gardens have to bring peace and joy into our busy adult lives. My vision for the Garden and my Horticulture team can be summed up in the mantra: "Creating a place where people can connect with nature." We want to continue to create a haven in the middle of our city where people can take a break from screens, concrete, traffic, stress, etc. and connect with nature. We as people have been what the great naturalist and biologist E.O. Wilson called biophilia, a deeply ingrained love of nature. That looks different for everyone. For some, smelling a rose in the Rose Garden along paved paths is just what they need, for children, seeing the pond and play houses in My Big Backyard will allow them to soak up the nature that surrounds their play, others feel the need to get lost in the native Woodlands and escape to an old forest just around the corner from the office. I will be bringing my experience and love for ecologically minded landscaping and native plants to grow and enhance our natural areas while we continue to grow and showcase the beauty of plants in our collections and traditional gardens. I want the Garden to be a place where our guests can come and experience as much of the diversity, magic, wonder, and beauty that nature has to offer!



Alice's Adventures in My Big Backyard

By Mary Glenys Espey, Horticulturist - My Big Backyard

Here at the Memphis Botanic Garden, we have a well-known children's garden known as "My Big Backyard" that is a space for horticulture and youth education to blend. This garden has a wide range of interactive smaller gardens within it including Home Sweet Home, Welcome Wildlife, My Little Garden, Raindrop Stop, and more, that each have their own theme. The Idea Garden within My Big Backyard is an ever-changing garden that gets a complete makeover every 1-3 years, ensuring that we provide exciting, new elements for children (and adults!) to enjoy. Some of the previous themes were Harry Potter, The Hobbit, Day at the Beach, and State Parks / Outdoor Adventure. This time around, we chose to create a mini-wonderland within My Big Backyard, where children can step into Alice's shoes for an afternoon and experience Wonderland as she did in the book by Lewis Carroll.



The word “whimsical” isn’t necessarily the first to come to mind when thinking about our landscapes; often, we tend to create formal or themed garden spaces that are aesthetically pleasing with a more traditional approach. However, with this year’s Idea Garden, whimsical was the number one word we had in mind when creating this space.

Horticulturally, we spent many hours planning and sourcing plant materials that fit the theme, such as “Double Delight” bi-colored hybrid tea roses, Harry Lauder Walking Stick or corkscrew hazel, topiaries, weeping Cherries, a mix of sunflowers including “Teddy Bear” and “Skyscraper,” various mints,

annuals and perennials including foxgloves, marigolds, Angelonias, daisies, and more. All of these were planted accordingly for each interactive section of this garden to create a perfect flow between play to horticulture.

Upon entering our Wonderland, children can crawl up the stone pathway and “fall down the rabbit hole,” a slide that welcomes them into the fun that this garden has to offer! Then, children can “take a sip” of the magic potion and enter through the keyhole doorway where tall plants tower over them, making them feel like Alice when she shrank inside Wonderland. Through the keyhole doorway leads to the Mad Hatter’s table, where kids can have their own tea party complete with teacups and cake while surrounded by various tea plants such as chamomile, sage, rosemary, and mint. After finishing up their tea party, they can “paint the roses red” like the Red Queen requests. One of my personal favorite elements to this garden is the “Meet the Flowers” portion, where children can meet individual flowers in a sea of color, including daisies, larkspur, tiger lily, and rose. All of these interactive play components were pulled straight from the book, but do not worry if you or your child isn’t familiar; each area has informational yet whimsical signage that walks you through the entire Wonderland experience!

We are very excited to be able to share this Wonderland with the public, and to welcome even more Alice in Wonderland adventures into the Garden that specifically cater to the youth of Memphis. We hope that along with providing an educational play space for children, we can also showcase that it is okay, and even fun, to welcome some whimsy into your garden spaces!



Nature Observation Through The Senses

By Adam Gann, Horticulturist – Sensory Garden & Fragrance Garden

As a Tribesman of the Muscogee Nation, I've loved nature for as long as I can remember. Growing up in Oklahoma I recall staring at sticks, bugs, and birds. I would often find myself climbing my Great Aunt Pauline's Magnolia tree and hugging her giant Sycamore. In 2016, I moved to Nashville to pursue a career in music and found myself exploring the hills and valleys of Tennessee. I grew to love spending time in state parks and rekindled my childhood affinity for nature, but I knew there was something more. During a visit to Bledsoe Creek State Park in Gallatin, I discovered my Muscogee ancestors once hunted the area. I realized the energy I was feeling was more than nostalgia, it was a deep feeling of connection to the land. At that time, I set out to restore my senses; senses that were stolen from me by the fast-paced civilization most of us find ourselves in today.

