



# 2019 ANNUAL REPORT

Uniquely UW | Simply Beautiful



# FROM THE DIRECTOR

Today, we're poised on the threshold of a new decade. What will define the Garden ten years from now? This conversation is how we'll begin 2020 as we launch a fresh round of strategic planning. Building on our 2015 plan we begin by acknowledging where and who we are today.

This annual report marks the very beginning of the planning process. It is a snapshot in time, our "current state analysis." It's the foundation upon which we frame an invitation to you, our UW-Madison community.

## **What goals are you pursuing? What challenges do you face?**

Ultimately, our success is your success. In the years to come our achievements will be defined by how we help you answer these questions.

To our established partners, we look forward to working together more deeply and purposefully, to refine our methods and expand our collective impact.

To new and potential partners, say hello. Make yourself known. Let's begin a conversation.

We believe gardens can and will change the world. As repositories of natural and cultural commonwealth, gardens provide critical ecological and social infrastructure, bridging diverse individuals and ideas in pursuit of a resilient and connected community.

Let's get to work.



Benjamin Futa, Director



# 2019: THE HIGHLIGHTS

## **Celebrating 30 Years**

2019 was a milestone year for the Allen Centennial Garden marking 30 years of exceptional horticulture on the UW campus. We celebrated with our community throughout the year, beginning with an anniversary party welcoming more than 400 guests in June, including Chancellor Blank and College of Agriculture and Life Sciences Dean VandenBosch. We unveiled a special exhibition, Then and Now, showcasing how the Garden has grown over three decades. And, we established our first oral history collection, capturing voices and stories from Garden founders and influencers. These voices will live on in perpetuity through the UW archives.

## **A Generous Community**

This year the Garden enjoyed an infusion of support from private gifts and grants, continuing a strong tradition of private support from a generous community. \$118,000 were contributed for garden and facilities upgrades. \$59,500 in grants were secured, a record for the Garden. Most notable is a \$50,000 award from the Institute of Museum and Library Services, a highly competitive federal award, funding an Interpretive Master Plan (more on that soon). The Friends of Allen Centennial Garden made a record contribution in support of signature programs and scholarships, more than \$8,000 for Plant Adoption Day, Rainbow Party, Welcome Party, and an intern field trip.

## **The Volunteer Experience**

Our exceptional volunteers continued to step up, show up, and share generously of their time, talents, and expertise with more than 975 volunteer hours recorded. The Friends Volunteer Committee in its second season continued to augment, support, enrich, and recognize this amazing cohort. A number of signature events organized by the committee have now become touchstones of the volunteer experience; a spring chili kick-off, a summer Garden Party, a summer field trip, and a fall finale. Lunch and Learn events following work parties kept us engaged, informed, and learning together throughout the season.

## **Lifelong Learning and Professional Networks**

We have continued to build a strong network of peers throughout public horticulture and design, especially our friends in university gardens. Our team joined panel presentations at the annual meetings of both the American Alliance of Museums and American Public Gardens Association. Our annual spring symposium in Madison saw record attendance, welcoming 230 curious minds to explore and learn about “Resilient Landscapes,” from master gardeners to landscape professionals. A number of regional horticulture and design firms helped to sponsor this offering. Additionally, we piloted a two-day Ecological Horticulture workshop welcoming 12 participants, presented in partnership with the Farm and Industry Short Course program, the UW-Arboretum, and The Flower Factory.

## Recognitions and Press

The Garden continued to receive recognition through awards and outreach. Most notable is the Frank Cabot Public Rock Garden Award, bestowed by the North American Rock Garden Society. This prestigious award recognizes an outstanding rock garden within a public garden, and is particularly special for us in light of the exceptional work done by an amazing crew of volunteers, the “Rock Heads,” led by long-time volunteer, Ed Glover. A special thanks to Warren “Buck” Gabelman for supporting an intern each season for the Rock Garden.

In addition, the Garden was featured in the July/August issue of American Gardener magazine published by the [American Horticulture Society](#); [Plant Adoption Day](#) and the [30th Anniversary](#) were both featured on local news; the [Garden Destinations](#) blog showcased exceptional gardens throughout the region; and an editorial about how the Garden is addressing plant blindness appeared in [Agri-View](#).

