



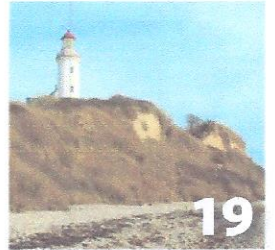
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The Association for Garden Communicators

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# New Opportunities on the Horizon



At Temple University, I work with students on a daily basis discussing job prospects. This has helped me spot trends in horticulture that most might not be aware of. I believe these new opportunities will change

how we view horticulture. Students are more creative in their approach to job expectations and are more likely to jump onboard a new horticultural opportunity such as a start-up. Many are likely to apply for internships knowing that they might lead to full-time employment. And, internships can be for any age adult with all levels of experience—not necessarily requiring university status as a prerequisite.

Non-majors taking horticulture classes and acquiring certificates in food systems are readying themselves for positions that combine horticulture with other fields of study. There is definitely an uptick in unique and creative positions that include horticulture knowledge as part of the job requirements. The impetus for these new positions comes from the realization that our environment has finally become a mainstream thought rather than an after-thought. In addition to the environment, people are grappling with higher health care costs that are driving the population to eat more healthfully and make healthier life choices.

The topics below are high-growth areas that are beginning to experience strong employment growth.

## MUSHROOMS, MUSHROOMS AND MORE MUSHROOMS

On a recent trip to Phillips Mushroom Farms in Kennett Square, Pennsylvania, which I wrote about in GWA Blog post, we heard from the general manager that its business has doubled in the last three years and keeps expanding yearly. Mushrooms are not only good for eating but they are an added-value crop for sourcing new medications for cancer treatments. Mushrooms are high in vitamins, low in fat and they can fill the void for vegans as a meat substitute.

Students asked the manager if there were jobs available in this industry. He said a resounding, “Yes! The company is always looking for good talent—including Ph.D.s. who can help in the research for new mushroom substrates and setting standards for handling and storage.”

Although the lion’s share of mushrooms grown in the U.S. is grown in Pennsylvania (also known as the mushroom capital of the world), other states and countries are also expanding this industry, especially in rural areas where the substrate materials for growing these fungi are readily available. Look for notable increases in positions in every sector of this industry, including mushroom production for the breakdown of bio-industrial wastes.

I have one student who is working at a new startup mushroom farm in Ambler, Pennsylvania. She loves working with the owner. Local farmers markets and restaurants are the main distribution points for this burgeoning business. The owner expects to hire additional help this fall as her business continues to expand.

The relevance of mushrooms is not going away any time soon. They were added to the stock market two years ago.

Types of jobs: Entrepreneurs, managers, pickers, packers, distribution specialists, PR and marketing, Ph.D. researchers, web designers, content providers, developers, chefs, composting specialists and the list goes on.

## FOOD FORESTS AND CITY ORCHARD PROJECTS

Food forests are small microcosms of intense plantings on open space or added to existing woodland. They provide additional value with locally grown foods. Creating a woodland that is layered from top to bottom with all sorts of fruiting plants that are edible to humans and animals changes how we farm and how we harvest. It also changes how we eat, what we eat and when we eat it.

Food forests are not a new concept. They were part of everyday life up until the early part of the 20th century. A fine example is when families went American chestnut picking in fall. Due to the chestnut blight in the early and mid part of the 20th century, picking ceased. But

now chestnut picking has come back to many regions of the country and there is money to be made.

In the city of Philadelphia, there is a non-profit group called the Philly Orchard Project (POP), which was started by a landscape architect. POP has planted more than 1,000 fruiting trees and shrubs in and around the city. The orchards are planted on public land, cemeteries and church properties. The plantings are usually done in collaboration with other non-profit organizations funded by grants and private donations. The food stays in the neighborhoods where it is grown—usually food deserts.

The POP model has been replicated in other cities with similar outcomes. These organizations rely heavily on volunteers, but they also hire key personnel as the organization grows.

Types of jobs: Volunteer coordinators, web designers, content providers, educators, propagators, developers, directors, horticulturists, landscape architects and grant writers.

