

The Living Desert

Gardens Curator

Join Our Team at The Living Desert – Gardens Curator

Are you a passionate leader with a love for wildlife and a commitment to conservation? The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens is looking for a **Gardens Curator** to oversee our incredible 52 gardens, grounds and surrounding spaces. If you're ready to lead a dynamic team and make a lasting impact on desert gardens, this role is for you.

About the Role:

As the **Gardens Curator**, you will lead and manage a dedicated team of horticulture professionals who oversee a diverse range of desert botanicals.

This leadership role requires a skilled communicator, an enthusiastic mentor, and a forward-thinking individual who thrives in a collaborative environment. You'll support The Living Desert's mission of desert conservation through preservation, education, and appreciation.

Key Responsibilities:

- Oversee the care and management of the botanical gardens on property including the Wildlife Confiscations Plant Program, Animal Browse Program
- Collaborate with leadership to create long and short range goals, establish priorities, organize and maintain the botanical gardens
- Initiates the acquisition/disposition of the plant collection and programs for the improvement of care, propagation, and display of the plant collection
- Assists in setting standards of the aesthetic look of The Living Desert.
- Supervises, evaluates, and provides direction to the Gardens team in all aspects of daily operations. Develops and incorporates messaging into guest's engagement activities reflective of Zoo's conservation messaging.
- Ability to pay attention to the details of habitats and perception of gardens/pathways/habitats for an optimal guest experience.
- Ability to speak in public and give animal presentations to public both informally and formally.

Who We're Looking For:

- A strong leader with proven experience in horticulture and supervisory roles, ideally with at least three years in a supervisory capacity in botanical gardens
- A strong communicator, comfortable engaging with diverse audiences, from staff members to guests.
- Someone who embraces innovation, collaboration, and has a passion for zoo management, plant conservation, and guest engagement

Why Work with Us?

- **Meaningful Work:** Contribute directly to The Living Desert's mission to inspire, educate, and conserve.

- **Leadership Opportunity:** As a key member of our leadership team, you'll have the chance to mentor and shape the next generation of horticulture professionals.
- **Impactful Community Engagement:** Help connect guests with plant wildlife through unique, engaging encounters and educational presentations.
- **A Thriving Environment:** Work in one of the most innovative zoos in the world, where desert conservation comes to life every day.

Ready to embark on this exciting leadership journey? **Apply today** and help us create a future where the deserts of the world thrive! The Living Desert is an Equal Opportunity Employer. We encourage applicants from diverse backgrounds to apply.

Application Deadline: Please visit the Living Desert website to fill out an online application at www.livingdesert.org for this position. Qualified candidates must submit a cover letter, resume, and three (3) references. The cover letter should include how you will be key in moving The Living Desert mission forward. Position will remain open until filled.

Position Summary:

The **Gardens Curator** is a leadership position responsible for the oversight of all aspects associated with the over 50 designated gardens and associated habitats, programs, pathways and team. The Curator works under the direction and reports to the Director of Park Design and Maintenance.

The Gardens team is expected to support the Zoo in its mission "to support desert conservation through preservation, education and appreciation." The team will help the Zoo achieve a forward-thinking vision of a modern zoo and gardens including supporting an inclusive culture. Located at the base of the picturesque Santa Rosa mountains in the heart of the Southern California's Coachella Valley you'll find an oasis in the desert - The Living Desert Zoo and Gardens. Having the mission of desert conservation through preservation, education and appreciation, our focus is on protecting animal and plant species found in the deserts of the world, including North America, Africa, and Australia.

This is a key, visible leadership position that requires a motivated, energetic, dedicated team player who is willing to make a significant commitment to the organization. This requires an enthusiastic individual with strong guest engagement skills, decision making skills and leadership skills while demonstrating ability to work effectively with all levels of staff. This leader will adhere to and support all organizational policies, procedures and standards.

This position oversees the botanical spaces throughout the park. This position is responsible for the development, implementation, mentoring, follow through and evaluation of the garden team. Exceptional leadership skills which include being a role model and an example for others to follow, inspiring others to work towards an exciting future and shared vision, challenging self and others to look for innovative ways to improve areas and the Zoo, foster collaboration, trust and team building. Working with the Director of Park Design and Maintenance along with the Chief Operating Officer to create and continue a culture of recognizing contributions, celebrating accomplishments and foster a feedback rich environment.

