



## VOLUNTEER HANDBOOK 2025

*The mission of the Houston Botanic Garden is to enrich life through discovery, education, and the conservation of plants and the natural environment.*

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to the Houston Botanic Garden! We would like to thank you for selecting us as a place to share your time, energy, and talents. This Handbook is for your information and guidance, and we hope that it will help create an enjoyable and rewarding volunteer experience. **Yellow highlights reflect new or updated policies for 2025.**

Volunteers for the Houston Botanic Garden are given the opportunity to utilize their talents while gaining valuable knowledge and experience. By donating their time to the Houston Botanic Garden, individuals are able to serve the community, gain personal fulfillment, and interact with people who share common goals and interests.

The Houston Botanic Garden depends on the committed and hard-working volunteers who give their time. The hours you devote to the garden are an incalculably valuable resource.

## VOLUNTEER COMMITMENT

The Houston Botanic Garden's commitment to each Volunteer:

- Provide a safe and healthy work environment
- Give adequate training and orientation
- Present a clear outline of duties
- Communicate clearly with volunteer
- Offer meaningful volunteer experiences
- Value and respect volunteer's time

Volunteer's commitment to the Houston Botanic Garden:

- Be courteous to visitors, staff, and other volunteers
- Perform duties to best of abilities
- Conduct work in a safe way, according to training and values, goals, and procedures of Houston Botanic Garden
- Volunteer at least 10 hours per year
- Be dependable and meet all schedule commitments
- Project a positive image when representing the Houston Botanic Garden
- Respect and follow instructions given by supervisor

## VOLUNTEER PROGRAM POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

### Equal Volunteer Opportunity

All decisions about volunteers shall be based on merit, qualifications, competence, organizational needs, skill level, and ability. All aspects of volunteering, including selection, placement, training, assignments, transfers, disciplinary actions, and termination is at the sole discretion of the Houston Botanic Garden's management and shall not be influenced by a volunteer's race, color, religion, gender, national origin, veteran status, physical or mental disability, or other characteristic protected by law.

### Change of Address, Phone, and/or Email

Please report any changes of street address, e-mail address, or phone number to [volunteers@hbg.org](mailto:volunteers@hbg.org). This is important to ensure that volunteers receive pertinent communications from the Houston Botanic Garden.

### Confidentiality

It is the policy of the Houston Botanic Garden to ensure that the operations, activities, and affairs of the Houston Botanic Garden are kept confidential to the greatest possible extent. If volunteers acquire confidential or proprietary information while volunteering with the Houston Botanic Garden, volunteers shall handle such information in strict confidence and will not discuss that information with individuals outside of the organization. Volunteers are also responsible for the internal security of such information. Volunteers found to be violating this policy are subject to dismissal.

### Nametags



All volunteers must wear a nametag when on duty. As a representative of the Houston Botanic Garden, it is important that nametags be visible at all times. General volunteer nametags will be stored in the main entrance ticket office, and can be requested upon arrival. Volunteers must return general 'Volunteer' nametags upon completion of duties. After completion of your first **10 volunteer hours** at the Garden, volunteers may request a **printed** nametag with their first name and last initial to keep for future shifts. After 25 volunteer hours, volunteers have the option to purchase at-cost **an engraved** Garden nametag with their first name and last initial.

*Email [volunteers@hbg.org](mailto:volunteers@hbg.org) to submit your request for a personalized nametag.*

### Reporting Hours Worked

Volunteers record hours worked by signing up ahead of time on Better Impact, and **most shifts hours are then automatically logged**. Volunteer docents and occasionally other special events or plant records shifts will ask the volunteer to log their own hours on Better Impact. For new volunteers, sign in upon arrival and sign out at the end of a work session to give back a **general "Volunteer"** nametag. If hours are different from the shift signed up for on Better Impact, please contact [volunteers@hbg.org](mailto:volunteers@hbg.org) and report hours worked so that we can update your volunteer hours. Volunteer hour's information is useful for recognition purposes and for providing information to potential funders.

## **Appropriate Attire**

All Houston Botanic Garden volunteers are expected to dress in attire that is appropriate to the job and to the weather. Closed-toe, sturdy footwear is required and sunscreen and hats are strongly encouraged for any volunteer spending time outdoors. Anyone working with tools must use appropriate personal protective equipment, such as: gloves, safety goggles/eyeglasses, long sleeved shirts and/or pants, hard-hat, earmuffs, or plugs.

## **Use of Houston Botanic Garden-Owned Technology**

Houston Botanic Garden-owned equipment (such as telephones, computers, copiers, etc.) are to be used for official Houston Botanic Garden business only, except that communication devices owned by the Houston Botanic Garden may be used in the event of a personal emergency.

## **Personal Property**

Volunteers are encouraged to not bring any valuables to the site and to keep all valuable, personal items in your own care at all times. The Houston Botanic Garden is not responsible for the safe storage of items belonging to volunteers.

