

## ONE ON ONE WITH...

### Jazmin Albarran: Executive Director of Seed Your Future

by Mary Yee

*The mission of Seed Your Future (SYF) is to "promote horticulture and inspire people to pursue careers working with plants." Jazmin Albarran, who has been SYF's executive director since May 2021, leads the nonprofit from a perspective of empathy: "I was an example of the type of people that we want to reach—someone who loves plants but doesn't realize there is a career for them in horticulture." According to a 2015 Purdue University study, about 56,000 jobs in the industry are open every year, but only 61 percent of them are filled. Albarran will be spreading the word about SYF at the AHS's National Children & Youth Garden Symposium in Knoxville, Tennessee, in July. Managing Editor and Art Director Mary Yee spoke with Albarran about changing perceptions and making connections to help more jobseekers enter the horticultural field. [Editor's note: The AHS is on SYF's Advisory Council.]*

**Your background is with social-cause organizations involving mental health and youth and career development. How do those experiences align with what you do with Seed Your Future?**

My passion is helping people find the best version of themselves. When I was asked to consider applying for the executive director position, I wasn't sure I was the right fit because I didn't know much about plants at the time. My predecessor, Susan Yoder, said the people in the industry will teach you about plants and she was right. I had no idea how massive and complex the horticultural field is. It's not just about the plants—it's about the supply chain from the breeder to the grower to transportation.

As executive director of SYF, I get to inspire students to pursue a career in a field where I know they will be professionally fulfilled. If you love what you do, it impacts your relationships and your physical and mental health in a positive way.

**How do you explain the continuing shortage of horticultural professionals?**

Lack of awareness, and a negative perception of the industry as one where you can't make money and doesn't offer career advancement. When you ask people about horticultural jobs, most think of farming or lawn maintenance. They don't realize all the other occupations in the field. You can be a scientist, a writer, or an educator at a public garden. You can develop communication content for companies, install irrigation systems in greenhouses, use plants for healing in horticultural therapy. There is a range of salaries, some going into six figures.

**What kind of career resources does SYF offer?**

We have many tools on our website ([www.seedyourfuture.org](http://www.seedyourfuture.org)),



such as the Plant Power Quiz, which provides a list of careers based on your interests. We highlight over 100 career profiles with job descriptions, salary information, and education needs. We also list industry scholarships, internships, and a where-to-study map.

Materials begin for students in middle-school, but we are a resource for people of all ages. I've gotten calls from adults who tell me they can't go back to the same 9-to-5 jobs they had before the pandemic. They enjoyed plants so much during that time that they want to make a career change working with them.

**SYF has a Green Career Week scheduled for October 2–6. What is this program about?**

Many industry professionals have told me they found their jobs by accident or as a second career because they were not aware of all the opportunities that exist for working with plants. I also heard that plant-related businesses wanted to connect with local schools to reach the next generation of employees but didn't know how. So we created the Green Career Week campaign with resources for people in the industry to make those connections—such as sample itineraries for a field trip or school visit, FAQs, and media and social media toolkits.

**How has being SYF's executive director for the last two years changed your relationship with plants?**

When I started, I could barely keep an aloe alive because I assumed all plants needed a lot of water to be happy. I've since learned that's not the case. I went from killing almost every plant I bought to now having seven houseplants that have survived over a year!

While I don't work directly with plants, I get to go to public gardens for meetings. I get to see how produce is grown. It's incredible. It's hard work but a lot of fun. ■