

## NICOLETTE MALIFITANO

After completing the six-month internship with Tagawa Greenhouses, I feel very confident in my future in the horticulture industry. It gave me a better picture of where I see myself in a few years down the road. I am so very thankful to have been able to take this internship and run with it. I have made countless connections that will only benefit me in the end.

I got experience in both the office setting, production, operations, and retail selling as well. My favorite part of the internship was the production side. It helped me become a more critical thinker when it came to taking care of the plants. I was forced to determine when to and not to water based on the weight of the trays. Also, I was put into positions where I had to take a look at the plants and determine what rates and what types of chemicals may need to be applied to the plants (i.e. plant growth regulators, fungicides, pesticides). I was also taught proper chemical application techniques which is not something that is taught in school. I am now able to better identify multiple species of annuals, mainly from working with so many for so long. Prior to this internship my identification skills were sub-par but now I feel more confident in my skills.

The most important lesson that I learned though was that I am not a fan of working in a commercial greenhouse. I got to work in their outdoor ranges where there is no automation and everything is hand watered, and that was my favorite part. I liked being able to give more of my time and attention to each individual plant rather than trying to take care of two or three larger ranges at a time.

On the operations side, I found myself not enjoying my time as much. I am very thankful for the experience, because I learned just how much work also goes into everything that is NOT growing the plants. I was responsible for unpacking cuttings and sorting them, tagging and picking up trays for deliveries, and plant counts. These tasks were all tedious, but I credit it to the main reason why my identification became much better. I was forced to track all the plants from the moment the cuttings entered the facility to the moment they leave. I learned the value of organization and automation in this setting. I was able to use a system on the iPad to move and track trays throughout the greenhouses. It took some time to enter all the data every week, but in the end it sped up the process for tagging because we knew exactly where everything was. So, though it was not my favorite part, it was still a very educational aspect of the internship.

In addition, I also got a bit of exposure in retail and merchandising. I spent two weeks at a Home Depot store learning about merchandising the material. I had worked in retail settings, but nothing compared to a box store such as Home Depot. I learned about color blocking, organizing by height, what is sellable, when plants are no longer sellable, and customer service skills. I also had some experience at Tagawa Gardens which is their retail location. There I got a chance to talk to management and learn about their marketing strategies, their outreach program, and how they try to stand apart from other garden centers.

I believe that one of the most valuable aspects of this internship was the opportunity to talk to every department in the business and discuss their roles in the operations. From

accounting to shipping to planning to maintenance, everything was connected. One department would not be able to function without the support of everyone else.

Overall, I was extremely impressed by and thankful for the opportunity I was presented with. I'm now sure that this is the field I want to make a career in.

