A PhD student position is available in the Li Lab (https://www.dlilab.com/) in the Department of Biology at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, starting Fall 2027. PhD students generally have funding for at least five years through teaching assistantships, fellowships, or research assistantships. The application deadline for Fall 2027 enrollment is [December 1, 2026]. Application instructions are at https://botanyibio.sites.wisc.edu/botany-graduate-program/.

About the lab

The Li Lab studies how environmental change, including climate change and urbanization, affects plant biodiversity, phenology, and species interactions. We combine fieldwork with open-data synthesis, computer vision and AI, and hierarchical statistical modeling. Current projects include Phenobase, a global plant phenology platform built on millions of community-science observations, and GUBIC, a global study of urban plant diversity and non-native species spread across hundreds of cities.

About this position

We are looking for a student interested in plant community ecology: how plant communities assemble, change through time, and respond to global change. Applicants who are skilled at plant identification, or eager to become so, are especially encouraged to apply. Students are encouraged to develop independent research questions that align with or expand on lab themes (see examples and publications on the lab website).

Potential projects include:
- A third resurvey of the Curtis stands. John Curtis's 1950s vegetation survey stands across Wisconsin were resurveyed in the 2000s, giving a rare multi-decade record of plant community change. We plan a third resurvey, which would let a student quantify change across three time points and test the roles of climate change, land use, and urbanization.
- UW-Madison Arboretum. The Arboretum offers field sites, restoration experiments, and long-term data and records that can support community change, restoration, and invasion questions close to campus.
- Other directions within lab themes, such as plant phenology, urban plant diversity and non-native species, or plant-plant and plant-pollinator interactions, drawing on lab datasets (e.g., Phenobase, GUBIC) and approaches (e.g., statistics, machine learning).

Who should apply
- Strong interest in plant community ecology and global change biology,

- Field botany skills (regional flora, keying, herbarium or vegetation sampling experience), or a demonstrated strong interest in learning them
- Comfort with, or interest in learning, quantitative analysis in R
- Applicants from diverse academic backgrounds are welcome, including biology, ecology, botany, statistics, computer science, and related fields

- Students from historically underrepresented groups in STEM are especially encouraged to apply

How to apply

Before submitting an official application, email Dr. Daijiang Li (dli55@wisc.edu) with the subject line "PhD position fall 2027." Include a CV and a cover letter that briefly describes:
- Your research interests and relevant experience, especially in plant identification and fieldwork
- The overarching question you wish to pursue in the lab
- Three hypotheses you would like to test during your PhD
- Proposed study systems, available data, and methodological approaches

Living in Madison

Madison is a vibrant, progressive city known for its high quality of life and active outdoor culture. Surrounded by lakes and parks, it offers abundant hiking, kayaking, cross-country skiing, and cycling. As the capital of Wisconsin and home to a top-ranked public university, Madison blends a dynamic academic atmosphere with a thriving arts and music scene, excellent local food, and a strong sense of community. With four distinct seasons and a walkable, bike-friendly design, it is an ideal place to study, live, and grow, and it is consistently ranked among the best places to live in the US.

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