

Royal Botanic Gardens

Kew

Inspiring futures

Lee Davies



Tell us about your job

Fungarium Collections Curator. I look after our scientifically important collection of fungi, keeping it in good condition, updating the arrangement to match our understanding of fungal relationships, and ensuring it is curated to a standard that ensures the collection will survive at least another 160 years.

Why is science important in your career?

Much of the science I did at school and university sets the foundation for what I do now. I didn't do anything relating to fungi, but subjects such as biology, taxonomy, evolution and the things you study as part of that are all useful for understanding what you are doing with living organisms.

What is your average work day like?

It can vary immensely, but often I am databasing and incorporating new specimens into the collections. I might also do tours for visitors and talk about fungal science, assist visiting researchers or be preparing to send specimens to other institutions for research. I also get to go on fieldtrips collecting fungi to add to our collections.

Did you go to university? If so, what did you study? If not, what did you do after leaving school?

I did, I did a degree in Palaeobiology and afterwards went into curation (of fossils) and those skills set me up to work on other groups (such as plants and fungi).

What sort of personality traits do you have that help you in your career?

The ability to think logically, be organised, or at least keep things organised. Plus, an enthusiasm for the things you are curator of. Passion for your subject goes a long way.

What helped you get your role at Kew?

Actually, in my case it was a series of fluke incidents, but mostly it was experience of working as a collections curator.

What advice would you give to someone considering a career like yours?

Aim for a biological degree of some sort, but more importantly, get some experience! Volunteer in a museum, work experience somewhere with collections. Curator jobs in the natural and earth sciences are few and far between (because we do it because we love it rather than to get rich quickly, we tend to stay in the job a long time, so they don't come up often). Having experience will get you a head start when they do.

What do you want people to know about your work?

We have the world's largest scientific collection of dried fungi, with around 1.3 million specimens, from over 60,000 species

It's a hugely variable job; I can spend one day databasing and accessioning new specimens, the next speaking to groups of visiting dignitaries and the next flying off to South America on fieldwork.

Fungi are incredibly important for all life on earth; they are the ultimate workers, ensuring plants survive and therefore all the animals that rely on them. No fungi = no plants = no animals.

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