

PERSEVERING Through The PANDEMIC

Despite the challenges of the 2020 pandemic, Joy Johnson was able to continue her hands-on horticulture education with an internship at Pleasant View Gardens — and be named the 2021 GPN/Nexus Intern of the Year.



BY TIM HODSON

Ask any college student studying horticulture if they participated in an internship in 2020 and you're most likely not going to get too many, if any, positive responses.

Joy Johnson is one of the lucky ones because she had an opportunity to complete an internship at Pleasant View Gardens (PVG) in Loudon, New Hampshire.

The COVID crisis forced many growers and universities to cancel their internship plans for 2020, but Joy was able to participate in a three-month program with the team that includes two previous Interns of the Year — Jessica (Boldt) Tatro ('05) and Adam Moseley ('12).

After spending her summer in New Hampshire at one of the founding partners of the Proven Winners brand, Joy has been named the 2021 GPN/Nexus Intern of the Year.

ESTABLISHING HER HORTICULTURE ROOTS

Joy is currently a junior at Michigan State University. She grew up on a farm in Western Michigan "so I've always been surrounded by agriculture but horticulture crops always interested me more than agronomy crops." While her father was working out in the fields, Joy would often be helping her mother plant and water the flowers in their yard.

Joy participated in 4H throughout her childhood from the age of 5-18, and would often work with different types of flowers to be judged as a "still exhibit."

When selecting a major at MSU, "I decided that horticulture was more interesting to me than plant biology or biochemistry. In the horticulture



program, you learn how plants grow and how to grow plants. You get to learn the applied side and that's been a really good route for me," Joy says.

During her sophomore year at MSU and prior to the pandemic, Joy began looking at internship programs that were research based. She wanted to find a program that was out of state, research related and had something to do with plant breeding.

"I've always been really interested in plant breeding," she says. While in high school she worked on several different plant-based research projects that really planted some of the seeds for her academic future.

Due to the pandemic, internship opportunities were very limited, but Joy was able to connect with the team at PVG and secure her position for the summer.

Congratulations JOY!

For the 21st year in a row, Nexus Greenhouse Systems is pleased to present the GPN/Nexus Intern of the Year Award.

This year's winner is Joy Johnson from Michigan State University. On behalf of all of us, we'd like to congratulate Joy for her dedication and achievement.

Her passion for horticulture throughout the internship was evident and will serve her well in the years to come. Joy had an incredible summer experience at Pleasant View Gardens in New Hampshire where she learned about horticulture research and development and explored interests independently.

We wish Joy all the best in her remaining time at Michigan State University and a successful career in the years to come.

This year provided all of us with serious challenges. To see Joy, and the other nominees, navigate these struggles and secure intern positions to further their studies and expertise, has been inspiring. Everyone has had to adapt and find new ways to keep going – it's how we grow.

On behalf of Nexus Greenhouse Systems, we congratulate all nominees and students that found and completed successful internships. Well done to everyone!

Keep growing. We're rooting for you!

— Greg Ellis, Sales Manager,
Nexus Greenhouse Systems



A WELL-ROUNDED EDUCATION

Joy arrived in New Hampshire in mid-May just as PVG was wrapping up its spring trials program. One of her first responsibilities involved prepping the greenhouses for the company's summer trials program.

This allowed her to acquaint herself with the different Proven Winners varieties that are grown at PVG as well as learn the company's coding system that indicates what "level" of trialing each plant variety is in.

As part of her internship, Joy also photo-documented all of PVG's perennials before transplant and weekly after that in the trial fields.

For the very first point of the trial, she would use an iPhone with the Pleasant View Trials app to scan the QR code and then take a picture of the plugs to indicate how many had rooted and what their general health looked like. The photos would later be uploaded through the

Continued on page 24 ...

PLANT BREEDER.
HORTICULTURE STUDENT.
RISING STAR. OH, AND ALSO...

