

## How Horticulture Internships Help Grow Our Industry

**When I was younger**, I heard from every angle how important a college degree can be for your career and success. There is no shortage of career options in this country, but some of the most satisfying day-to-day jobs out there are in the horticulture industry, especially if you love plants and gardening as so many of us do.

Being in a disposable income-based industry, we are growing with the U.S. economy. Industry growth brings with it job and career opportunities that span numerous disciplines from research and development to product management, greenhouse operation, marketing, sales, finance and more.

A few key opportunities that helped me hone in on my dream career during school were work-study programs, internships and great mentors. Work-study programs allow students the opportunity to work in their field of study during school, make a little spending money to help support themselves, and most importantly apply the concepts learned in the classroom to real world situations. Internships provide the on-the-job experience that few students these days really get prior to completing a higher education degree, and can more often than not open up career opportunities once finished with school. During both of those ventures, having a great mentor that cares about your success and development is crucial, and though they are especially prevalent in the academic world it is important to remember no one will plan your career for you and seeking out those leaders at every opportunity is highly beneficial.

### MY WORK STUDY EXPERIENCE

Unlike most students, I went back to school after being done with high school for a few years, and though that made it challenging financially there was a huge benefit to knowing why I wanted to go back ... to learn more about plants.

When I got to Gainesville, Florida, in 2007 the first thing I did was walk right into the Environmental Horticulture Department and ask about any available job opportunities. Working my way through school was a financial must, but every student can relate to the benefit of spending 10 to 20 hours a week working in your field of study. In most cases, the experience gained there is more applicable than the course work and, at the very least, is a great way to make connections and solidify concepts learned in the classroom.

It can also be beneficial to students to seek out a professor that would be willing to do an independent study project that allows them to apply what they are learning. Rosanna Freyre at UF gave me a great opportunity to work as a greenhouse technician on her plant breeding projects and field trials, which in a large way influenced my course selection and career goals going forward. The time spent in the greenhouse and field was an invaluable experience.

### MY INTERNSHIP EXPERIENCE

Being out in the greenhouse complex on main campus in Gainesville and frequenting the Pine Acres trial farm in Citra,

Florida, my passion for plants really thrived. I transferred to UF from the local state college (Sante Fe) in 2010, and had the pleasure to study plant science under a decorated ENH faculty including another renowned ornamental plant breeder Dave Clark. Being a familiar face around the department (from my work study involvement) and taking Clark's Plant Molecular and Cellular Biology course, I knew I wanted to pursue plant breeding as a career. Clark helped me land an internship at Garden Genetics, LLC (G2) in Bellefonte, Pennsylvania.

In the summer of 2011 I packed up my truck (and then girlfriend, now wife) and drove to Pennsylvania to set up shop in a sub-let apartment for the season. Though daunting, I look back at the challenge of finding housing, transporting my life a thousand miles away, and meeting new professionals at G2 as a huge influence in my career and world view. Under the mentorship of Mike Uchneat and Rick Grazzini, I was able to expand my crop knowledge into other valuable annual plants, get hands-on experience cross pollinating, collecting and cataloging hybrid seed, work with tissue culture embryo rescue, and really learn what it takes to create and bring new ornamental plants to market.

As part of a scholarship opportunity at UF, I was required to keep a log of my activities which led to a paper I wrote for the GPN/Nexus Intern of the Year award application. The following summer I found myself in Columbus, Ohio, accepting the award at Cultivate. That experience landed me a graduate degree fellowship at the University of Florida where I started a basil breeding program targeting downy mildew resistance under Dave Clark and, after receiving my master's degree in 2014, a job at Pleasant View Gardens (PVG) as R&D new plant identification manager and trial manager for Proven Winners North America.

### PROVIDING OPPORTUNITY THROUGH HORTICULTURE INTERNSHIPS

As R&D manager at PVG, I am honored to host five to six students annually in our Trial Field and Display Garden summer internships in Loudon, New Hampshire. After all of the great mentorship throughout my education and internship experiences, I really look forward to working with students every summer for the opportunity to pass along the insight into our industry, hands-on experience, and potential for career opportunities that I was provided.

Along with Jessica Tatro (production R&D manager) and Jeff Huntington (PVG co-owner and vice president), we strive to create an educational and exciting work environment that showcases how amazing a career in horticulture can be. As we develop our relationship with upcoming organizations like the Collegiate Plant Initiative at the University of Florida, we hope to help increase exposure of career opportunities in horticulture to more and more interdisciplinary students. If you know anyone interested in submitting an application for our internship program, please email us at [careers@pwpvg.com](mailto:careers@pwpvg.com). 



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