## The Living Collection

Everything begins with the Garden itself, and we continued to invest in exceptional horticulture that embodies beautiful and resilient plant communities. A mixed meadow planting emerged near the great lawn, and as it matures, will showcase native plants alongside annual accents; the New American Garden blossomed in its second season following a significant renovation in 2018; the Conifer Garden continued to evolve with new stone work and a new bulb meadow underplanting; and the Woodland Garden continues to ebb and flow as the tree canopy re-establishes following the loss of a large river birch three years ago.

## Programming

The Garden again set a new record for programming with 203 events welcoming 13,500 individuals, a 28% and 13% increase over 2018, respectively. Most notable, 75% of these programs were presented with a campus or community partner. Partnerships are a necessity of this success and embody the heart and soul of the Wisconsin Idea.



## The Student Experience

UW-Madison students are core to our purpose as a campus garden, and our internship experience is at the heart of it all. This year we received an incredible 102 applicants for eight openings, an average of twelve applicants per position. Students hailed from majors across campus resulting in our most diverse cohort yet. All internships are paid, and this year saw a record number of scholarships awarded for student salaries; \$32,800 total, up 108% or \$17,000 from 2015. All of these scholarships are made possible through private donations from individuals and organizations.

We also piloted a new Apprenticeship experience. Intended for a rising senior or recent graduate, this twelve-month position exposes emerging professionals to the full range of public garden operations and is augmented with tailored professional development, field trips, special projects, and more. Our first Apprentice, Ryan Drake, Community and Environmental Sociology '18, accepted a full-time role as Ecological Horticulturist with the Greater Des Moines Botanic Garden in early November.

Before an internship, our relationship with students often begins in the first month of fall term. Our annual Welcome Event saw nearly 1,300 students, and the second annual Plant Adoption Day over 1,900. Both set records. These events serve as gateways to the Garden and horticulture, exposing and reintroducing young people to the power of plants. Both events are curated by our interns for their peers. This co-creative approach opens doors in authentic and meaningful ways. Students from every school and college on campus attend.

### 2019 Intern Cohort



### Ryan Drake, 2018-19 Apprentice

“I didn’t expect to be doing this work (horticulture) but I can’t imagine not doing it. The Apprenticeship opened doors to learn, ask, and connect.”



## The Program Funnel

How can a garden be more than a collection of plants? For most gardeners, we understand the full potential; gardens provide solace and respite, they nurture our soul and heal our mind, they bolster our emotions, they provide food, clean our air and water, provide homes for wildlife, they're expressive and creative, and they're simply beautiful.

In an ever more congested world with technology and media competing for our every moment of attention, cultural organizations – this includes public gardens – must do more than simply exist. We must curate intentional invitations for people to visit and engage with us. How can we matter if people don't know we exist? The pursuit and achievement of relevance is directly related to our long-term viability. We must be seen in order to be valued.

**Relevance is the ultimate driving force behind all Garden programs.** We layer offerings to provide safe, accessible, and visible conduits to learn about plants and connect with new people. Those of us “inside the room” who understand how awesome gardens are don't need to be shown the door – but imagine if you've never stepped inside a garden. There's more to an entrance than a physical gateway. If you don't feel curious or you don't feel welcome, why would you ever come inside?

Our community must know we exist before we can invite them back to learn with us. When we see 600 students visit therapy dogs or 250 people attend live music at a Summer Sunday Concert, it presents us with an opportunity to welcome new visitors and invite them to return again. We may not teach them plant science 101 on that first visit, but Rome wasn't built in a day. The journey to relevance begins with **AWARENESS**.

Once we become aware of something, the door begins to open. We take our first cautious steps inside and wait to see what happens. This is our chance to say, “Hi! Welcome. We think plants are cool, and this is why. If you give them a chance, we think you'll like them too.” This **AFFINITY** building begins with an event like Plant Adoption Day, where UW students are invited to adopt an indoor plant of their very own. This blockbuster event sets the stage for us to begin to break down barriers between young people and plants as we show them what plants need to survive and thrive.

