

PERENNIALS



GARDEN PROFESSIONAL SPOTLIGHT

EDDY DAWSON DIRECTOR OF PROGRAMS RED BUTTE BOTANICAL GARDENS

TELL US ABOUT YOUR JOURNEY IN THE GARDEN INDUSTRY.

My love of plants and my willingness to embrace change have followed me throughout my life. When I was five years old, I planted a pine tree at our house. The next year, when we had to move, I insisted my dad dig it up and take it with us. We moved around quite a bit, but I always embraced the chance to explore natural areas and build gardens with my dad.

In college, the changes did not slow down. As an undergrad student at Texas A&M, I began as a chemistry major but quickly changed to horticulture. Later as a master's student, what started as a traditional plant taxonomy pursuit shifted to a master's in botanical informatics; I was drawn to the booming technology arena and its potential to impact other fields like botany.

I've spent the last 20 years at Red Butte Botanical Garden in Salt Lake City. I started as the assistant curator and later hired on as curator of plant records, where I brought my technology skills to bear by modernizing the plant records database and introducing GIS to the garden. From there, I transitioned into a broader technology role as the Director of Information Technology. I still stayed close to my horticulture roots, teaching the occasional horticulture class and tech-based summer camp.

"Everyone loves plants; not everyone knows it" is my life's mantra. Two years ago, I moved into my current role as

Director of Programs to embrace this idea to its fullest. I work with an extraordinary team to connect plants to our surrounding community. We are currently in the process of reimagining how to do this.

TELL US ABOUT A RECENT PROJECT YOU WORKED ON.

One of our most popular programs is Garden After Dark, which can draw up to 1,700 people a night. But because of COVID-19, we needed to adhere to strict regulations. Instead of canceling the event, we decided to mirror our timed admissions model to spread the crowds out over a month-long event. My staff designed the event to be hands-off and self-guided, keeping our team, guests, performers, and artists well-spaced and safe.

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

The most rewarding thing is witnessing that "aha" moment: seeing adults and children alike realize that plants are cool. It's great to see your mission in action when someone is inspired and recharged. I find joy in seeing my staff succeed and empowering them to do so—especially during a challenging time like COVID-19. I love working with plant people.

Eddy and his children, Quinn and Amber, enjoy visiting the Water Conservation Garden at Red Butte Botanical Gardens.

Photo: Ashley Schoenfeld of Miles of Memories Photography