## **PROFESSIONAL CONDUCT**

All Houston Botanic Garden volunteers are representatives of our organization. It is important that volunteers maintain professional behavior regardless of work location. While it is impossible to list all forms of unacceptable behavior, the following are examples of activities that will not be tolerated and will result in disciplinary action, up to and including immediate dismissal from the program: the possession, sale, transfer, or consumption of alcohol or illegal substances while on duty; harassment (sexual or otherwise) of any person; fighting or threatening violence; negligence or improper conduct leading to property damage; theft; and possession of weapons.

It is the commitment of the Houston Botanic Garden to ensure the garden is free from negative, aggressive, and inappropriate behaviors and provide an atmosphere of respect, collaboration, openness, safety, and equality. All volunteers have the right to be treated with dignity and respect.

The Houston Botanic Garden has a strict policy against all types of harassment, including sexual harassment and other forms of harassment based upon an individual's sex, gender, race, religion, color, national origin, physical or mental disability, marital status, age, sexual orientation, gender identity or any other status protected by federal, state or local laws. All forms of harassment are strictly prohibited and will not be tolerated.

The Houston Botanic Garden is a smoke and drug free environment.

## **Sexual Harassment**

Sexual harassment is a form of misconduct that undermines the integrity of the volunteer/employer relationship. No volunteer, male or female, should carry out or be subject to unsolicited and unwelcome sexual overtures or conduct, whether verbal, non-verbal, or physical. Sexual harassment refers to behavior that is unwelcome and offensive. All forms of sexual harassment, should be promptly reported to a supervisor who will investigate and take appropriate actions.

## **Disciplinary Actions**

In the event that either concern about a volunteer's actions needs to be expressed or the dismissal of a volunteer is necessary, the following measures will take place:

1. A discussion will be scheduled with the volunteer(s) involved.
2. Specific actions will be outlined. These actions may be actions for improvement or outright dismissal, if warranted. If the actions are those of instituting improvements, a follow-up discussion will be scheduled in order to address if improvements are taking place.
3. If the problem persists, one more discussion will take place with one more follow-up meeting.
4. Any future occurrences of the same problem may result in dismissal.

## **Grievance Procedure**

The Houston Botanic Garden strives to create a positive climate for the personal and professional growth of its volunteers. If a volunteer feels that the Houston Botanic Garden, its staff, or other volunteers have not met this goal, the following steps may be taken:

1. Volunteers are encouraged to schedule a discussion with the Volunteer Manager to discuss the situation.
2. If the Volunteer Manager cannot resolve the situation or if you feel that a discussion with them is inappropriate, you may contact another member of the Houston Botanic Garden staff.
3. If the situation cannot be resolved with Houston Botanic Garden staff's involvement, a meeting will be arranged with the President. The decision of the President shall be final.

The Houston Botanic Garden does not tolerate any form of retaliation against volunteers or employees availing themselves to this process.

## **Leaves of Absence**

If a volunteer must stop volunteering for a month or more, they must notify the Volunteer Manager. If you are unable to return after 90 days, you will be made 'inactive' or 'archived' in our Better Impact system, unless prior arrangements have been made. When a volunteer is ready to return from a leave of absence, contact should be made with the Volunteer Manager so that they can re-activate their profile in Better Impact to start signing up again for volunteer shifts.

## **Absenteeism**

Volunteers are expected to perform duties on a regularly scheduled and punctual basis, as indicated in the program description and by signing up for the position within that program. When expecting to be absent from a scheduled duty, volunteers must inform the person responsible in the program where the volunteer is working. Continual, excessive absenteeism will result in dismissal or placement in a more appropriate volunteer program such as our "All Call" public volunteer days and projects. If you miss **three or more** shifts in a row with no advanced communication, your profile will be set back to 'applicant' status and the volunteer must undergo the orientation process anew.

## **Media Policy**

To ensure that the Houston Botanic Garden is delivering a clear message, volunteers are not to respond to inquiries from the media seeking information about the Houston Botanic Garden. If a member of the media approaches a volunteer seeking information about the Houston Botanic Garden, you should simply let the media know that you are a volunteer and are not authorized to speak on behalf of the organization and try to put the media contact in touch with the Houston Botanic Garden office.

## **Photo Release**

Houston Botanic Garden volunteers may be photographed while on duty. These photos may be used in brochures, displays, advertisements, web site, or press releases. The Houston Botanic Garden reserves the right to photograph adults over the age of 18 for these purposes. Images of volunteers under the age of 18 may only be used with parental permission. If you do not wish for your photograph to be used to promote the organization, you need to contact [volunteers@hbg.org](mailto:volunteers@hbg.org) and expressly state that your photo should not be used by the Houston Botanic Garden.

## **Donations**

Guests may be inclined to offer tips to volunteers in return for your assistance. While this is a generous offering, volunteers should not personally accept such monies. Instead, volunteers should thank the guest for their offer and suggest that the guest donate the money to the Houston Botanic Garden.

