

Looking to the Future

Doug Conley

Looking ahead to the next twenty-five years, what are the greatest challenges and opportunities that public gardens will face?

“I asked a schoolboy in the sweet summer what he thought a garden was for? And he said strawberries. His younger sister suggested croquet and the elder sister garden parties. The brother from Oxford made the prompt declaration in favor of lawn tennis and cigarettes, but he was rebuked by a solemn senior and was told a garden is designed for botanical research and for the classification of plants.” (Reverend S. R. Hole, *Our Garden*, 1899)



This quote is still relevant today as public gardens attempt to balance mission with the visitor’s desire for an “experience.” Add in the need for revenue, and the garden may serve primarily as an event venue. How does one meet everyone’s expectations, while maintaining ones values?

What can gardens do to overcome these challenges and take advantage of these opportunities?

We are stewards of the only factories capable of one of the world’s most relevant chemical reactions: carbon dioxide + water (add light and chlorophyll) = sugar + oxygen.

This is a beautiful symbiotic relationship between plants and animals. They convert our waste product—our breath—into food and oxygen...WOW! Our challenge is to stimulate botanical curiosity (actually, curiosity in the natural world) to preserve the mission, while providing a beautiful event venue. This establishes relevancy, which then supports funding, staffing, etc...as we attempt to grow a gardening culture. Gardeners tend to be modest (a failed crop keeps one humble), but we need to be relentless self-promoters without becoming braggarts—with APGA as our megaphone.

What role could APGA play in assisting gardens to overcome these challenges and take advantage of these opportunities?

I would like APGA to “think globally, while gardens act locally.” National Public Gardens Day is a good example. Continue linking us with like-minded organizations such as Association of Nature Center Administrators and the National Forest Service to provide us with opportunities to cross-pollinate ideas. The regional symposia have proven to be a wonderful way for gardens to share their experiences and learn from each other; APGA should continue to offer them.

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