

MCKEE

BOTANICAL GARDEN

Director of Horticulture



Start Date: June 15, 2026 | **Application Deadline:** May 1, 2026

*Inspiring Curiosity and Wonder
Through Living Collections*

McKee Botanical Garden

A Living Masterpiece of Florida's Historic Jungle Garden Tradition



Nestled within a lush tropical hammock along Florida's Treasure Coast, **McKee Botanical Garden** stands as one of the most distinctive historic gardens in the United States, a rare surviving example of Florida's early 20th-century "jungle garden" tradition.

Founded in the 1920s by industrialist **Arthur G. McKee** and visionary developer **Waldo E. Sexton**, the Garden was conceived as an immersive tropical landscape where visitors could wander through preserved native hammock enhanced by exceptional plant collections, winding pathways, reflective water gardens, and distinctive architectural features.

Upholding the founder's vision, landscape architect **William Lyman Phillips** designed McKee as a garden of intimacy and discovery. Towering palms and dense tropical plantings create a living canopy overhead, while gently curving paths lead visitors through a sequence of garden "rooms," each revealing new vistas, tranquil water features, and sculptural moments within the landscape. This carefully choreographed experience allows the Garden's 18 acres to unfold as an expansive journey through Florida's subtropical beauty.



Water gardens filled with luminous waterlilies mirror the surrounding palms and sky, doubling the visual landscape through reflection and creating a sense of serenity that has enchanted visitors for generations. Layered plantings of palms, bamboo, bromeliads, orchids, and other tropical species add significant depth and texture, transforming the Garden into a living tapestry of color and form. Throughout the landscape, bridges and rustic historic garden structures serve as destinations guiding visitors along the Garden's unfolding narrative.

McKee quickly became one of the finest examples of the "jungle garden" tradition that captivated early Florida travelers. After closing in 1976 amid redevelopment pressures, the heart of the historic Garden was rescued in the 1990s through a remarkable community effort and reopened in 2001.

Today McKee is widely celebrated as an award-winning model of horticultural preservation and community stewardship. As the Garden celebrates its centennial in 2026 and the 25th anniversary of its reopening, it remains what its founders envisioned: a living museum where nature, artistry, and history converge in a uniquely immersive tropical landscape.

Key Characteristics

- 18 intensely planted acres.
- Designed as an immersive subtropical jungle landscape.
- Dramatic spatial sequences.
- Rustic architecture and garden structures integrated into the landscape.
- A historic “roadside attraction” garden style, now preserved as a cultural landscape.

McKee excels as a designed landscape and atmospheric garden, where the experience of moving through the space is the primary narrative.

- Vegetation closes overhead.
- Views unfold gradually.
- Paths curve and conceal.
- Water reflections and shade deepen the atmosphere.

This creates the sense of entering a living jungle, which was exactly the theatrical experience intended by the founders.

One of the most powerful elements at McKee is vertical enclosure. Instead of open lawns, the garden uses tall palms, bamboo, philodendrons, and broad leaf tropicals to close the space overhead, forming a living ceiling. The effects of this design include:

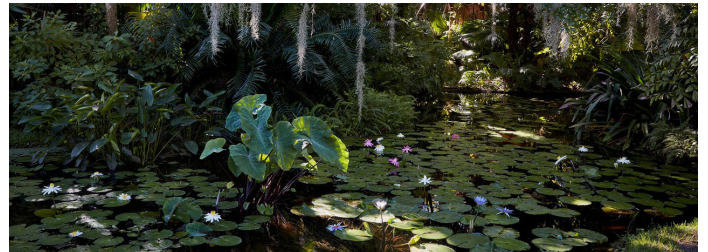
- Visitors feel immersed rather than exposed.
- Sound softens and the air cools beneath the canopy.
- The eye focuses on textures, leaves, water, and details rather than distant vistas.

McKee uses serpentine paths rather than straight axes. This technique, long used in Japanese and English landscape design, creates what garden designers call “the principle of mystery.” Instead of seeing everything at once:

- A path curves.
- Something disappears from view.
- Visitors instinctively continue walking to discover what lies ahead.
- Each turn reveals another scene, water gardens, bridges, sculpture, or bucolic architectural features.

