

## Course Description

Accurate plant identification is an essential skill for individuals working with living collections. This course introduces key plant structures, identification tools, and observation techniques to help you distinguish between species in the landscape. You'll explore how environmental context affects plant appearance, and how plant ID supports garden maintenance, education, and conservation. The course also includes strategies for helping colleagues, volunteers, and visitors build their own plant identification skills.

## Learning Objectives

After taking this course, you will be able to:

1. Use key plant structures—such as leaves, stems, flowers, fruits, and buds— to distinguish between plant species.
2. Differentiate common characteristics such as simple vs. compound leaves and opposite, alternate, or whorled branching patterns to support accurate field identification.
3. Determine when and why to use plant identification tools such as dichotomous keys, field guides, and mobile apps to verify the identify of plants in garden settings.
4. Recognize how environmental factors and seasonal cues—such as habitat, growth stage, and winter buds—influence plant appearance and help navigate "lookalike" species.
5. Identify when an identification is uncertain and apply appropriate escalation strategies, such as consulting a specialist and / or deferring maintenance actions.
6. Explain the practical value of plant identification for safety, maintenance, invasive species control, conservation, and public engagement in public garden work.