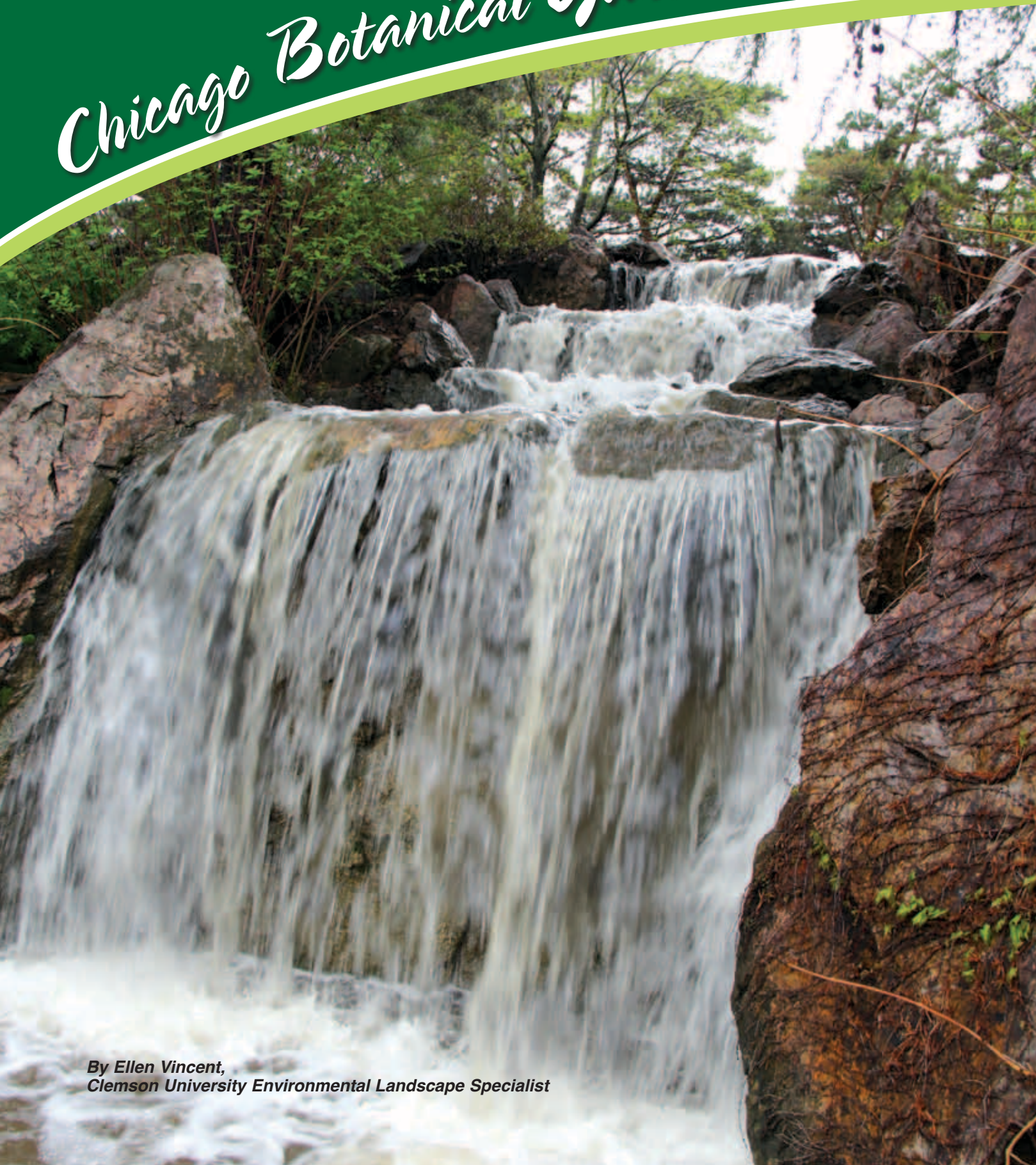


Chicago Botanical Garden



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Chicago. Known for wind and rain; historic gangsters and shoot outs; and really good music. Chicago is also a premier contemporary destination for green roofs, architecture, and one supreme botanic garden. What impressed me about this public garden was the extraordinary landscape design, education, and communication. The exemplary design, installation, and maintenance evident in this space calls not for just one visit-but many. The commitment to education-both passive and interactive is startling and refreshing.

Many public gardens will hire several to many architectural firms and landscape designers over time; obtain multiple donors with individual desires; and need to express the changing visions of its directors or trustees. To

a garden visitor/viewer these design changes may appear as abrupt hardscape materials transitions such as gravel paths attaching to asphalt; a bell tower competing with three large oaks; or a huge steel structure adjacent to a historic wooden hut. Chicago Botanic Garden has managed to align its natural and built environmental changes with startling grace and beauty-holding true to its design intent.

