

Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden's Sustainable Urban Landscapes Symposium Talk Descriptions and Speaker Biographies March 19, 2026



O'Dell, Oh My! A Closer Look at the Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden's Community Garden Projects

JEROME STENGER, Associate Director of Horticulture, Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden, 9:00AM–9:50AM

2025 was the first year that our Horticulture team planted more trees, shrubs and perennials off Zoo property than on Zoo property. Where are those plants going, and why? This talk will quickly summarize 2025 community garden projects, then peel back the curtain on one inspiring and unique greenspace—the brand new O'dell Owens Urban Learning Garden in Walnut Hills. Learn about the process, from design to delivery (and continued maintenance), of this botanical gem.

Jerome Stenger is the Associate Director of Horticulture at the Cincinnati Zoo & Botanical Garden, where he's worked since 2017. Prior, he managed Painters Greenhouse, an independent garden center and eco-tourism destination in Western North Carolina, from 2010–2017. Jerome graduated from Ohio Wesleyan University in 2007 with a BA in English, which he uses when writing talk descriptions and bios.

From Bringing Nature Home to the New Wild: A Balanced Perspective, Part I—Going Native

ED LYON, (Retired) Director of Reiman Gardens, 9:50AM–10:40AM

A recent noble gardening trend is a movement to using native plants in the home garden. However, most home landscapes have changed considerably from the cultural conditions that were originally indigenous to the site. The honorable push to support this movement tends to highlight the idyllic without education that addresses reality. Many worthy garden movements have failed due to oversimplifying information, resulting in unhappy homeowners who revert to a simpler form of gardening—or abandon gardening altogether—when these new trends fail to work. Go native, what might this mean to you as professional, educator or gardener? This talk will attempt to balance the real-life challenges with the benefits of the native plant movement.

Ed Lyon is a retired professional horticulturist and gardener with 25 years' experience in the public garden field and dirt under his nails from intensive lifelong personal gardening. He most recently served as Director of Reiman Gardens, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa, a position from which he retired in May 2024.

He authored "Growing the Midwest Garden" for Timber Press, which was released in May of 2015. For 25 years through Spellbound Garden Writing & Consultation, he has presented to both public and professional audiences. He has written for national gardening magazines, most regularly Fine Gardening and occasionally others. He developed an on-line tutorial on garden design for Garden Gate Magazine and on shade gardening for Fine Gardening magazine.

His Wisconsin and Iowa home gardens were destinations for garden tours, and the Iowa garden was featured in Garden Gate magazine, including the cover. He recently moved to America's Garden Capital, Philadelphia.

Preserving (and Appreciating) Heritage Trees

KRIS BACHTELL, (Retired) Vice President of Collections

Morton Arboretum, 11:00AM–11:50AM

Horticulturist Kris Bachtell has over 40 years of experience observing and working with many notable heritage trees in the Chicagoland area. Heritage trees are those specimens that are recognized for their unique size, age, historical or horticultural significance. Due to their history, there are some fascinating stories linked to each tree. These stories often have notable connections to the local community, but it often takes a little “sleuthing” to discover the fun facts.

While the trees he will cover during his presentation are based in the Chicagoland area, you will learn how to how to recognize these important specimens as well as how to unveil their unique stories. He will also review how they can be maintained to help preserve them along with propagation techniques to grow additional specimens for future generations to enjoy.

*After nearly 44 years of service, **Kris Bachtell** recently retired as the Vice President of Collections and Horticulture at The Morton Arboretum in Lisle, IL. His role included directing the horticulture and grounds operations for one of the largest arboreta in the United States.*

His interests included evaluating plants suitable for the colder, harsher climate of the upper Midwest, and introducing these plants through the nursery trade. He serves as the Director for Chicagoland Grows Plant Introduction Program, a joint venture of The Morton Arboretum, Chicago Botanic Garden, and the Ornamental Growers Association of Northern Illinois (OGA). This program seeks to evaluate, introduce, and promote plants into the nursery trade that possess useful landscape features and can withstand the climate and soils of the upper Midwest. Kris has been directly involved with introducing over 20 outstanding selections from the Morton Arboretum's collection into the nursery and landscape trade.

