A Field Day for Student Volunteers

Students are naturally drawn to the arboretum when they arrive at U-M. Volunteering to maintain a place they love is an easy next step, and one that engages them with nature and with the botanical gardens and arboretum.

By Sharyn Falls Dennis

Student volunteers are a critical piece of our mission and vision. Engaging students in eco-restoration work—not to mention the many other types of volunteer opportunities available at both the arboretum and the botanical gardens—helps us train a new generation of environmental leaders.

Student volunteer numbers are impressive. Last year more than 1,300 University of Michigan students volunteered at the Arb and Gardens. That includes 436 students participating in public workdays, and 159 students doing eco-restoration work in private workdays.

One group that volunteers regularly for the eco-restoration workdays is APO Gamma Pi, a national co-ed service fraternity. Philanthropy chair Anne Patterson says that students really love volunteering at both the Nichols Arboretum and Matthaei Botanical Gardens. “It’s a great opportunity to spend time outside and it gives students the opportunity to learn more about what the Arb and Gardens are like. I’ve had members say that they specifically chose these events because they hadn’t had the opportunity to spend time in these parts of campus before, and volunteering in them is a great way to see them.”

When talking to APO volunteers working in the Arb this winter, Anne recalls one of the students talking about cutting down a number of invasive honeysuckle shrubs and how he found it interesting to hear and learn about how the landscapes in the Arb and Gardens are maintained. “I think it’s valuable for the student volunteers to see how they can have a tangible impact on the landscape,” says Anne.

For information on student volunteer opportunities visit the Matthaei-Nichols website: mbgna.umich.edu. Or call/email volunteer coordinator Sharyn Falls Dennis: 734.647.8528; dsharyn@umich.edu.

Dig into Our Garden Teams

Contact volunteer coordinator Sharyn Dennis: mbgna.volunteer@umich.edu; 734.647.8528.

Matthaei Garden Team
Learn new gardening techniques and help maintain a variety of display and exhibit gardens. Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday 9 am–noon.

Nichols Garden Team
Help maintain the horticultural collections at the Washington Heights entrance, including the Peony Garden, Gateway Garden, and Laurel Ridge. Monday & Friday, 9 am–noon.

Gaffield Children’s Garden Team
Enjoy this playful space and help tend the veggie and fruit garden, the pollinator garden, and faerie and troll knoll. Must enjoy working in a kid-friendly environment. Friday, 9 am–noon.

Natural Areas Team
Explore and learn about the many natural areas, trees, trails, and native landscaping at the Arb and Gardens while helping with seasonal maintenance, removal of invasive species, and eco-restoration.

Native Plant Team
Tend a variety of native landscapes at Matthaei including the Great Lakes Garden. Responsibilities include general gardening maintenance. Weekdays, AM, and PM shifts.

Nature Pop-Ups at the Gaffield Children’s Garden
Help children explore the gardens through nature play. Weekly nature pop-ups encourage children to explore the garden by touching, tasting, and creating. Monday 9–11 am.

Above: Year-round, students and student groups participate in eco-restoration workdays that occur each month in the arboretum and the botanical gardens.

shakespeare in the arb
Volunteers needed
Performance dates: June 7-10; 14-17; 21-24

“Wherefore art thou Shakespeare in the Arb volunteers?” We’re seeking volunteers for this summer’s play, Romeo and Juliet, directed by U-M Residential College’s Kate Mendeloff. Ushers and box office assistance needed (pm shifts only). Orientation required.

For more information call/email volunteer coordinator Sharyn Falls Dennis: 734.647.8528; dsharyn@umich.edu.