



U.S. National Arboretum

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National Bonsai Apprenticeship

Exceptional Horticultural Opportunity at the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum

Description

The U.S. National Arboretum is offering a unique opportunity for an individual to receive advanced bonsai training at the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum located in Washington, DC. This national apprenticeship program prepares aspiring horticulturists with the knowledge needed for a career in bonsai collection management. The successful applicant will be involved in the day-to-day care of a storied collection of historic bonsai, some of them in training for hundreds of years, and will receive one-on-one instruction from museum staff to develop skill in the styling and maintenance of bonsai.

This apprenticeship provides the incumbent access to one of the largest bonsai collections in the United States, bonsai literature and scholarship, and an introduction to a network of professional bonsai practitioners from around the world. Many of our past apprentices are now curating bonsai collections in both private and public gardens across the United States.

This training opportunity is from early March through the end of November each year. The position has a 40-hour work week of five days per week and does require weekend work. The apprentice receives a weekly stipend of \$1320 from the Friends of the National Arboretum; this is not a federal government position. Housing is not provided.

Qualifications

Applicants should have an active interest in the art of bonsai and a basic understanding of plant care. While coursework is not required, candidates who demonstrate commitment to the art of bonsai are desired. Background knowledge of and/or experience in horticulture, life sciences, or visual arts is a plus.

Duties

The bonsai apprenticeship will prepare individuals for bonsai collection and public garden management. The selected candidate will assist the museum staff with all duties related to managing the gardens and bonsai collection at the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum at the U.S. National Arboretum. As the apprentice's knowledge, skills, and abilities develop, supervised work on the bonsai will be offered. Responsibilities will include seasonal garden and bonsai care, such as repotting, pruning, wiring, de-wiring, and other maintenance as needed. The apprentice will also assist with educational programs offered to the public by helping to teach classes and bonsai demonstrations.



Andy Bello, 2019 National Bonsai Apprentice (left) and Isiah White, 2024 National Bonsai Apprentice (right).

As an integral part of the U.S. National Arboretum, the National Bonsai & Penjing Museum serves over 700,000 visitors each year. Courteous and helpful interaction with visitors is essential. Daily tasks related to museum operations include keeping gardens and bonsai displays clean, opening and closing the museum, weeding, and watering. The apprentice will frequently be called upon to safely lift and move heavy but fragile trees around the museum. Much of the work is performed outdoors in all weather conditions, including heat, cold, and rain.

The apprentice will join other U.S. National Arboretum staff and interns on field trips to public gardens in the Washington, DC area. They will develop an independent study project related to bonsai design in collaboration with the Museum Curator, which will be presented to staff of the U.S. National Arboretum and the Friends of the National Arboretum.

Applications

Applications will be accepted until December 1, 2026.

Please email a cover letter including your personal background in bonsai and your long-term career plan to USNA.Internships@usda.gov. Describe pertinent talents and life experiences that you bring to this position. Also include your resume, references, and transcripts (unofficial are acceptable). If you have any questions, please call the National Arboretum's internship coordinator at 202-245-5093.