

Sensing Nature guide

Volunteer guides are key to enabling visitors to explore Westonbirt National Arboretum. By sharing their passion, knowledge and experience they support people to understand and connect with the significance of the tree collection and its seasonal delights. Our sensing nature walks are a key part of our guided walks programme. These are designed to deliver multi-sensory walks that showcase/explore a diverse range of sensory perspectives of the arboretum experience and challenge existing narratives of landscape appreciation.

To listen to our existing sensing nature guides talk about their experiences please visit:

- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TZvkaE-OIPs>
- <https://www.fowa.org.uk/blog/sensing-nature-guided-walks/> - from RNIB Connect Radio

When

- Sensing Nature walks run on Fridays from April to September, usually twice a month.
- Once trained sensing nature guides may also support other guided walks that run throughout the year, generally from March-October, with a more limited programme throughout the winter.
- Walks last about 1½ hours, however, to allow for preparation time on/ before the day, shifts take a minimum of 3 hours, and often a full day during your first season.
- We ask for a minimum of 2 onsite shifts per month.

What's Involved

- An introductory process including at least 2 onsite visits.
- A period of mandatory training, followed by mentorship and walk preparation. Our next Sensory Guide training course will run in Spring 2024. Prior to attending this training, you will be asked to attend at least two Sensing Nature walks onsite at Westonbirt - more details in 'how we support you' section.
- Leading parties of visitors safely around the arboretum in partnership with an assistant guide.
- Developing and providing a thought-provoking multi-sensory walk focusing on our key messages.
- Tailoring the walk to suit the specific preferences and needs of different people.
- Answering visitor questions or advising where they may obtain the information.
- Promoting Westonbirt and its events; the Friends' Charity and membership.
- Working as part of a team, with the existing guide team and support network including supporting walks as a co/guest presenter as well as leading walks.
- Engaging in ongoing training and personal development.

Who are we looking for...

For the sensing nature walks programme we are keen to encourage people with lived experience of different sensory perception. In particular, we welcome applications from those with visual impairments. Full training will be provided, so you don't have to be a tree expert! The most essential attributes are passion for trees/the environment and an interest in people.

This role is all about engaging with visitors so ideally you will be

- Confident in engaging with all kinds of visitors.
- Able to speak effectively to groups of people in an outdoor setting.
- Reliable, positive, patient, and keen to share your enthusiasm for the arboretum with others.
- Have good attention to detail, and a willingness to learn and promote our key messages.
- Able to make sufficient time available during the period of formal training and subsequent learning to undertake 'homework', get to know the arboretum and keep up to date with a continuously changing environment.
- Comfortable walking on and off paths in ALL weathers through the seasons (NB we can provide trained sighted assistants to support you).

How we will support you...

Becoming a guide takes time. However, we will be with you every step of the way through our tailored training programme.

- Two onsite visits prior to your first training session (for initial orientation and understanding of what you are signing up to), including:
 - site orientation
 - experiencing two different Sensing Nature walks with our VI guides
 - exploring your individual support requirements with you.
- A full 5-day initial training programme onsite from 10am-4pm and 3 virtual training sessions of 2-3 hours.

The 5 training days will take place over a period of two months in Spring 2024 when you will be onsite from 10am to 4pm working in small groups, supported by sighted Westonbirt guides, to orientate and explore the site, and to learn and practice the information and processes you need to become a sensory guide at Westonbirt.

- We will also provide further optional Orientation Days on certain Fridays through the training period if required.
- A period of personal mentoring, development and shadowing experienced guides following the initial training to enable you to build confidence to lead groups.



Please note, initial onsite training is mandatory for this position, and we do require trainees to attend all training sessions followed by a period of development and mentoring.

- **Initial visits** to attend a Sensing Nature walk and meet some of our training team. Walks are scheduled on 11th & 25th August; 8th & 22nd September 2023 - other dates may be available and we would ask you to join two walks.
- **Onsite Training (likely to be Fridays/Saturdays): Spring 2024** (exact dates tbc by 31/10/23).
- **Virtual Sessions:** November 2023 (Meeting the Group) then 2 in Spring 2024 (exact dates tbc 31/10/2023).

We can provide sighted assistants to those guides that may require further support in becoming familiar with the arboretum layout and terrain, which can be uneven, rough, or muddy. Our existing VI support team are trained in sighted guiding and will work with you to understand your specific guiding preferences. Alternatively, you are welcome to volunteer with a friend, family member or personal assistant.

Other benefits...

- Access to Westonbirt's library and archive resources for further research.
- A contribution to the cost of volunteering travel, details on enquiry.
- A volunteer card to enable access to the arboretum.
- Volunteer uniform.
- Duty Manager support and an on-site radio for communication.
- Ongoing guide team meetings and CPD development sessions (you are expected to attend at a minimum of 2 of these sessions).

What to do now?

If you are interested in this opportunity please contact the volunteer office by email volunteer.westonbirt@forestryengland.uk or telephone 0300 067 4847 for an initial conversation.