Kris has worked for nearly 40 years as a tree care consultant to golf courses, cemeteries, and private estates throughout the Midwest U.S. This work often involved a comprehensive inventory and assessment of tree populations. He also specializes in training staff members in planting, pruning, and tree protection techniques to help ensure successful tree establishment and growth.

BS in Ornament Horticulture, University of Illinois, Urbana, IL. MS in Horticulture, University of Wisconsin, Madison, IL.

From Bringing Nature Home to the New Wild: A Balanced Perspective, Part II—The Big Picture (Reality Bites)

ED LYON, (Retired) Director of Reiman Gardens, 12:50PM–1:40PM

Horticultural education has seen an unfortunate transition to heavy dominance by social media and other online sources. For the first time in the presenter's lifetime, we are seeing many of the advances made due to continually evolving research revert to advice including old wives' tales, myths, and falsehoods. At the same time, human modification of our soils; rapidly changing climate; invasives; new diseases and insects; and other spiraling-out-of-control issues require the most recent research and applications, not debunked recommendations. These changes are some of the most rapid in history and this presentation looks at the changes in educational recommendations/advice and how it correlates to current trends such as the native plant movement and future gardening efforts. We will look at those predicted climatic shifts, their history, future expectations and what it might mean to horticulture in the future.

The Scientific Truth About Turf

DR. MARK CARROLL, *University of Maryland, 1:40PM–2:30PM*

Lawns are pervasive within the anthropogenic landscape. They provide many ecosystem services and are valued as a recreational surface. They are also viewed by some as a resource depleting feature of the landscape that can pose a threat to public health and to the environment. More specifically, practices used to maintain turfgrass are frequently cited as being a contributor to atmospheric warming, regional air and water quality degradation, declining ecological diversity and increased municipal consumptive water use.

This presentation will provide an overview of research that has examined the impact of turfgrass management practices on processes that affect atmospheric warming, regional air and water quality degradation and presence of pollinators. The presentation will also touch upon how public policies actions, by governmental bodies, have altered turfgrass management practices and presence of lawns in the landscape.

Dr. Carroll is an Associate Professor within the Department of Plant Science and Landscape Architecture and Director of the Environmental Science and Policy Program at the University of Maryland. The latter is a multidiscipline undergraduate program that includes participation of 9 departments that are spread across 3 colleges and the School of Public Health at the University.

Dr. Carroll's research focuses on water quality issues in the management of turfgrasses and the development of low input sustainable turfgrass systems. He has examined the fate of pesticides and nutrients in turf systems and the development of innovative approaches that minimize lawn fertilizer use. Dr. Carroll teaches Introductory to Turfgrass Science and Management and oversees the internship program within the Department of Plant Science and Landscape Architecture. He is also the creator of one the universities signature "Big Question courses" entitled Lawns in the Landscape: Environmental Hero or Villian.

Paperbark Maple Conservation Project

KRIS BACHTELL, *(Retired) Vice President of Collections, Morton Arboretum, 2:50PM–3:40PM*

Although it is a well-known and beloved garden plant, paperbark maple (*Acer griseum*) is endangered in its native habitat in China. To help secure its future, Kris Bachtell has traveled worldwide collecting samples of the species, from public gardens in the United States and United Kingdom to the wilds of the People's Republic of China. These expeditions are helping scientists understand the genetic diversity of the species to guide its planting and conservation. Get a botanist's perspective on the history of paperbark maple in the wild and in cultivation and learn how this project can serve as a model for helping to conserve other threatened species.

How Emerging Technologies Can Help You Meet Your Conservation Goals

ADAM BAKER, *Davey Resource Group, 3:40PM–4:30PM*

In this talk we will discuss three studies that provide insight into the conservation of pollinators using technology and novel approaches. 1) Benefits of using drones to establish pollinator habitat on public and private lands, 2) Using machine learning to assess the value of pollinator habitats, 3) Assessing predation of monarchs using artificial caterpillars.

Dr. Adam M. Baker conducts research and provides educational training as a Research Entomologist with the Davey Institute. His expertise is in pollinator ecology, conservation, and the responsible management of pests in the urban landscape. Adam's research explores the ecology and conservation of pollinators and beneficial insects, pests of ornamental trees and shrubs, and the ecological value of landscape design.