Next, we begin to wonder how can we make plants more like dogs. Dogs are social objects and mediators that can help us have conversations with people we don't yet know. Social objects are part of a larger social infrastructure, the physical places and organizations that shape the way people interact. When social infrastructure is robust, it fosters contact, mutual support, and collaboration among friends. When it is degraded, it inhibits social activity, leaving families and individuals to fend for themselves. Social infrastructure is crucially important because local, face-to-face interactions are the building blocks of all public life. If you want to learn more about social infrastructure, I highly recommend *Palaces for the People* by Eric Klinenberg.

When we already recognize so many tangible benefits of plants and gardening, why not also intentionally embrace them as social objects? Again, to be seen and recognized is to be valued. Social infrastructure is a conduit to renewed relevance for the natural world.

This concept is on full display during Drag Queens and Daylilies. What do these two things have in common? At first glance you may notice their colors, shapes, and names. Every possible permutation of creativity and expression is embodied in both pop culture (drag queens) and daylilies (horticulture). The notion of embracing this culture in horticulture opens new doors and inspires ideas about plants with audiences who might never have given them a second thought because these plants (daylilies) have now become a social object through **AUTHENTIC ENGAGEMENT**.



AWARENESS

AFFINITY

AUTHENTIC  
ENGAGEMENT

OWNERSHIP

The deepest level in this continuum is **OWNERSHIP**. This is the moment of truth, the critical juncture where personal transformation occurs. No longer are plants invisible, no longer are they misunderstood or undervalued. They are seen, they are known, they are relevant. Authentic ownership – shared ownership, truly – is only possible when we acknowledge an imbalance of power and are courageous and vulnerable enough to surrender the high ground by inviting our community to create and activate spaces together. Authentic ownership can elevate us to share of our best selves and to become a family.

This is why we invite therapy dogs into the Garden, why we present live music, why we give away 2,000 indoor plants, and why we invite drag queens to talk about daylilies, among 200+ other programs. We're growing a connected family on campus, one that is inextricably entwined with the power of plants. As an indispensable link in the campus social infrastructure, we have emerged as a hub of campus life and identity.

**We are uniquely UW and simply beautiful, and we are just getting started.**

### **Daylilies & Drag Queens**

Madison queen Lucy demonstrates how to create a new daylily hybrid while drawing lines between horticulture, plant breeding, and drag culture.



# Plant Adoption Day



## Interpretive Master Plan

What does a blockbuster movie and a garden have in common? Each is a story expressed through performance. Both are scripted, choreographed, and edited. The gardener acts as casting manager, director, and set designer for their garden. Each performance has leading characters, the focal points of the story, with supporting characters as the indispensable ensemble. Fergus Garret, Head Gardener at Great Dixter in the UK, describes a great garden as one that “provokes a reaction” from the viewer. A friend once described gardening as “the slowest of the performing arts.” I couldn’t agree more.

As vessels of culture, stories are powerful. They provide context, provoke ideas, transfer knowledge. They captivate us, move us, inspire us.

What does this mean for a public garden like the Allen Centennial Garden? Our “story” is open to the world, from dawn to dusk, year round. As a living museum, the Garden is a repository of cultural and natural commonwealth. We are story rich. What an opportunity..

