ROYAL BOTANIC GARDEN EDINBURGH

Director of Horticulture Candidate Pack

September 2026

“All known life depends on plants, yet approximately 45% of the world’s plant species are threatened with extinction. In this context, the skills, ambition, and ingenuity of botanic gardens are more crucial than ever. The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh is a global leader in plant research, education, and horticulture, dedicated to shaping a better future. We are the custodians of the National Botanical Collection, provide high-quality scientific evidence to drive impactful conservation action, and enrich individuals and communities through transformative learning and engagement.”

Professor Julia Knights
Regius Keeper, Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

A MESSAGE FROM THE REGIUS KEEPER

Thank you for your interest in the Director of Horticulture role.

Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh is home to one of the richest living plant collections on Earth and is Scotland's scientific centre of global excellence in plant science, horticulture, education and conservation. We welcome nearly one million visitors annually to our four gardens; Logan in Dumfries and Galloway, Benmore in Argyll, Dawyck in the Scottish Borders, and Edinburgh. We also have an ambitious programme of capital refurbishment underway across our Edinburgh estate through the transformative Edinburgh Biomes programme, including the restoration of our iconic Palm Houses and a new sustainable Energy Centre.

This pivotal role will be a key part of our Executive Team and will lead talented horticulture teams across our gardens, under glass and outdoor, act as Curator of our National Living Collection of Plants, Plant Health and leading our gardens strategic planning on the impact of climate change on the collection.

This is an exciting opportunity to help shape our global reputation for horticulture and shape the future to help us deliver real impact in the fight against biodiversity loss and climate change.

With the opportunity to help shape this next exciting chapter as we approach the next phase of our corporate strategy, this role also comes with a competitive salary, generous pension, excellent training, and an incredible work environment, based in Edinburgh with engagement across our four stunning botanic gardens.

Thank you in advance for your interest.
Julia

Professor Julia Knights
Regius Keeper (CEO), Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh

OUR ORGANISATION

The Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh is a world-leading centre for plant science, horticulture, and conservation, education, and public engagement. Founded in 1670 as a physic garden for the study of medicinal plants, it attracts over one million visitors each year and holds one of the world's most diverse botanical collections.
We have four gardens in Scotland; Benmore, Dawyck, Edinburgh and Logan.

Through a wide network of national and international partnerships, we pursue our mission to Explore, Conserve and Explain the World of Plants, addressing global biodiversity loss and climate change.

Funding is drawn equally from Scottish Government Grant-in-Aid and self-generated income, reflecting our dual role as a public institution and an enterprising organisation. The continued growth of commercial activity, philanthropic support, and consultancy work is a key strategic priority for ensuring long-term sustainability and impact.

OUR STRATEGIC DIRECTION

Guided by the strategy *Responding to the Biodiversity Crisis and Climate Emergency (2021-2026), our* work focuses on:

- **Understanding plant and fungal diversity for the benefit of society:** our scientific research seeks to understand the threats facing species and biomes, and how they respond to environmental change. We develop strategies and actions to conserve biodiversity both in Scotland and around the world.

- **Conserving and developing botanical collections:** we curate and enhance the National Botanical Collection as a living scientific and cultural heritage resource, and we support the development of botanical collections globally – particularly in partnerships with countries across the Global South.

- **Engaging and educating people:** we build global capacity to respond to the biodiversity and climate crises by sharing scientific, horticultural and conservation expertise through education and public engagement, inspiring people of all ages to value and protect the natural world.

OUR COLLECTIONS AND COMMUNITY

At the heart of our mission are the National Botanical Collections - the Living Collection, Herbarium and Library and Archives – which underpin our science, horticulture, learning and conservation. The Living Collection is curated across four Gardens – Edinburgh, Benmore, Dawyck and Logan, spanning Scotland's varied climates. Together they grow over 13,500 plant species, many rare or threatened, making us a global leader in conservation horticulture and ex situ plant conservation.

- Edinburgh: a 72-acre garden just a mile from the city centre showcasing over 100,000 plants, with features including the world-renowned Rock Garden, Chinese Hillside and network of historic and modernist public Glasshouses, sitting alongside the crucial research houses, currently being restored through the Edinburgh Biomes Project.

