

Job description - Propagator - Westonbirt (PB6A)

Job summary

Westonbirt is home to one of the world's most significant tree collections and is recognised internationally for its work in tree conservation, scientific collaboration and public engagement. Working as part of the Westonbirt Tree Team and reporting to the Curator, the Propagator will be responsible for delivering propagation activities that support the long-term resilience and development of the living collection.

The Propagator will work alongside other nursery staff, focusing on the propagation and cultivation of tree species that support Westonbirt's collection development, conservation programmes and future planting requirements. The role will also support volunteer engagement, knowledge sharing and public understanding of tree conservation.

The role will contribute to maintaining the highest standards of nursery hygiene, plant health and biosecurity. It will help ensure that all propagated material entering and leaving the nursery is healthy and free from pests and pathogens.

The position is a part-time post working 21 hours per week. It is a fixed-term appointment for six months, with the possibility of extending, but with no guarantee of permanency.

Key responsibilities & accountabilities

Propagation and Nursery Management:

- Plan and undertake the propagation of trees and woody plants using a range of techniques including seed propagation and preparation, cuttings, grafting and layering
- Collect seed and vegetative material from the arboretum collection and approved external sources in accordance with best practice guidance and relevant legislation
- Manage and maintain propagation facilities, including glasshouses, polytunnels, propagation benches, nursery beds, and associated infrastructure and equipment, to a high operational standard
- Monitor germination, rooting, establishment and growth, applying appropriate cultivation techniques to produce healthy, high-quality planting stock
- Undertake potting, transplanting, watering, feeding, pruning and general nursery maintenance activities
- Contribute to the planning and delivery of annual propagation programmes aligned with collection development priorities, conservation objectives and planting requirements
- Assist with the preparation and supply of nursery stock for planting in the collection
- Be responsible for all incoming and outgoing transfers of plant material in adherence with Westonbirt nursery procedures
- Ensure all propagation and nursery activities are undertaken safely and in accordance with Forestry England policies and procedures

Conservation, Research and Collection Development:

- Support national and international tree conservation programmes through the propagation and cultivation of rare, threatened and genetically important tree species.
- Contribute specialist propagation expertise to collection development, conservation and research projects
- Support research into seed biology, dormancy, germination requirements and innovative propagation techniques for challenging taxa
- Represent Westonbirt and Forestry England at meetings, workshops, conferences and professional networks as appropriate

Plant Health, Biosecurity and Compliance:

- Maintain the highest standards of nursery hygiene, plant health and biosecurity
- Contribute to Westonbirt's Integrated Pest Management programme through monitoring, preventative action and the use of biological, cultural and environmental controls where appropriate
- Ensure compliance with plant health legislation, biosecurity standards and phytosanitary requirements relating to material arriving and departing the nursery
- Support inspections, audits and plant health monitoring programmes as required
- Operate, maintain and monitor horticultural equipment, tools and machinery safely and effectively

Volunteers, Learning and Public Engagement:

- Supervise volunteers, students, and work experience placements engaged in nursery and propagation activities
- Support tours, demonstrations, interpretation and educational activities that promote tree propagation, conservation and horticultural excellence
- Share specialist knowledge with colleagues and contribute to maintaining Westonbirt's reputation as a centre of excellence for tree propagation and conservation
- Actively develop professional skills and knowledge through training, research, networking and continued professional development

And any other tasks, reasonably requested by your line manager.

Skills, knowledge & experience

Essential professional and technical experience

- Demonstrable practical experience of propagating trees and woody plants from seed and vegetative material through to planting
- Good knowledge of propagation techniques including seed handling, cuttings and grafting
- Sound understanding of tree biology, growth requirements and nursery production system
- Knowledge of plant health principles, nursery hygiene and biosecurity procedures
- Understanding of Integrated Pest Management principles and their practical application
- Strong organisational skills with the ability to plan, prioritise and deliver work programmes effectively
- Good communication and interpersonal skills
- Ability to work independently and collaboratively as part of a team
- Ability and willingness to undertake practical outdoor work throughout the year

Desirable professional and technical experience

- Experience of propagating rare, threatened or unusual tree species
- Experience of working within an arboretum, botanic garden, specialist nursery or conservation organisation
- Knowledge of seed conservation and *ex situ* conservation techniques
- Experience of grafting
- Understanding of UK and international plant health and phytosanitary requirements
- Experience supporting volunteers, trainees or apprentices
- Experience of seed collecting, fieldwork or plant exploration activities
- Membership of a relevant professional body (e.g. International Plant Propagators Society)

Qualifications

Essential

- Relevant qualification, or equivalent practical experience, in horticulture, arboriculture, botany, plant science or a closely related discipline.

Desirable

- Plant health, biosecurity or nursery management training.
- Full UK driving licence.