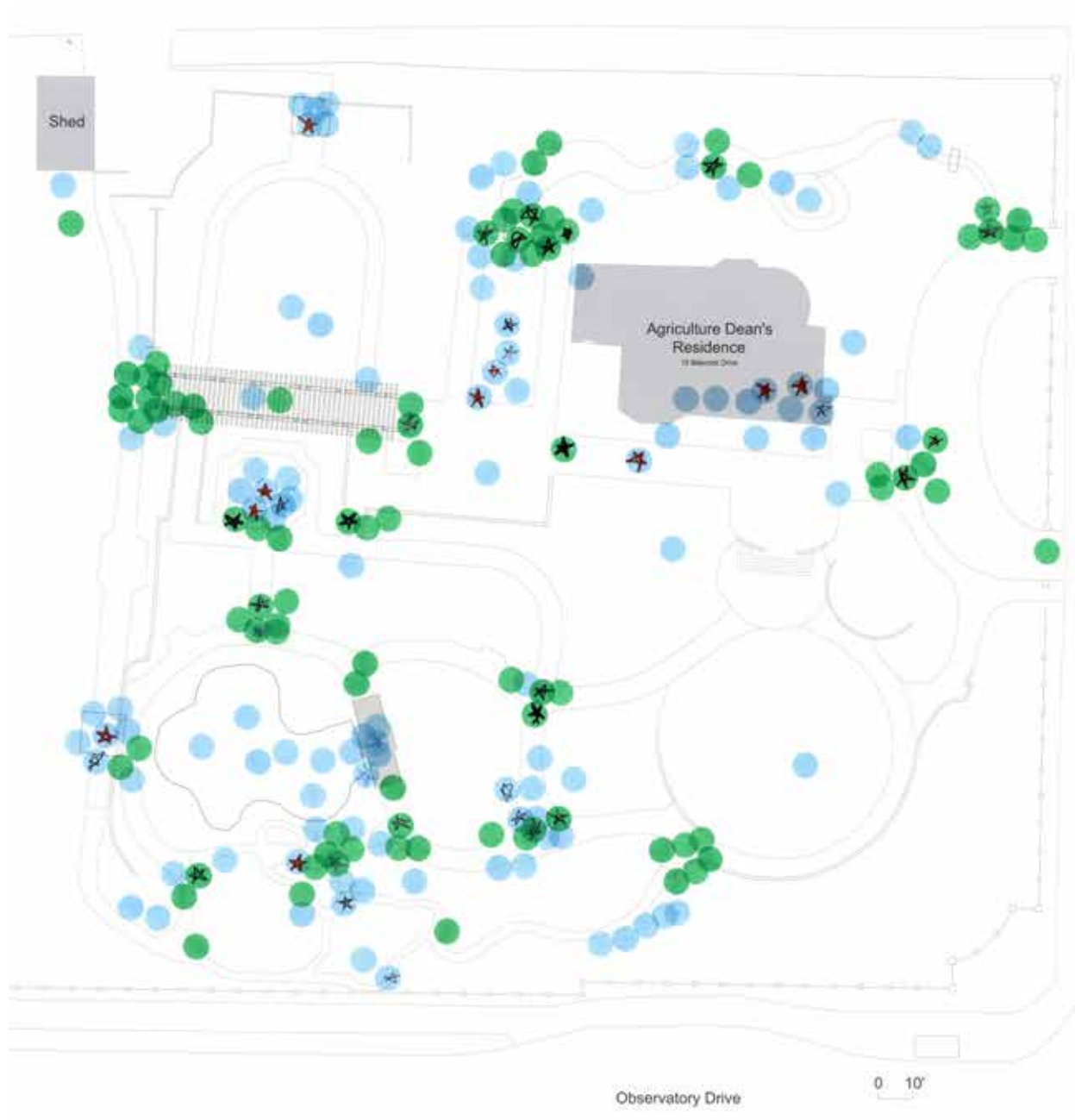
Earlier this year, that opportunity was recognized and catalyzed with a \$50,000 federal grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services and an additional \$5,000 Innovation grant through UW-Madison, both in support of developing a comprehensive “Interpretive Master Plan.”

In the museum world, “interpretation” is the art of storytelling. It aims to reveal meanings and relationships. The best interpretation acts as a machine that transforms the way we see ourselves and the world around us because of our interaction with an object and its story.

What stories should we tell through the Garden? How? Why? The interpretive planning process will help us answer these questions and set the stage for the next act: actually sharing those stories with our community in an authentic and meaningful way.

Our interpretive planning process is well underway. Focus groups of students and community stakeholders walked the Garden in early October and helped us create a heat map of “curiosity and confusion” to pinpoint our greatest opportunities. Analysis of these responses will conclude before the end of 2019 and the Garden has already begun to seek underwriting support for implementation.

Great storytelling is universal, appeals to our deepest emotions, is surprising and unexpected, and is simple and focused. These “rules” govern Pixar, arguably one of our greatest contemporary storytellers with films like Toy Story, Wall-E, and Finding Nemo. How can we make gardens more like a blockbuster movie? All the ingredients are there.