Intern of the Year



CONGRATULATIONS TO JOY JOHNSON

She was a 2020 intern in the growing operation at Pleasant View Gardens and she brightened the greenhouses even more than the flowers. She was instrumental in documenting all our perennials before and after transplant, as well as assigning bloom ratings to the plants along the way. Plants will be in this future plant breeder's blood as she pursues her BS in Horticulture at Michigan State University. Join us in wishing her well, and we look forward to who might fill her shoes in next year's edition of PVG's yearly internship program. Think you might be a good fit next year? Learn more at the link below.

PWPVG.COM/INTERNSHIPS



Pleasant
View

GROWING SUCCESS

... continued from page 21

app to a database. Then the plugs would be matched up to an Ellepot tray with another corresponding label and transplanted.

Once the plugs were transplanted, the next course of action for the trial was to get the trial field ready. This was done by setting up the drip irrigation system, filling and setting out pots, labelling the pots with more corresponding labels and QR codes, preparing hanging basket lines and setting up a shade cloth area.

“During this period, I learned a lot about how to set up drip irrigation and how to efficiently set up a trial field to meet the specific needs of the different plants as well as the research needs,” Joy remarks.

“Plants that were shade tolerant would be planted under the shade cloth, and we also utilized in-ground trials to reflect what most landscapers would experience with the different plants.”

The next step in the summer trial was to bring the established Ellepot plant trays down to the trial field and transplant them in the pots or in the in-ground field with the corresponding labels. After everything from the greenhouse was transplanted and placed, the focus was on maintaining the plants.

“I learned about the growth habits and needs of a large variety of plants. I regularly did field walks, and through that experience, I gained a better understanding of scouting for pests, diseases and irrigation



issues. Once the issues were identified, I learned more about how to counteract them,” Joy says.

HER PERENNIAL PROJECT

During the summer, Joy also was assigned to work on an independent study project that was part of PVG’s perennial field trial. The perennial trials are ongoing from year to year but Joy had a specific assignment for this year — create a bloom calendar for the perennials.

“I would walk the field with a list of every plant in that field, and, if it was in bloom, I would give it a rating of 1 to 5 with a 1 being hardly any flowers to a 5 being in peak bloom,” she explains.

At the end of the summer she took all of the data that she had collected and entered it into a spreadsheet to create the bloom calendar. During week 26 she took “glamour shot” photos of all of this year’s perennials that had been planted in gallons. The photos were used to assess how well the plants filled a gallon pot and if it had flowered in that pot ... traits that could impact their sales at retail.

Joy learned how valuable the trials are to the company. Since the perennial trials are ongoing, they are continually making improvements to products and the processes. But after walking the field all summer and collecting data, “actually seeing everything come together [at the end] was very rewarding.”

And she particularly enjoyed the leucanthemum trials because “I’m a big fan of daisies!”

BACK TO “SCHOOL”


Once she completed her internship at PVG, she returned to East Lansing for her junior year of studies. Once again, due to the COVID situation, this school year has been very unique. The entire fall semester for all MSU students was online — creating some challenges. “Obviously it is not an ideal learning environment,” but the students and the university are making it work for them.

Looking back on her summer in New Hampshire, Joy really enjoyed her experience and working with everyone at PVG in spite of the pandemic. She said the company did a great job protecting its employees, making sure they wore masks and always checking on their health. She wishes she could have spent even more time picking the brains of her supervisors and managers to learn as much as possible about their research, products and processes.

“Pleasant View is a great company to work for. They are super, super kind to their employees,” Joy says. “I’m grateful that I was able to get out of my comfort zone ... and complete an internship at all given the circumstances of COVID-19.”

Joy is currently looking at internship opportunities for this upcoming summer prior to her senior year at MSU, and then she plans to go to grad school.

“Plant breeding is what I am really interested in. I’m still working on figuring out what I like more — the field side versus the lab side,” she says.

She’s got a little time to figure that out, so stay tuned! 



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