McKee was designed almost like a theatrical journey. Visitors move through a sequence of distinct scenes:

- Entrance transition from the outside world.
- Shaded jungle paths.
- Reflective water gardens.
- Rustic architectural features inspired by distant cultures, including the Spanish.
- Kitchen, the Hall of Giants, and the Bamboo Pavilion.
- Opening into light before returning to dense foliage.



Each “scene” has a different emotional tone, cool, dramatic, contemplative, or surprising. This concept of choreographed garden rooms was central to many great historic gardens, but McKee applies it especially well in a subtropical setting.

The result is that visitors often describe McKee as magical or transporting, restful and restorative, even though it spans only 18 acres. While many larger botanical gardens have exceptional collections, they often prioritize display and research over spatial storytelling. McKee, by contrast, is a designed landscape experience first, inviting visitors to discover the relationships between plants, water, design, and history through experience. This immersive approach transforms a visit into both a sensory and educational journey, which is why McKee feels so different from most botanical gardens.

Awards and Recognition



- 1996** **The Garden Conservancy** designated McKee a *“preservation project of national significance.”*
- 1998** McKee is listed on the **National Register of Historic Places** for its historical, cultural, and natural significance as one of Florida’s early tourist attractions.
- McKee Botanical Garden is also recognized by the State of Florida as a **Florida Heritage Landmark**.
- 2011** **National Geographic Traveler** named McKee Botanical Garden one of the *“22 Secret Gardens -- Soothing Places of Surprise and Sanctuary in the U.S. and Canada.”*
- 2019** Awarded **Hall of Fame Excellence Award by Tripadvisor** in 2019, 2020 and 2021.
- 2020** **Florida Forest Service** recognized McKee Botanical Garden as an outstanding **Florida Forest Landowner** for maintaining the integrity of Florida’s forest, ensuring they will be available for future generations.
- 2023** **Travel & Leisure Magazine**, included McKee in a list of the *Top 26 Most Beautiful Places in Florida*.
- 2024** **The International Waterlily and Water Gardening Society**, recognized McKee as having a *Nymphae Certified Collection of Excellence*, one of only seven such Gardens in the world.
- 2024** Awarded **The Garden Conservancy’s Jean and John Greene Prize for Excellence in American Gardening** for design, preservation and scholarship.
- 2026** **American Society of Landscape Architects, Florida Chapter, 2026 Design Award**
“McKee Botanical Garden: New Life for a Unique “Old Florida” Landscape.

The waterlily collection at McKee received the IWGS Award and our collection has been Certified by this international group.

By the Numbers

- **20 Acres** (with parking areas)
 - **15 Acres** (garden proper) of intensely planted Jungle space, ponds, and waterways
 - Garden Areas: **28**
 - Greeting Area
 - Historic/ Spanish Kitchen Hall of Giants
 - Hall Giants North Path and areas around Hall of Giants
 - Main Pond / North Pond
 - Main Jungle Trail
 - Royal Palm Grove
 - Outer Banks Trail up to Folly
 - East Glade Trail/ Aviary Waterfall and Beds
 - Children's Garden and Planting Areas
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HORTICULTURE STATS

- **160** orchids were virus tested from July '23 to Dec '24. This completed the virus testing for all orchids in the green house.
- There are **1,017** orchids accessioned in Iris BG and over **975** residing at McKee Garden reflecting **107** different genus and **255** different species.
- **176** Total number of orchids acquired July 23 to Dec 24, not including **444** native orchids put into the trees because they were not accessioned. **204** Orchids acquired from Jan 2025 – Jan 2026.
- **57** Total number of Aroids acquired July 23 to Dec 24.
- Total of **2,975** McKee Accession records of tagged plants to date (2/25/2026), includes **453** different genus and **1,868** different species.
- There are **104** cubic feet of algae and submerged pond vegetation removed from the ponds each week which brings it to **16** cubic yards removed monthly.
- Our staff and volunteers remove over **200** cubic yards of Garden prunings and clippings each and every month.
- Each year there are over **1,700** hours spent maintaining our pathways.
- **372** new Garden Plant Educational signs were created from July 2023 to December 2024 and took approximately **280** hours to review and create.

