

Speaker Bios

Updated January 5, 2025



Jared Barnes, Ph.D. Meristem Horticulture

Jared Barnes, Ph.D., started gardening when he was five years old, and since then he has enthusiastically pursued how to best cultivate plants and cultivate minds. He currently fulfills those passions as an award-winning associate professor of horticulture at Stephen F. Austin State University in Nacogdoches, TX. He writes a weekly newsletter titled *plant•ed* that was featured in the NY Times, hosts *The Plantastic Podcast*, and gardens with his wife Karen and daughter Magnolia at their smallholding *Ephemera Farm*.

He obtained his Ph.D. in horticultural science from North Carolina State University in Raleigh, NC; he interned the summer of 2008 at The Scott Arboretum of Swarthmore College in Swarthmore, PA; and he has traveled around the US and into eleven countries to gain a national and global perspective of horticulture.

Recent awards include the 2021 Stephen F. Austin State University Teaching Excellence Award, 2019 Perennial Plant Association's Academic Award, the 2017 Keep Nacogdoches Beautiful Sustainability Award, the 2016 Perennial Plant Association's Young Professional of the Year, and a member of GPN's 2016 Class of 40 Under 40.

His passion has been recognized by peers in interviews in NY Times, People, Organic Gardening, Greenhouse Grower, AmericanHort Connect, Ken Druse's Real Dirt, and Nursery Management, and his articles have appeared in *The American Gardener*, *Fine Gardening* and *Carolina Gardener*.

Andrew Bunting, Vice President of Horticulture Pennsylvania Horticultural Society

Andrew Bunting is Vice President of Horticulture and leads the utilization of planting and design to promote environmentally sound gardening practices at PHS. Andrew has elevated each of the departments he oversees and has increased the brand and visibility of PHS through their respective work.

Andrew received his B.S. in Plant and Soil Science from Southern Illinois University. Prior to arriving at PHS, Andrew worked at the Chicago Botanic Garden, Chanticleer Garden, and the Scott Arboretum for a tenure of 27 years. He has received the American Public Gardens Association's Professional Citation, Chanticleer Scholarship in Professional Development, and the Certificate of Merit from the Pennsylvania Horticultural Society. He also serves on the Board of Magnolia Society International. Andrew published his first book in 2015, *"The Plant Lover's Guide to Magnolias."*

Andrew enjoys bird watching, travel and, of course, gardening.

Michelle Catania, Green Industry Outreach Coordinator The Morton Arboretum

Michelle Catania is the Green Industry Outreach Coordinator at the Morton Arboretum in Lisle, IL. Catania began her career at the Arboretum as the Soil Science Research Assistant in 2009. Over the years, she has

developed a strong expertise for both urban tree health and urban soils. Michelle supports the Arboretum's mission by promoting healthy, long-lived urban trees. She is devoted to disseminating peer-reviewed scientific research aimed at improving tree and soil health in urban environments. She has co-authored several scientific papers related to urban soils and trees and is a frequent speaker for the green industry. Catania is devoted to getting the best management practices to the industry and is determined to communicate how to better care for urban soils. She holds a B.S. in Biological Sciences with an emphasis in plant science and a M.S. in Physical Geography & Natural Environmental Systems where she focused on forest ecology and soil geomorphology. While earning these degrees, she worked seasonally for a prominent landscape supply firm in the Chicago suburbs where she found a niche educating contractors. When she is not at work, Catania is training two little dinosaur-loving boys to be human.

**Colette Copic, CRTI Community Manager
The Morton Arboretum**

As the Chicago Region Trees Initiative Manager at The Morton Arboretum, Colette Copic stewards national and state funding opportunities for healthier and more resilient tree canopies in our communities. This includes helping communities build capacity within their forestry programs through funding opportunities, resources, and training. As an ISA-certified arborist Copic's background includes work in urban and community forestry, tree protection policy, ecological restoration, and community engagement.

**Dr. Bert Cregg, Professor of Horticulture and Forestry
Michigan State University**

Dr. Bert Cregg is a professor of Horticulture and Forestry at Michigan State University. He leads research and extension programs on the physiology and management of trees in landscapes, nurseries, and Christmas tree production. Prior to joining the MSU faculty in 1999, he was a research plant physiologist for the US Forest Service and International Paper. Dr. Cregg's interest in conifers dates back to shearing Christmas trees in his hometown of Olympia, WA.