### **“Curiosity and Confusion”**

Four focus groups helped compile heat maps showing where they were curious about something or confused about what to do next. This information will feed directly in to new way-finding and interpretive displays in the future.

## Signature 2020 Projects and Initiatives

### Academic Catalyst

Made possible with support from the Dean's Office in the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, a new Academic Catalyst position will execute and fulfill goals for academic engagement and student recruitment through the Garden beginning January 2020. Summer is our best season, and a prime opportunity for expansion, support and integration with new and existing courses.

This position will help to realize a future where the Garden is the college's most robust, diverse, and multi-functional classroom, providing hands-on, authentic, meaningful learning opportunities for our students.

### Ambassadors

Continuing to build on the work of the interpretive master plan, the Garden will begin developing a new core function in Ambassadors. Envisioned as a diverse cohort of student interns and adult volunteers, this group will enhance the guest experience for all visitors. Presently, a visitor coming to the Garden outside of a program or event remains underserved due to a lack of a personal presence upon entry. Ambassadors will serve a core and critical function of welcome and orientation and set the stage for interpretation as a resource of knowledge and information.

### New Summer Course

Made possible with support from the Morgridge Center for Public Service on the UW-Madison campus, the Garden and Horticulture Department is piloting a new 1-credit summer course for 2020, *Exploring Science Outreach*.

Students will be exposed to emerging best practices in science outreach and STEAM-based programs (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, and Math) in informal learning environments. Students will explore successful models of STEAM outreach and become familiar with a variety of informal learning environments, including museums, libraries, university campuses, and public gardens.

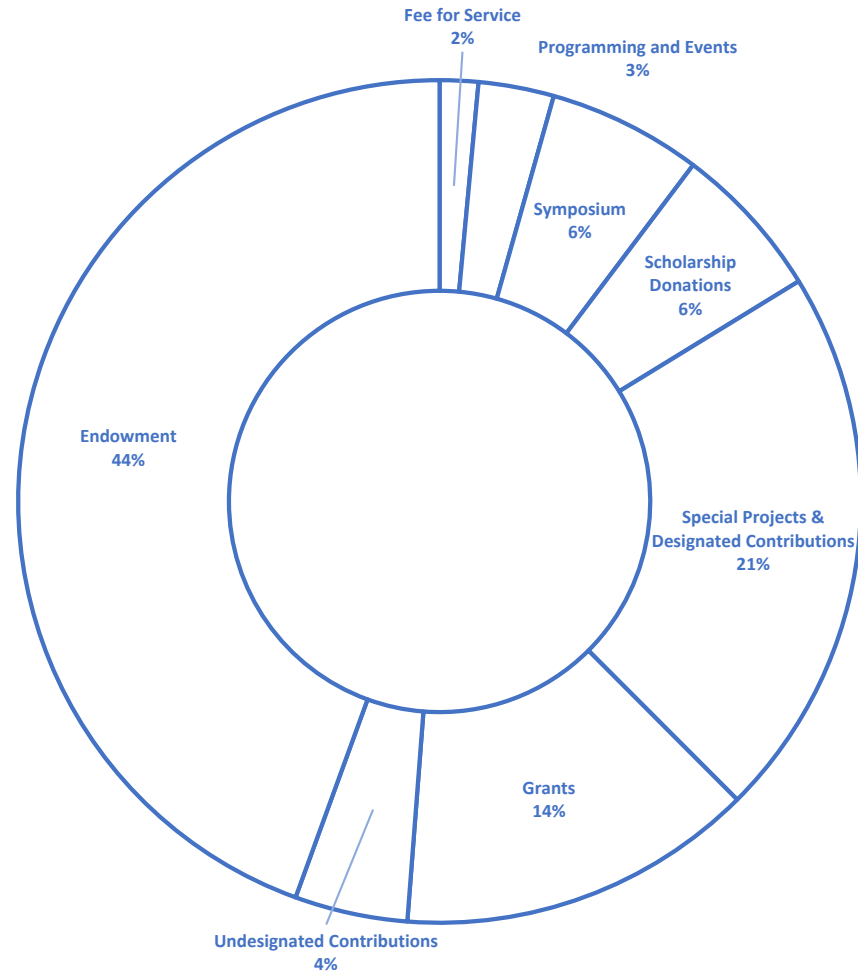
Students will be challenged to explore and present new ideas and participate in unique community experiences to better understand these concepts. Ultimately, they will develop, prototype, and deliver a STEAM-based informal learning experience for a diverse, multi-generational audience at a Garden outreach event.