ABOUT THE ROLE:

Director of Horticulture

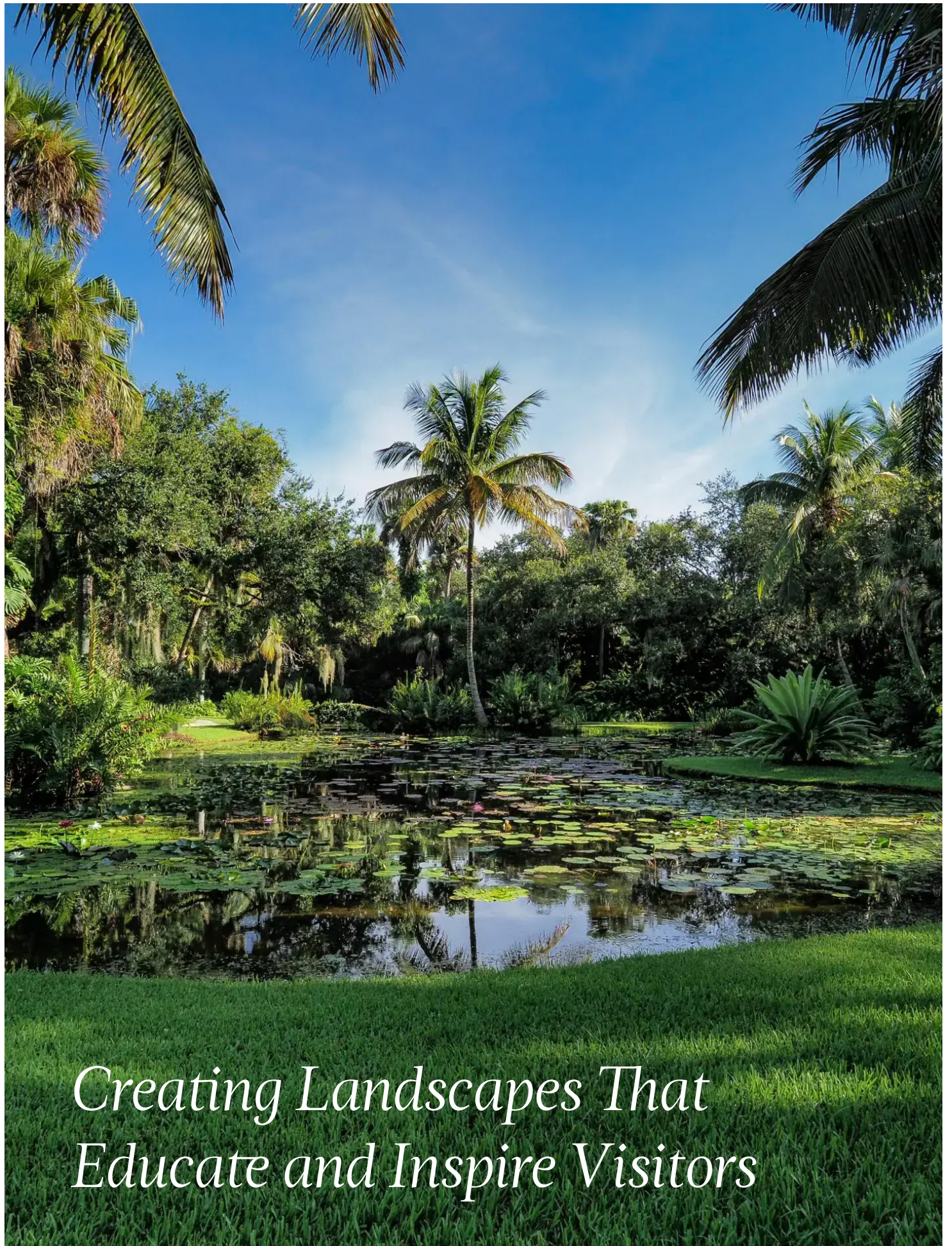


The **Director of Horticulture** (“Director”) is responsible for the stewardship, maintenance, and ongoing development of McKee Botanical Garden’s landscapes and living collections. Working closely with the Executive Director, this role ensures the garden is maintained in alignment with its design intent, horticultural standards, and institutional mission.

The Director provides leadership to the horticulture team, oversees plant accessioning and documentation practices, and manages the horticulture department budget and operational priorities. This position plays a critical role in maintaining the beauty, integrity, and botanical value of the garden while ensuring best practices in horticultural care and collections management.