This position supports in the oversight of the gardens, habitats, behind the scenes areas, pathways, guest engagement activities and overall management strategies. Develops short and long term goals and strategies, makes recommendations to Zoo administration regarding acquisitions, dispositions and relevance to overall Zoo objectives including conservation and mission. This position will ensure the highest quality of wellbeing and care for the botanical collection.

Job description is a summary of the typical duties of the role, not an exhaustive or comprehensive list of all possible job responsibilities, tasks and duties.

Mission:

- Collaborating with leadership to create long and short-range goals; establish priorities, organize, and maintain botanical collections
- Initiates the acquisition/disposition of the plant collection and programs for the improvement of care, propagation, and display of the plant collection
- Assists in setting standards of the aesthetic look of The Living Desert.
- Develops, implements, and mentors training and development of staff that includes gardening and upkeep techniques that reflect the mission of the Zoo.
- Uphold or exceed minimum standards to maintain AZA accreditation and USDA standards.
- Directs propagator and supervises selection of all species to be propagated. Accepts or rejects plant donations based on appropriateness to collection. Searches for and purchases plant species from outside sources for current and future exhibits, gardens, landscapes, and projects.

Administrative:

- Works to promote a One Team philosophy while overseeing cross area programs.
- Supervises, evaluates, and provides direction to the Gardens team in all aspects of daily operations.
- Oversight of Gardens team including recruitment, selection, development and performance management.
- Oversees the daily organization of the team including schedules.
- Promotes and enforces organization guidelines, policies and standards. Ensures documentation of all aspects of management and utilizes this information for troubleshooting and problem solving with team members.
- Produces and contributes to annual evaluation appraisals for Gardens team.
- Review of AZA and USDA standards, including all TLD formal written policies/protocols including pertinent accreditation documents.
- Directs and /or supervises the maintenance of the plant inventory and records.
- Develops departmental protocols and operating procedures including establishing goals, objectives and standards
- Maintains proper permits for the exhibition and propagation of plant collection and acts as a liaison between The Living Desert and governmental agencies (i.e., USDA).
- Participates in administrative staff meetings, planning sessions, and committee meetings.

Communication/Relationships:

- Must take a leadership role with personnel, crucial conversations, conflict resolution and positive behavior change.
- Collaborates with all other departments to support programs and animal safety protocols
- Collaborates with Animal Care and the Browse Coordinator to support the nutritional efforts for the animals health and well-being
- Ability to give/receive feedback in a positive and productive manner to move team skills forward. Encourage a feedback rich environment.
- Ability to give and comprehend written and oral instructions, and to accurately carry out those instructions. Ability to communicate clearly and concisely both orally, in writing and presenting to a variety of groups.
- Have strong organizational and communications skills including observational and listening skills.
- Must be a motivated self-starter who needs minimal supervision and be able to work with others as a team.
- Recognizes importance of confidentiality and discretion. May handle sensitive information at times.
- Key liaison during design and construction phases

Safety:

- Takes a leadership role for emergency situations by acting as Manager on Duty, Incident Commander, Emergency Team Lead.
- Required to facilitate one training exercise drill annually and debrief at All Team meeting.
- Ensure compliance of safety policies, procedures and practices; ensures teams work in a safe manner with appropriate protective equipment, all accidents/incidents are investigated, documented and corrective action is taken.
- Ability to work around potentially dangerous animals within the Two Key/Two Lock/Two Keeper and Lock Out Tag Out Engineering Control systems.
- Must be capable of emergency response handling to avoid injury to self, humans, and animals while remaining calm under pressure.

Guest Service/Public Relations:

- Develops and incorporates messaging into guest's engagement activities reflective of Zoo's conservation messaging.
- Ability to pay attention to the details of habitats and perception of gardens/pathways/habitats for an optimal guest experience.
- Ability to speak in public and give animal presentations to public both informally and formally.