- Benmore: set in the dramatic Argyll landscape, this 120-acre mountainside garden is famed for its rhododendron and conifer collections of global significance and is a key visitor attraction for the west coast, sitting at the gateway to Loch Lomond and The Trossachs National Park.

- Dawyck: in the heart of the Scottish Borders, is the most continental climate of our four sites and is an internationally renowned arboretum, playing a key role in conservation and climate resilience.

- Logan: in Dumfries & Galloway showcasing tender southern hemisphere plants, not generally seen growing outdoors this far north, alongside other temperate and maritime species in a striking and exotic setting.

Science, Conservation and Learning

Together, our Horticulture and Science teams collaborate to understand and conserve biodiversity, restore habitats, and develop sustainable plant management practices. The Living Collection provides the foundation for discovery science, conservation translocations and climate adaptation.

Training and skills development are central to our work. Through specialist degree and diploma programmes, short courses and online learning, we nurture professionals who go on to lead in horticulture, plant science, conservation and research education worldwide.

Community and Visitors

The four Gardens within the organisation are places of beauty and tranquillity, where visitors experience the restorative power of nature. From moments of quiet reflection to vibrant seasonal displays, they promote health, wellbeing and inspiration, deepening people's connection with the living world. The Gardens also inspire curiosity and creativity through education, art and community engagement.

A dedicated community of horticulturists, scientists, educators and volunteers share a passion for plants and a commitment to public benefit, conservation and environmental stewardship. Together, they create welcoming spaces that celebrate the diversity of life and the vital role plants play in sustaining it.

For further details visit rbge.org.uk

Vision

A positive future for plants, people and planet.

Mission

To explore, conserve and explain the world of plants.

THE ROLE

We are looking for an inspiring and forward-thinking Director of Horticulture to shape and lead the delivery of our horticulture, champion the stewardship and growth of our globally significant Living Collections and strengthen our connections with communities and partners, locally, nationally and internationally.

As a member of our Executive Team, reporting to the Regius Keeper, you will combine operational excellence with bold strategic vision. Your leadership will drive innovation in conservation horticulture, sustainability, climate resilience, and biodiversity recovery. You will also be a passionate advocate for horticulture — helping to elevate the profession and promote it as an exciting, rewarding career path for people from all backgrounds.

This role also includes leading our horticulture and botanic garden consultancy services and developing partnerships that generate income aligned with our mission, ensuring the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh continues to thrive as a leading global centre for science, horticulture and conservation.

Key responsibilities

Strategic and Operational Leadership

- Shape the future of horticulture at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh by setting a bold strategic direction, creating a Masterplan for each of our four gardens, that includes adaptation and migration strategies to address the impacts of climate change. Collaboration with the Garden Curators and other stakeholders is essential, ensuring alignments with our goals in biodiversity research, conservation, learning, visitor experience, community engagement, and organisational development.
- Inspire and lead the Horticulture division, championing excellence in standards, sustainability, and the care and curation of our Living Collections.
- Ensure smooth and safe operations through effective resource planning, risk management, and a strong commitment to health and safety for all.
- Collaborate as part of our Executive and Senior Leadership teams, contributing to a positive, inclusive culture and the successful leadership of the organisation.
- Engage with governance by attending Board of Trustees meetings and providing clear, impactful reporting on horticultural progress and priorities.
- Drive innovation in major projects, serving as the horticultural lead for Edinburgh Biomes and capital development programmes, and working closely with the Estates and Sustainability team to deliver infrastructure that supports net-zero ambitions and Scotland's National Outcomes.

Conservation Horticulture

- Lead innovations in conservation horticulture, working closely with the Science team to advance in and ex situ conservation, rare species propagation, and programmes for reintroduction and translocation — helping protect plant diversity for future generations.

- Champion plant health and resilience, overseeing policy and operations in horticulture in collaboration with the Science team to safeguard our collections and ecosystems.
- Foster collaboration across disciplines, partnering with Science, Estates and Sustainability, and Learning and Engagement teams to deliver integrated, innovative approaches to biodiversity conservation and ecological restoration.
- Shape strategies for global impact, developing horticultural plans that contribute to national and international conservation goals and support climate adaptation for a sustainable future.