**Neil Diboll, President
Prairie Nursery**

Neil Diboll is President of Prairie Nursery and has over 40 years of experience in prairie establishment and restoration. He designs natural landscapes for golf courses, corporate campuses, public parks, and residential settings. Neil will share his expertise in creating prairie meadows and gardens to help you establish native wildflowers and grasses on your property. His step by step approach will provide you with "tried and true" methods to convert a small area to a prairie garden or a large acreage to a beautiful prairie meadow.

Neil Diboll received his degree from the University of Wisconsin in 1978. He has since worked for the U.S. Park Service in Virginia, the U.S. Forest Service in Colorado, and the University of Wisconsin. In 1982, Neil began his involvement with Prairie Nursery, producing native plants and seeds and designing native landscapes. He has since devoted his efforts to championing the use of prairie plants, as well as native trees, shrubs and wetland plants, in contemporary American landscapes.

**Katie Dubow, President
Garden Media Group**

Katie Dubow is president of Garden Media Group, a second-generation women-owned and run public relations firm specializing in the green industry. Author of the annual Garden Trends Report, Dubow presents the report worldwide – from Italy to Columbus.

Dubow is also a guest host on QVC for Cottage Farms, judge at the Philadelphia Flower Show, the inaugural recipient of the Emergent Communicator Award from GardenComm, and serves on the board of the Pennsylvania Landscape and Nursery Association.

**Lisa Fiore, Founder and CEO
LandscapeHub**

Lisa is a fourth-generation landscape industry professional and former president of Fiore Nursery & Landscape Supply in Chicago. In growing her 100+-year-old nursery business, she identified areas of opportunity in the industry — labor inefficiencies, supply chain logistics, and communication difficulties. To solve these challenges, she conceptualized an enhanced database of a supplier network to help manage business, and LandscapeHub was born.

**Julie Joyce, Founder
GreenID Marketing**

Julie Joyce is the founder of GreenID Marketing, a digital marketing agency with a focus on startups and new business endeavors. Julie grew up in the horticulture industry of Illinois, in a family owned horticulture business that included a wholesale nursery, landscape design and retail garden center; this business that became her first client. With over 20 years experience of working within the horticultural industry, she has a unique perspective on what it takes to build a successful entrepreneurship. Julie is drawn to innovation and today her client portfolio includes a large variety of startups from various industries. In addition to providing social media management, she also manages strategy, e-commerce and tactical campaign implementations. She loves the passion, energy and the wild ride of entrepreneurship and easily aligns with like minded clients. Most importantly, Julie believes work should be fun, sustainable and successful, both financially and personally.

**Graham Hill, President
Platt Hill Nursery**

Graham grew up in Illinois and eventually traveled to Ohio where he attended and graduated from Denison University in 2007. After college, Graham attended the Marine Corps Officer Candidate School graduating and accepting a commission. This led him to his first assignment in Okinawa Japan where he spent two years leading teams of Marines and deploying with the 31 st MEU.

After completing this assignment, Graham tried out for the Marine Special Operations Command where was subsequently assigned to Camp Pendleton California. Serving as the Operations Officer and Head Quarters Company commander with a team of 200 people, he deployed to Afghanistan. This was an extremely rewarding experience, where he also met his future wife, Jackie Hill. Upon completion of his assignment in California in 2014, he was sent to school and then to the Joint Special Operations command. Serving in Crystal City Virginia, Graham was able to attend Georgetown in the evenings to get his MBA. During this time Graham and Jackie had their first child Hayden. In 2017, Graham deployed again to the middle east, this time Jordan. While challenging, Graham had the opportunity to work in another operations assignment leading a team of 26 across three different continents.

Graham resigned his commission from the Marine Corps and returned to join the family business in 2018 with Clark and Platt. In 2018, Graham and Jackie had their second child Hunter Hill. In this capacity, he took over for his father as the President of the organization. With the partnership with his brother, they navigated COVID, while subsequently growing and expanding the business through 2024.

Lynn Kuhn
Outdoor Transformations

After graduating from Iowa State University with a landscape architecture degree, Lynn spent over 15 years in the nursery industry as a landscape architect, making my clients happy by creating beautifully landscaped spaces. After a few years at home with three young boys, she returned to the world of plants as a consultant, then as the first Executive Director of the Brenton Arboretum near Dallas Center, Iowa.

