The Garden contains the University’s collection of around 8000 different living plants including a fine collection of trees and shrubs (mostly arranged by taxonomic grouping) and holds nine national collections under the auspices of Plant Heritage. Well known features include the limestone rock garden, the systematic beds, the woodland and stream gardens, the dry garden, the scented garden and the renowned winter garden. One of the most popular and key features is the glasshouse range featuring temperate and tropical environments.

The Garden’s purpose is to provide a research and teaching facility for the University. It plays an important part in the conservation of threatened plants and offers educational courses to the public. In addition, it is a significant public amenity visited by over 250,000 visitors a year, some of whom also book a guided tour of the Garden.

The Guided Tours
The tours are an important part of the Garden’s outreach programme and aim to increase the educational value, interest and enjoyment of a visit to the Garden. A team of volunteer guides conducts them. Standard group tours last for one and a half hours and must be booked in advance. Depending on the season and on what is looking good, the tour will include reference to the history of the Garden, its key collections, features and other areas identified as of interest by the guide.

Tours are offered all year round, 7 days a week and during summer evenings after the Garden closes to the public. There are fewer tours during the winter months with the busiest time being from April to September. The Garden also offers free one-hour tours at weekends and on special event days. These offer limited spaces to visitors who sign up on the day.

The Guides
The guides are drawn from a variety of backgrounds but are united by a love of the Garden and a desire to share this with visitors. They offer their time, skills and experience free of charge. They are required to sign a volunteer agreement.

We require enthusiastic communicators who enjoy engaging with the public. Our guides need to have a strong interest and some knowledge of plants and trees plus a willingness to learn more. The guides are an important part of the public profile of the Garden. Their work is much appreciated and they receive ongoing and strong support from the staff of the Garden.

Guide commitments
We require volunteers who can offer flexible availability and commit to our comprehensive one-year training programme. During the year, a guide might expect to undertake about 10 or 12 tours.

In addition to the required training, Guides are also invited to attend at least one planning meeting each year that includes a tour of the Garden by a senior member of the Horticultural staff.

The Guide Training Programme
There is an ongoing training programme, the aim of which is to help the guides to be knowledgeable and authoritative. With around 8000 plants, many of which are on display in the public areas, there are wonderful opportunities for the guides to put together an interesting narrative for a tour, within a required framework. Each guide develops his or her own way of doing this, responding to current seasonal interest, whilst encouraging questions and endeavouring to answer them. There are
opportunities to meet the other guides socially at monthly lunches and at a social event usually on a weekday evening in November.

Training for guides will last for about one year. On being accepted for training, each trainee is assigned a mentor from the pool of existing guides. Mentors play an important support role throughout the training. A mentor offers the trainee the benefit of their experience and is there to answer any questions.

The training programme consists of four core sessions: history of the Garden, tree collection, systematic beds and glasshouses. Other training sessions are offered from time to time for the benefit of all guides and trainees. In addition to this, trainees are expected to shadow at least five tours, each by a different guide. Training in presentation skills and how to conduct a group in the Garden is also offered.

Trainees will have access to a dedicated virtual learning environment where information for the guides is stored. In addition, the Garden’s website is a rich source of information about the Garden and all new volunteers are invited to attend a Garden Induction Day.

When the trainee and their mentor feel they are ready to be assessed, the trainee will be asked to prepare a tour lasting for about one hour for a small group that may contain one or more guides and several Garden staff members.

Once trained, all guides are expected to keep up to date with developments in the Garden, to attend the annual meeting and as many as possible of the training sessions that are offered.

The Selection Process…the next step

An Expression of Interest Form should be completed and submitted by those wishing to be considered as a Guide. All applicants must be aged 18 or over.

A meeting will be arranged for those applicants most closely matching our requirements. This will be an opportunity to discuss the role with the Volunteer Guide Co-ordinator and a member of the Administration team.

Please download and complete the Expression of Interest Form and post or email to:

Administration
Cambridge University Botanic Garden
1 Brookside, Cambridge, CB2 1JE

admin@botanic.cam.ac.uk

The closing date for receipt of completed forms is Friday 25 February 2022.