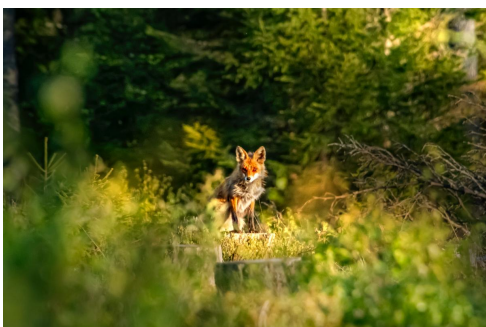
I began looking into the old ways of Indigenous Peoples. I read *Tom Brown's Field Guide to Nature Observation and Tracking* and *What the Robin Knows: How Birds Reveal the Secrets of the Natural World* by Jon Young. These texts informed me how Indigenous Peoples lived from the land, how they viewed nature as an extension of themselves, and how they had to be fully aware of their surrounding environment to survive and to care for it. Their senses had to be at peak performance to thrive. They took lessons from the animals around them and mimicked how they functioned in the wild.

Jon Young explained how one can amplify their senses by following the example of certain animals. He implored the reader to smell and taste like the coyote, touch like a raccoon, listen like a deer, and look through the forest like the owl. Mimicking our friends in nature connects us more to our surroundings and allows one to see that there is a lot more going on than we sometimes realize. On your next nature walk, I recommend finding a place where there is less foot traffic and to sit or stand being as still as possible. Lean up against a tree and become a part of the scenery. After about 20 minutes, watch as the wildlife that evacuated the area when you entered slowly return to their routine. As your disturbance bubble shrinks and the awareness bubble grows, start to apply some of these sensory expanding techniques. Start with what Young calls "owl eyes."



An owl's eyes are in a fixed position so when they're looking for their next meal, they look around moving their whole head. Using this technique is the best way to see more wildlife, it opens one's peripheral vision to watch for movement. This allows you to catch the flicker of a squirrel's tail, the head turn of a bird, or the locomotion of a snake. Move your head left, right, up, and down pausing after every movement. You'll notice the first critters to come back are usually the smaller ones like chipmunks and chickadees.

Our vision is the "loudest" sense because it is taking in the most information. Closing your eyes can help amplify the other senses. With eyes closed, act like a Doppler radar and take in all sounds coming in from 360 degrees. Listen for not just the closest sounds but also the sounds furthest away. Don't just take in the animal sounds but everything from the wind blowing through the canopy to people walking in the distance. Cupping the hands behind the ears essentially triples the helix size of the ear and will amplify the sounds coming from the direction you're facing. Imagine your ears are now standing up like a deer and will twitch at the smallest of sounds.



This helps to nail the location of that bird call you just can't quite identify. Using these techniques, I feel like a kid again! As you walk around looking for the next movement or sound, imagine you're a fox stalking its prey: walk at a $\frac{1}{4}$ of the speed you normally would, take one step where you would normally take four.

Watch a video of any animal stalking and notice they first step with the outside ball of their foot rolling the rest of the foot on the ground and then applying their weight. With practice you can eventually walk over any surface silently just like Indigenous Scouts on a hunt. Like anything we learn, these things take

patience and practice. The more it's done, the faster you can snap in and out of these techniques. With enough practice you'll be able to have all of them going at once. I find it to be a truly magical experience.

The thing I find that gets in the way are my wandering thoughts. Practicing mindfulness is just as important as practicing these sensory expanding techniques. The present moment is where I find my senses are at their peak; of course, this is easier said than done. The moment I start thinking about when my rent is due or something I regret saying to a friend in the 8th grade, my senses slip and I lose the smell of that Eastern Red Cedar and the feeling of its bark on my hand. Using any of these skills helps guide me to the present moment, and I highly recommend you try them. Every time the mind starts to wander, let the song of that robin or the sound of that black walnut hitting the ground snap you back to the here and now. To quote Bruce Lee, "Empty your mind; be formless, shapeless like water." Happy walking friends!



Something you want to learn more about?
Email our Director of Horticulture at
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