Fiscal Responsibility:

- Gathers budget information, collaborates, and submits first draft budget to Director of Park Design and Maintenance for garden program needs.
- Researches and implements cost effective savings when purchasing and ensures responsible spending.
- Understands the importance of resources and not wasteful or frivolous with spending decisions.
- Inputs, organizes and approves budgeting processes in a timely manner.

Leadership/Organizational Specific Tasks, Duties, Responsibilities:

- Supervise, assist, and provide direction to Gardens team in daily operation.
- Investigate/address management issues as necessary, identify repair needs and follow through with appropriate work orders.
- Contribute and maintain a safe, positive, and productive workplace environment for animals, guests and team members. Embraces and supports Dangerous animal Two-Key/Two Keeper/LOTO policies in place.
- Ensure and responsible for on-the-job training, providing necessary resources and development of area GardensTeam.
- Identify necessary supplies or equipment and follows through with appropriate purchase orders.
- Participate in AZA and Living Desert conservation or education programs, scientific meetings, conferences and workshops, author papers and present lectures on husbandry and conservation issues, design and construction meetings as appropriate.
- Review challenges, goals, or upcoming events of the department with Director of Park Design and Maintenance. Including actively collaborating with all departments to support special events.
- Oversee scheduling and as necessary participate in educational presentations. Provide accurate and engaging information to the public.
- Continue to seek and acquire education and personal training in the zoological, botanical, management and leadership fields.
- Interact with other zoological institutions and conservation organizations
- Promote and enforce institution guidelines, policies, and standards. Participate in and promote staff interaction with guests that enhance the guest experience and deliver conservation messages.
- Maintain effective communication, both written and verbal, with Director of Park Design and Maintenance. Assist as a technical expert and key spokesperson with regards to gardens and in potential crisis situations, as needed. Serves as internal public relations liaison for the Gardens team.
- Adhere to and enforce institution guidelines, policies, and standards, established animal handling and related safety guidelines.
- Participate in weekly reporting/planning meetings. Development of short term and long-term objectives/strategies/goals regarding the overall animal residents/organization.
- Excellent guest service skills and able to engage guests courteously and effectively at all times.
- Establish and maintain effective and professional working relations with co-workers in accordance with The Living Desert Employee Handbook.
- Provides assistance to other departments as needed.
- Related responsibilities as necessary to accomplish department objectives.

Experience Required

Minimum Qualifications: • Bachelor's degree in Botany, Horticulture Landscape Design, Landscape Architecture or other plant science-related degree preferred with at least three years of supervisory experience • Knowledge and experience in management preferred, including programmatic planning, budgeting and supervision. Proven supervisory, interpersonal, communication and leadership skills preferred. Will substitute training and experience that provides the required knowledge, skill, and abilities. • Proven supervisory, interpersonal, communication and leadership skills • Highly professional, motivated, forward-thinking individual who will build positive working relationships while demonstrating sensitivity to the "mission" of the Zoo • Ability to effectively communicate written and verbally with all staff levels, Board, senior and middle management, staff, donors, volunteers, and guests • Analytical, interpersonal, public relations, presentation, and communication skills both verbal and written • Software literate in Microsoft Word, Excel. ZIMS and Monday.com knowledge is a plus. • Valid California driver's license • Must be insurable on The Living Desert's automobile insurance • Covid vaccination plus one booster required. • Annual TB test with negative reading required. Working Conditions: • Standing, walking, twisting, climbing, crawling, kneeling, reaching motions, lifting (up to 50#) • Exposure to extreme heat, chemicals and dust/airborne materials. • Works around potentially dangerous animals (large ungulates, carnivores, venomous snakes) and harmful plant life • Holiday, evening, weekend work required. Available on as needed basis for emergencies and events. • Travel opportunities for conferences and workshop as budgeting/funding are available. Some or all expenses paid. Equipment Used: PC computer, general office equipment and software, telephone, radio, vehicles including medium to heavy equipment, small handheld and power tools. This class specification should not be interpreted as all inclusive. It is intended to identify the major responsibilities and requirements of this job. The incumbents may be requested to perform job-related responsibilities and tasks other than those stated in this specification.

Salary

\$70,304.00

How to Apply

On our website:

<http://LivingDesert.org>

The Living Desert
47900 Palm Desert
Palm Desert, CA 92260
Phone: 442-301-5004