## **SAFETY/RISK MANAGEMENT**

Personal safety is of the utmost importance for all individuals associated with the Houston Botanic Garden. All staff and volunteers should be aware of the safety procedures and should report safety violations and/or unsafe conditions to your supervisor.

## **Background Checks**

The Houston Botanic Garden conducts background checks on all staff and seasonal employees. Volunteer background checks are now processed through a third party verification entity, VeriFYI. The Volunteer Manager will submit your name and email address, and you will receive an email to follow all steps necessary to submit your background check. The cost to volunteers is \$11.95 as of January 2025 and demonstrates your commitment to our mission as a nonprofit organization.

All volunteer applicants will be required to complete the screening process.

The following factors will be taken into consideration if the background check shows a criminal conviction:

- The severity of the criminal action
- The number of convictions
- Relevance of the criminal activity to the activity you perform
- Length of time that has passed since the criminal activity
- Your age when the criminal activity occurred; the Houston Botanic Garden is less likely to allow an individual to volunteer at the Houston Botanic Garden if the activity occurred as an adult; however, we still would take into consideration the length of time that has passed since the criminal activity occurred.

The Houston Botanic Garden will offer an applicant the opportunity to explain the circumstances surrounding the criminal activity/the results of the background check before a decision is made.

**Violent Crimes:** The gravity of the offense would be carefully reviewed. If it is determined an applicant may pose an unacceptable safety risk to the Houston Botanic Garden, its employees, or visitors, the Houston Botanic Garden has the right to not allow the individual to volunteer.

**Sexual offenders:** If the Houston Botanic Garden learns an applicant is a sex offender, the applicant will be denied from volunteering as this would pose an unacceptable safety risk to our

employees and visitors.

### **Working with Children**

It is important that the Houston Botanic Garden is a safe place for all our guests, including children. State law requires anyone who suspects child abuse or neglect to report those suspicions to the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services (DFPS) or to a local law enforcement agency.

### **First Aid**

Upon witnessing illness or a serious injury to a staff member, visitor, or another volunteer, please remain calm and use best judgment regarding temporary assistance. Only individuals certified in first aid, CPR, and similar first aid responding procedures may, at their discretion, provide necessary treatment to individuals. Otherwise, volunteers may stay with the injured party and instruct a specific person to notify Houston Botanic Garden staff immediately. Volunteers may assist by keeping the area cleared of bystanders and routing visitors away from the area.

### **Injury and Incident Reporting**

Volunteers must report all workplace injuries, accidents, or illnesses to their supervisor as soon as possible and seek medical care if needed. An incident form will need to be completed by the volunteer with the supervisor.

Volunteers are required to submit an emergency contact, included on the Volunteer Application, as part of their personnel file in case of an emergency situation should arise.

### **Emergencies**

In the event of an emergency such as serious illness or injury of a fellow worker, volunteer, or visitor, a volunteer should call 911 and report location and nature of the emergency. This call should be immediately followed by notification to the volunteer's supervisor with all relevant information. Staff will proceed to the location and provide assistance.

### **Insurance**

The Houston Botanic Garden carries Volunteer Accident Insurance to assist volunteers who are injured while volunteering. Such coverage is in excess over any other medical insurance available to such volunteer.

### **Abusive Language and Behavior**

Abusive language or behavior will not be tolerated. If this type of behavior is observed, please contact a supervisor or other Houston Botanic Garden staff, who will handle the situation. A volunteer should NEVER get into a confrontation with a visitor. The volunteer's input on an incident report may be necessary.

*THANK YOU for dedication to the Houston Botanic Garden and your commitment of your time to help enrich life through discovery, education, and the conservation of plants and the natural environment.*

## VOLUNTEER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT FORM

By being an active volunteer at the Houston Botanic Garden, I acknowledge and agree that the:

I have received a copy of the Houston Botanic Garden Volunteer Handbook (the "Handbook"). I understand that the Houston Botanic Garden may amend the Handbook from time to time, either by distributing a revised version of the Handbook or by posting or distributing a written memo.

I understand and am aware of the potential risks of personal injury and property damage which can or may occur, and I assume such risk and take responsibility for my safety while volunteering at the Houston Botanic Garden.

I understand that my role as a volunteer is "at will." This means that either the Houston Botanic Garden or I may terminate the volunteer relationship at any time, for any reason either party considers appropriate in their sole discretion.

All records, files, materials and software that I have access to in the course of my role as a volunteer and that relate to Houston Botanic Garden's business are considered confidential. During and after my volunteer role, I will neither disclose that information nor use it for the benefit of any person or organization other than the Houston Botanic Garden. When my volunteer role ends, or upon the company's request, I will immediately return all company property and all materials that relate to Houston Botanic Garden's business.

Please rewrite the following sentence, followed by your signature: I have read and understand this Volunteer Handbook.

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Volunteer Signature

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Print Name

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Date