## GREEN PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

One student who took my food crops course this past spring is working toward his food-systems certificate in tandem with his architecture degree with an emphasis in building management. He said that as a future building manager he needs the skills to make sound decisions regarding the best ways to use buildings’ and properties’ open spaces.

He plans on initiating a rooftop farm to mitigate storm water and add food to the local economy. In addition, he will cool the buildings’ exterior walls by growing vine crops. Interiors will have green walls for culinary production as well as plants used for adding oxygen to the atmosphere.

Management of these services will take specially trained individuals; my student will be one of the first graduating in the field of green property management. He says that it’s a no brainer. People need to know a little bit of everything to make the right decisions and to manage with the most efficiency. The knowledge he has gained will also help in hiring competent employees for the farm management and maintenance of green spaces.

Not long after speaking with this student, I talked with a civil engineer from a global engineering firm who supported my student's claim. The engineer said since he was hired 20 years ago, his company has grown 10 times. He attributes a large percentage of this growth to green property management, explaining that creative management schemes with good managers create big paybacks for clients. Rooftop farms and other multiple uses for building and property spaces are key to returns for their clients' investments. This is the wave of the future.

Types of jobs: Green property managers, farmers, aquaponic and hydroponic specialists, delivery personnel, maintenance staff, etc.

### **URBAN FARMS**

Urban farming continues to expand in cities throughout the U.S. and abroad. I have helped set up one farm, Philly Urban Creators (PUC), while teaching at Temple. This organization is on approximately two acres of land in North Philadelphia, an area that is economically depressed with an extremely high, school-drop-out rate. The farm is used as a vehicle to stress the importance of education. Teaching children in vulnerable years helps to bring social justice to the neighborhood. Not only does PUC grow fresh vegetables and fruits, it is also a hub to help empower the disenfranchised. The garden started out with all volunteers, but now supports a bustling team that travels the world setting up similar models. Funding comes from grants, donations and sales from excess produce.

Types of jobs: Farmers, educators, delivery personnel, artisans, community activists, civic leaders and others.

### **PERFORMANCE-BASED AND ADDED-VALUE LANDSCAPES**

Several years ago, a landscape architectural firm asked me for help in finding students to learn how to measure landscape performance in relation to storm water runoff. The city's water department was encouraging homeowners and businesses to build rain gardens and install green roofs, which would mitigate storm water and reduce runoff into an aging infrastructure. The water department realized it could save billions of dollars by rethinking how storm water was managed. Tax credits, free rain barrels and free rain gardens were being offered to reduce the overall hard surface runoff. Tax credits were also given for green roof installations. The program continues, but there are more and more people who need rain gardens and green roofs installed, so this provides a wonderful opportunity for start-up companies.

Types of Jobs: Growers, certified rain garden installers, green roof specialists and others.

—Continued on page 28

Additional areas for up and coming demand for jobs and opportunities are:

- Performance-based landscapes for highway infrastructure
- Integrated Pest Management (IPM) growers for organic operation
- Aquaponics for residential and commercial use
- Composting productions and the diversity for new and improved products, including mushroom compost and its other byproducts
- Vermiculture, developing more pleasing designs of the bins and housing for these systems
- The production of biochar for the improvement of soil and regeneration for fire-dependent species

This list is by no means complete, but it shows very strong areas of interest from scientific professionals and students. I can't wait to see what is coming next.

### RESOURCES

- [Mushroom Market Analysis](#)
- [American Mushroom Institute](#)
- [Philadelphia Orchard Project](#)
- [20 Urban Food Forests Around the World](#)
- [Rutgers' Rain Garden Certification Program](#)
- [National Association of Realtors' Field Guide to Green Property Management](#)
- [Green Property Management](#)
- [Philly Urban Creators](#)
- [Greenville County Soil and Water Conservation](#)
- [North Carolina Certified Rain Garden Specialists](#)

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Eva Monheim is an assistant professor of horticulture at Temple University. When she's not in the field with her students, she's on the grounds of Longwood Gardens teaching woody plants and arboriculture to professional garden students. Her commitment to education is tireless, and her dedication to mentor students is paramount. A former newspaper columnist, she is an award-winning artist who loves dabbling in photography.