Reports to: Executive Director

Salary Range: \$115,000-\$135,000/year, commensurate with experience plus some limited flexibility for an exceptionally qualified candidate.



*Creating Landscapes That
Educate and Inspire Visitors*

Key Responsibilities



GARDEN STEWARDSHIP & LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

- Oversee the maintenance and horticultural care of all garden landscapes, display areas, and cultivated plant collections.
- Ensure the garden is maintained in accordance with its design intent, curatorial direction, and institutional standards.
- Develop and implement seasonal planting plans, landscape enhancements, and long-term garden maintenance strategies.
- Monitor plant health and apply best practices in pest management, soil health, irrigation, and sustainable horticulture.
- Maintain exceptional aesthetic standards to ensure a high-quality visitor experience.

TEAM LEADERSHIP & STAFF DEVELOPMENT

- Foster a collaborative and mission-driven team culture.
- Supervise, mentor, and support horticulture staff, providing clear direction, training, and performance management.
- Develop daily/weekly work plans, priorities, and schedules for horticulture staff.
- Coordinate with volunteers and other departments to support garden operations and special initiatives.
- Ensure compliance with safety practices and operational procedures.

PLANT COLLECTIONS & ACCESSIONING OVERSIGHT

- Oversee the accessioning process for all plant material entering the garden in coordination with the Director of Living Collections.
- Ensure accurate plant records, labeling, and documentation of living collections.
- Support the development and management of the garden's plant collections in accordance with botanical garden best practices.
- Assist in plant sourcing and acquisitions, emphasizing botanical significance, design integrity, and suitability for subtropical growing conditions.
- Maintain relationships with regional nurseries, collectors, and plant vendors.

BUDGET & RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

- Develop and manage the horticulture department budget in collaboration with Human Resources and/or the Executive Director.
- Monitor expenditures for plant material, equipment, supplies, and landscape improvements.
- Identify opportunities for efficiency while maintaining high horticultural standards.
- Assist with planning and budgeting for future garden improvements and capital projects.

Perform other duties as assigned.



Required Skills & Qualifications

- Bachelor's degree in Horticulture, Botany, Plant Science, Landscape Design, or related field (or equivalent professional experience) – Master's degree a plus.
- 3+ years of progressive experience in horticultural management, preferably within a botanical garden, public garden, or estate landscape setting.
- Demonstrated leadership experience supervising teams.
- Knowledge of plant taxonomy and botanical nomenclature.
- Strong knowledge of plant care, landscape maintenance, and horticultural best practices with native and ornamental species in Central Florida.
- Excellent written and verbal communication skills, with a commitment to engaging diverse audiences.
- Strong interpersonal skills and the ability to collaborate across departments and with external partners.
- Experience using botanical database systems (IrisBG and Garden Explorer preferred).
- Must be self-directed while also thriving in a team-oriented environment.
- Experience managing departmental budgets and operational planning a plus.



WORK ENVIRONMENT

The Director of Horticulture works both indoors in an office setting and outdoors in varied garden environments. This role involves routine use of standard office equipment including computers, phones, photocopiers, etc. Outdoor work may involve exposure to sun, heat, and changing weather conditions and involves physical activity, including bending, reaching, kneeling, and lifting up to 50 lbs.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITY EMPLOYER

McKee Botanical Garden, Inc. is committed to fostering an inclusive and diverse workplace. Employment decisions are made based on qualifications, merit, and organizational needs, without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, disability, veteran status, sexual orientation, or other protected statuses.



How to Apply



Mckee Botanical Garden has engaged Dovetailed to lead this search. Interested candidates should email a single PDF document to Zack Lehman at zack@dovetailedsourcing.com that includes:

- A cover letter addressed to Executive Director, Rochelle Wolberg
- A resume
- A list of at least three professional references
- Two examples of documents demonstrating your horticultural leadership and planning experience, such as:
 - Seasonal garden and collections management plan
 - Garden master plan
 - Capital improvement plan
 - Integrated pest management plan
 - Public-facing interpretation plan

Please do not contact Mckee Botanical Garden directly.

Dovetailed

Application Deadline: May 1, 2026