Advocacy and Senior Influence

- Champion horticulture as a force for positive change, highlighting its vital role in tackling biodiversity loss, improving public health, building climate resilience, advancing urban greening, and promoting environmental education — locally and globally.
- Shape policy and partnerships for impact, influencing horticultural and environmental agendas by contributing to advocacy work and forging strong, collaborative relationships with governments, conservation organisations, and botanic institutions worldwide.
- Be a visible and trusted voice for horticulture, representing the organisation and the wider sector through active participation in networks, advisory bodies, media, and public forums — amplifying the importance of horticulture in addressing global challenges.
- Inspire and empower future generations, working with our Learning and Engagement, People and Organisational Development teams, and partners to promote horticulture as an inclusive, rewarding career through training, outreach, and visibility initiatives that welcome people from all backgrounds.

Income Development and Consultancy

- Lead the growth and delivery of horticultural consultancy services, working in partnership with our Centres of Excellence to share expertise in botanic garden development, biodiversity conservation, and plant health — helping clients create sustainable, thriving landscapes.
- Identify and develop mission-aligned opportunities that strengthen the organisation's financial sustainability while staying true to our values and global impact goals.
- Support fundraising success by working closely with the Development team on donor engagement, acquisition, and stewardship, ensuring every contribution makes a difference.
- Build meaningful partnerships with clients, stakeholders, and funders to expand our reach through innovative services, collaborative projects, and strategic alliances.

Undertake other tasks as agreed with the Regius Keeper.

PERSON SPECIFICATION

Essential skills

- Proven senior leadership experience in horticulture — ideally within a botanic garden, conservation, or heritage landscape setting — bringing vision and impact to complex environments.
- Exceptional leadership and people management skills, with experience guiding and empowering large, diverse teams to achieve shared goals.
- Hold a recognised qualification in horticulture, plant science or a closely related field.
- Collaborative and inclusive leader, with high emotional intelligence and a strong commitment to championing equality, diversity, and inclusion in all aspects of work.
- Comprehensive expertise in living collections management and conservation horticulture, ensuring the highest standards of care and innovation.
- Outstanding communication and advocacy skills, with experience representing organisations confidently in public, policy, and media arenas.
- Strategic and solutions-focused thinker, skilled in budget and risk management, driving continuous improvement, and leading successful change initiatives.
- Passionate advocate for the future of horticulture, committed to inspiring new generations and widening access to horticultural careers for people from all backgrounds.

Desirable skills

- Experience of Masterplan creation for a garden or conservation site to adapt and mitigate to the impacts of climate change.
- Bring experience in developing or managing consultancy or commercial projects that advance horticulture or conservation goals.
- Understand UK and international biodiversity and environmental policy frameworks, and how they shape conservation practice.
- Collaborate effectively across sectors, with experience working on multi-partner conservation or greening projects involving public bodies, academia, and NGOs.

TERMS OF APPOINTMENT

This role is based at the Royal Botanic Garden Edinburgh's HQ in the capital with regular travel to our gardens at Benmore, Dawyck and Logan, and occasional travel to elsewhere in the United Kingdom and overseas. Hybrid and flexible working are also possible.

We offer a generous employment package:

- Annually alongside your starting salary of £93,341, the organisation contributes 28.97% of this towards you being a member of the defined benefit Civil Service Pension scheme. Your pension pot in this scheme will grow by 2.32% per year.
- 25 days holiday entitlement on appointment, increasing to 30 days after 2 years of service, with the option to buy additional holidays.
- 11.5 days of public and privilege holidays annually.
- A range of staff support mechanisms, including an employee assistance programme, cycle to work and staff discount schemes.
- A number of family-friendly options to support work-life balance, including flexible working arrangements, enhanced contractual maternity, paternity, adoption, and shared parental leave, and career breaks.
- Discounts in our shop, restaurants, and cafes.

HOW TO APPLY

To apply, please email recruitment@rbge.org.uk with:

- Your CV
- A covering letter outlining the skills, knowledge and experience you would bring to the role
- A digitally completed equal opportunities questionnaire*: EOQ form

The closing date for applications is midday (GMT) on Monday 5 January 2026. Interviews will be held in February 2026.

To arrange an informal discussion about the role, please contact Jennifer Martin at jmartin@rbge.org.uk

*The equal opportunities monitoring online form will not be shared with anyone involved in assessing your application. Please complete this as part of the application process.