Eventually, her path led to discover her ultimate purpose, to create conversational spaces where people can connect. She calls these spaces Conversation Gardens. Now, Lynn is on a mission to spread the word about how important conversations are, and that where we choose to have matters. She is the mother of three teenage boys, co-founder of a non-profit called Justice League of Food, brand manager of four restaurants, author, speaker, consultant and designer.

Steve Lane, Urban Forestry Consultant and Ecologist
Graf Tree Care

Steve Lane is an Urban Forestry Consultant and Ecologist with Great Lakes Urban Forestry management where he specializes in GIS based tree surveys, tree risk management, urban forestry management, planning, appraisals and other innovative forestry solutions for a variety of public and private sector clients. He is also the past president of the Illinois Arborist Association, where he teaches a variety of advanced training courses for the organizations. He has worked in the fields of Urban Forestry Consulting, Commercial Arboriculture, Restoration Ecology, Wetland Permitting, and also performs analysis of Urban Tree populations and Natural Resource systems using GIS. Steve holds a double major in Ecology and Geography from the University of Oregon, and a GIS Certification from Elmhurst College. He is also active in the Illinois Parks and Recreation Association, where he teaches GIS classes for beginners. He is also the bass player of a bunch of lousy bands you've never heard of.

Susan Martin
@ Gardener Sue's News

Susan Martin is a freelance marketer, writer, and speaker who has worked in horticulture for 24 years and is a lifelong gardener from Michigan. You can find her on social media @Gardener Sue's News.

Ahmet Mehmedov, Field Service Manager
Hunter Industries

I am currently a Field Service Manager for Hunter industries in the Great Lakes Region with over 30 years of irrigation experience. My experience/knowledge covers irrigaton design, installation, troubleshooting to advance two wire projects. I have managed projects ranging from simple 2-10 zone systems to \$300K plus jobs in larger commercial settings. I currently reside in Indianapolis with my family.

Chris Molloy, Midwest Sales Manager
Hunter Industries

Chris Molloy is a Midwest Sales Manager for Hunter Industries based out of the Chicagoland area. With over 30 years of green industry experience, my career has taken me from project management, business owner to branch management. My experience has covered all forms of landscape/irrigation installations from simple residential projects, new hospital, high rise work, along with building animal exhibits at Lincoln Park Zoo in Chicago, IL. Besides irrigation/landscape knowledge, I can relate to contractors on a business level, catering conversations, training to their needs. I currently reside in the Chicagoland area for the past 40 years.

Heather Prince
Fearless Gardening

Heather Prince has been a part of the green industry for more than 20 years, including experience at The Morton Arboretum, Chicago Botanic Garden, The Growing Place, The Pizzo Group, Wannemaker's Home & Garden, and the American Horticultural Society. She is a trained horticulturist specializing in trees, shrubs, and natives with a passion for connecting people with plants.

Currently she is the email marketing manager for The Garden of Words as well as a staff writer for The Landscape Contractor, the magazine of the Illinois Landscape Contractors Association. Her freelance writing has included Chicagoland Gardening, and numerous newspaper articles, blog posts, magazines, newsletters, and more. Heather also relishes sharing her knowledge and experience by teaching at The Morton Arboretum, Chicago Botanic Garden, Olbrich Botanical Gardens, and Edith Farnsworth House as well as garden clubs, groups, and industry gatherings.

Aaron Schulz, Plant Health Care Director
Oakbros Tree Care & Removal

Aaron Schulz is the Plant Health Care Director and Consultant for Oak Bros Tree Care & Removal LLC in Bloomington, IL where he oversees plant health care operations and consults with private and public clients. He is a Western Illinois University graduate with a B.S. in Agricultural Science with emphasis on Arboriculture & Urban Forestry. He is an ISA Board Certified Master Arborist, IAA Advanced Training and ISA Certification instructor. He has sat on the IAA Board of Directors since 2017 and is a Past President of the organization. He chairs several IAA committees including Advanced Training, Plant Appraisal, and Legislative. He has a passion for arboricultural education, soil health, tree preservation, and brewing beer.

Valerie Smith, Content Strategist
Sod Solutions

Valerie Smith, a Clemson University graduate with a Master's in Professional Communication, manages all website content and traffic for Sod Solutions and Lawnifi. Her interests include artificial intelligence, SEO, analytics in GA4 and Google Search Console, and UX, showcasing her diverse expertise in digital communication. She enjoys gardening, running, reading, and playing guitar in her free time and she has two cats.