### UW Conference Centers

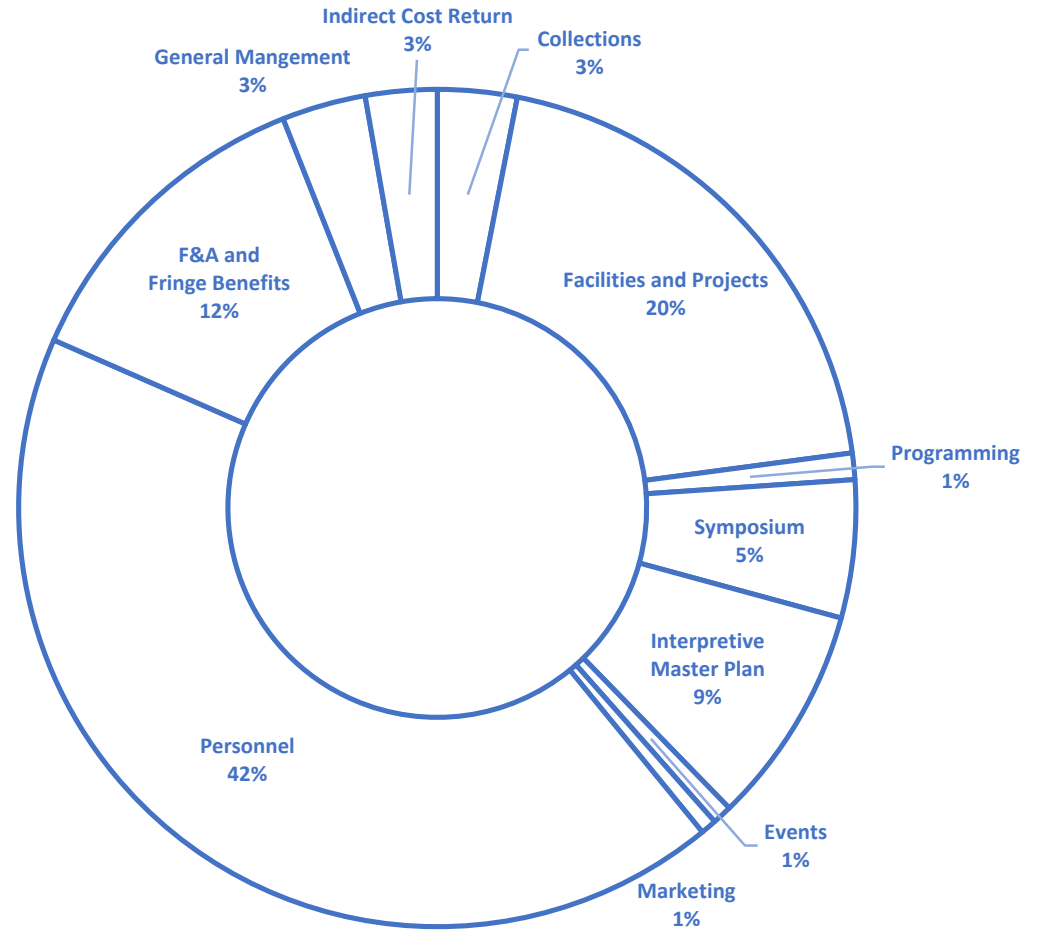
The Garden, Horticulture Department, and CALS Dean's Office are in the early stages of developing a partnership with UW Conference Centers to augment and expand the Garden's capacity to offer and deliver exceptional event experiences. From weddings to university events, this partnership will continue to elevate the Garden's role on campus in new and exciting ways.

# FY 19-20 Budget

Projected Revenue: \$507,800



Projected Expense: \$489,150



Net Budget: \$18,650



**see you in 2020**