

# Keep Growing®

FALL 2013



CHICAGO BOTANIC GARDEN  
Member Magazine and Program Guide

# Jacob Burns

## Perennial plant curator and scholarship recipient

Have you ever gazed around the Chicago Botanic Garden and wondered who is in charge of all those plants? Many people play a role, but the person who leads in purchasing, identifying, and managing 91 percent of Garden's collection of 2.5 million plants is the remarkably calm Jacob Burns. The Garden displays one of the largest documented and labeled collections of hardy herbaceous perennials of any public garden in North America—2,301,000 of them at last count, of 5,200 taxa\*—and as their curator, Burns is the go-to person for fellow staffers and professionals who have questions about perennial plants—and he is happy to answer visitors' questions as well.

"The work of our curators is critical to sustaining the integrity of the collection as displayed in this living museum," said Garden president and CEO Sophia Siskel. "Jacob is a wonderful rising leader in this field." Andrew Bell, Ph.D., is the Garden's other esteemed plant curator, specializing in woody plants.

Burns helps the horticulture staff decide which perennials to include in the various display gardens and throughout the general Garden grounds. He also ensures that the plant database is accurate, since plants are continually added and withdrawn. One of his goals for 2013 is to procure 200 new perennial taxa suitable for the Midwest that are not in the Garden's collection.

Last November Burns received a Chanticleer Scholarship, which provides professional development opportunities for public garden staff. When 2013 ends, he will have received personalized mentoring by plant curatorial expert Tim Thibault, of the Huntington Botanical Gardens in San Marino, California; visited curators at eight botanic gardens in Boston, San Francisco, and Philadelphia; and interacted with the Plant Collections Committee of the American Public Gardens Association. This past May in Phoenix, during the annual APGA conference, Burns met many of the curators he planned to visit and work with over the summer.

*\*Taxa (singular taxon) apply at genus, species, and cultivar levels; the name refers to the entity or group of entities given a name and rank.*

"Jacob is an excellent plantsman, and I believe he will be a great curator," said Kris Jarantoski, executive vice president and director of the Garden. "The Chanticleer Scholarship will give him a firm foundation on which to build his knowledge and effectiveness in this field."

It was while Burns volunteered his art skills as a teenager at the Midland Nature Center near his hometown of Coleman, Michigan, that he developed an interest in plants. He graduated from Michigan State in 2005 with a B.S. in horticulture, and accepted a job at the Chicago Botanic Garden in 2008. After working as a seasonal, assistant, and full horticulturist here, Burns assumed his new role as curator of herbaceous perennials last August. "I'm a plant resource," he said. "And I love it when people ask me questions."