The entrance at Chicago Botanic Garden is unassuming, and boasts espalier on each side of the entrance door. The clean orderly repetition of horizontal and vertical lines represent simplicity, a principle of design that welcomes rather than challenges a viewer. Cherry trees overhang wood benches and small beds and containers of perennials and seasonal annuals represent

good sense of scale -the materials are all in relative proportion to each other allowing the eye to move gracefully up down and from side to side.

Once you enter the Visitor's Center you have choices to make. You can enter the café that is lined with windows that overlook gardens and purchase fresh packaged foods, like tabouli quinoa salad, or order burgers at the counter; or you can enter the gift shop and buy live plants, clothing, art, books, or jewelry; or you can become a member and receive a black bag or umbrella embossed with the Chicago Botanic Garden logo ; or you can simply walk straight out into the gardens on a bridge with an arbor covered with plants. Tough choices-but any one of them should prove rewarding. The principles of rhythm and line are evident here as you

can easily turn left (café) or right (gift shop) while straight ahead is the bridge that takes you to the display gardens. Once you are on the bridge simplicity is again represented by the container plantings that hang above and to the sides of you. Each container repeats similar plant materials, though the arrangement of materials varies between baskets.

Chicago Botanic Garden features 26 display gardens on 385 acres and employs 250 people. Each themed space displays equal emphasis of plant and hardscape elements, which demonstrates the principle of design termed "balance". Circular or rectangular windows appear in many walls and hedges that offer perfect natural views onto another garden space. The item that appears in the window then becomes a "focal



point"; the feature that immediately draws the eye. The English Walled Garden quickly reminded me of the residential gardens of Charleston—iron gates; old stone walls, vines, and tasteful wood benches. Lush, full, and elegant-yet welcoming.

Water is used extensively at Chicago Botanic Garden as a design feature; creating magnificent effects on the senses, another principle of design. Large and small bodies of water are visible as you cross bridges to get to gardens on islands. Lakes surround and move through this public garden—and are striking when viewed behind the tulip or rose plantings or through the leaves and branches of a willow tree. Fountains and waterfalls are incorporated into many garden spaces—subtle water spilling and pooling in the Heritage Garden fountain or noisy water falling through rocks and splashing into a pool along the lakeside. You are never far from the sound or sight of water and plenty of interactive opportunities exist for feet and hand dipping.

Communications are strong and clear at Chicago Botanic

Garden and clearly support the education mission. A kiosk holding a marked map and sprigs of plants in bloom help you pick your path for the day. An elderly gentleman sitting on a stool at the entrance offers genuine welcome greetings and good bye well-wishes to all who pass. He simultaneously holds court with any visitor who wants to stop and talk or who asks for directions.

Trees have individual inconspicuous metal name tags hanging from them as well as larger name plates in the ground. Individual garden entrances contain signage that clearly identifies the donor and the intentions of the space. There is a free garden guide app for people with digital devices. Erasable signage boards are posted in hallways, restrooms, and even outdoors which allows for changing communications and announcements of events and plants to notice.

Chicago Botanic Garden offers a multitude of educational programs—and the certificate programs run by Amelia Simmons Hurt, Manager of the Adult Education Certificate Programs of the Regenstein

School are exemplary. Certificates for school teachers, green industry professionals, and avid hobbyists exist in areas such as botanical art, photography, landscape design, professional gardening, horticulture therapy, and healthcare garden design to name a few. I represented Clemson's Institute for Engaged Aging by attending a one-day symposium on healthcare garden design that was part of a larger 8-day certificate program. Chicago Botanic Garden installed one of the first interactive educational healing gardens in the United States along with an annual healing garden symposium that draws attendees and speakers from all over the United States.

Communications are dynamic between the Botanic Garden and the education program registrant. Personal email confirmations were sent after registration; complete hotel, taxi, and other nearby gardens of interest lists were sent as well. On site, signs announcing the event and pointing the way to the correct building appeared often enough to keep even the spatially challenged from getting lost. Amelia and her

assistants personally stood outside the meeting room doors to greet participants and answer questions. They were there as ambassadors during breaks and lunch as well.

The education facilities were upscale and comfortable and the botanical art and gardens that appeared indoors enhanced the educational experience. To get to my conference room I walked along a corridor that featured the bonsai collection on my left, it was in a walled courtyard where artists were at work outside; while on my right I could see a class of tai-chi practitioners.

Before the symposium began I met the Director of Horticulture Tim Johnson and two Assistant Horticulturists Tom Weaver and Kathryn Deery to learn about internship opportunities for Clemson horticulture students. These three professionals impressed me with their shared commitment to plants, visitors, and students; and their desire to teach their trade to others. I highly recommend the Chicago Botanic Garden as a destination for education, clear communication, and exemplary design.