



GARDEN PROFESSIONAL SPOTLIGHT  
**JUSTIN HENDERSON**

GARDEN DIRECTOR  
 POWELLSWOOD GARDEN

**TELL US ABOUT YOUR JOURNEY IN THE GARDEN INDUSTRY.**

Gardening found me six years ago. All of my career I've been in non-profits, but I had little appreciation of horticulture. At the time, I was working for a church and serving as the executive director of a local food bank. My emphasis was to build community and provide food to those in need. I was asked by the board to create a community vegetable garden. Begrudgingly and with almost no knowledge I went to work. As I began to improve the soil, something inside of me clicked. I discovered a joy unlike any that I had ever experienced. Soon I was completely obsessed. We transformed a desolate plot into a full-fledged two-acre food forest. My heart's desire to impact others had found a new outlet, by means of connecting people to nature! I began to dream of a full-time career in gardening, I just had no clue of the path. In 2017, it was time for me to move on from my

work at the church and food bank. I stumbled on an internet ad for an open garden director position at PowellsWood. I applied and the rest is history.

**TELL US ABOUT A RECENT PROJECT YOU WORKED ON.**

When I began working at PowellsWood, I started taking photos of the garden with my phone and posting them to Instagram because I wanted the rest of the world to know how beautiful the plants were. We had about 60 followers. I was surprised to find the high level of interest that these photos generated. One day Monte Powell, our owner, came into the garden and handed me his Nikon. My photography improved drastically and now we have 8,600 followers on Instagram. I have discovered that there is a universal connection between people and plants. Our role is simply to celebrate it.

**WHAT DO YOU FIND TO BE THE MOST REWARDING THING ABOUT WORKING IN THIS INDUSTRY?**

I have felt so embraced and welcomed by the public garden community. Coming into a new career field I was quite intimidated. I questioned if this was the right career choice for me but once I started networking with other public gardens and meeting the outstanding souls who operate them, I knew that I had found a home. Just recently, I attended the Association's annual conference and met countless people who listened to my story and offered their wisdom. I left feeling encouraged, embraced, and supported. The Association and other regional networks have given me great hope for the future of public gardens. 🌸

Interview by Ian Simpkins, Deputy Director for Horticulture & Urban Agriculture, at Vizcaya Museum and Gardens