

4-5-2019

Dear Students, Friends and Colleagues,

“The Country is predicted to lose half its botanical expertise over the next decade.”

Representative Mike Quigley from Illinois noted this recently as he underscored the need for the [Botanical Sciences & Native Plant Materials Research, Restoration and Promotion Act](#) a.k.a. the Botany Bill, which he and Representative Francis Rooney are currently co-sponsoring supported by 29 other representatives who have since signed onto the bill.

Half of our botanical expertise – gone in just ten years. Well, obviously since I’m breaking my newsletter silence, you know this had an impact on me. Field botanists, natural resource managers, landscape architects, native plant retailers, molecular biologists working on scientific breakthroughs based on plant science . . . all are jobs which can make significant contributions to society by creating a healthier more resilient and even regenerative world. So what gives?

Ajit Nawalkha wrote recently in [Forbes](#), “Older generations were all about getting the job done and getting paid for it. But the millennial generation is all about getting the *right* job done and getting paid for it.” It seems the *follow your bliss* thinking is really kicking in - and it appears to be spreading. More and more millennials are married to their passions and are embracing freelance or entrepreneurial work as a way to feed those interests. As this trend has kicked in, people from other age groups are seeing the shine in their eyes and joining them to create what we now recognize as the [gig economy](#) . They’re making the healthcare, manufacturing, retail/wholesale, leisure/hospitality and business sectors robust in this current climate. Botany it seems – not so much.

It’s not that folks aren’t passionate about botany although it’s true we can’t become passionate about something we seldom hear about or encounter. That’s on those of us who work in or near these fields. Come on, people – let’s talk to students up to and including rising Seniors about the wonderful world of plants – how much we need them, how rewarding botany-related fields can be. Let’s give them opportunities, internships and plants themselves to help grow their interests in these arenas.

At the same time, we have to recognize the rising cost of higher education and students’ forethought about their return on investment may be slowing entries into botanical professions as well. In fact, it may be the deciding factor. Most feel relatively certain they can recoup the tens-of-thousands to hundreds-of-thousands spent on college degrees if they enter the healthcare, manufacturing or business fields. Salaries and overall benefits connected to those vocations are widely reported and enjoyed by an ever-increasing number of new recruits. Conversely, you’ll hardly ever hear about a botanist enjoying margaritas by the pool at their 1.5 million dollar estate. So there is that.

Botanists and those working in a field requiring that educational background can and do make good livings though. I don’t have a hyperlink for you but I’m guessing more than a few enjoy

drinks by the pool. They just aren't interviewed about it as much and to be fair, they probably aren't doing it with the mega salaries enjoyed by those in other professions. (Also, a lot of them would just rather have a craft beer by the creek.) But affording school and making a decent living is a concern.

We can nurture the passion for plants waiting to bloom in many students if we promote botany and the careers related to it. And right now, today, we can move beyond helping build their bliss by helping to clear their economic hurdles. [The Botany Bill, H.R. 1572, promotes botanical research, the hiring of botanists and a preference for native plants. It creates a student loan repayment program for botanical scientists to encourage more students to enter the field and would require states to utilize native plant species where possible and practical.](#) Many of us like the professionals in the Missouri Prairie Foundation's Grow Native! program, Kansas City Native Plant Initiative, their partners and a number of you reading this have looked for ways to help the environment and even get more people into plant-related fields. Here's one easy way. Pick up the phone and dial your [Congressional leaders](#). Tell them to support H.R. 1572 and/or build a [Senate](#)-related version of the Bill. It's one thing we can do today that can help build more interest and engagement in botany . . . and materially recognize everything plants do for us each and every day.

Here's to you and the plant world too,

Margo Farnsworth  
Screendoor Consulting  
[Screendoorconsulting.com](http://Screendoorconsulting.com)  
615.478.4889

Contributing author in [Wildness: Relations of People and Place](#)  
***Give good people good information and they'll do good things.***

(If you've just received this single newsletter, it may be because I thought you'd be interested in this particular subject. You may or may not get others. If you want on my list regularly, e-mail me. If you want off my list, e-mail me. Thanks!)