

Christina Rodriguez

Internship Report

From the beginning of my internship to my present moment I knew my internship would open many doors for me. Working at Pacific Plugs & Liners/Smith Gardens; a nursery predominantly focused on propagation while also dabbling in finished products. The type of nursery a newcomer would love to stumble upon. Since there is so much room for learning in both propagation and finished products, I have obtained many skills and gained increasingly valuable knowledge. I worked in several departments with almost everyone in the company. My internship began with shadowing the head grower, growers, production manager, and head supervisors. Giving me an overall feel for the grand scheme of a nursery in action. After shadowing the growers and head supervisors for a couple of weeks I then spent time in all departments; shipping, inventory, receiving, seed sowing, sticking, patching, moving, Integrative Pest Management, and finally finished products. Each department I would spend anywhere between 2-4 weeks, this allowed me time to learn the ins and outs of a departments. Which also gave me time to connect the dots between the department and the bigger mission the nursery was fulfilling.

Within each department I learned through many lenses; a head grower, a department manager, supervisor, and most importantly as a regular employee. Each of these lenses allowed me to see the nursery through a unique perspective. For example, I learned how a head grower makes decisions, communicates effectively, and solves problems within the nursery. Whether the head grower's problem is communicating clearly and concisely to a certain department or several departments. For example, if you need to move plants into one area of the greenhouse to a colder zone in the greenhouse you must communicate this effectively to irrigators and movers so everyone is on the same page. Another key in production is being able to accommodate for the company as well as employees. Being a production manager you must ensure a department as a whole is saving money and productively running with proper etiquette. An example, in order to ensure you are not wasting valuable money you must ensure all employees and their labor is accounted for in order to calculate proficiently the cost of labor. Within these two positions (head grower and production manager) there is a necessity to have problem solving skills and experience in order to resolve several problems and complicated tasks.

Having the opportunity to work in all the departments gave me an immense amount of perspective when it came too the big picture of the nursery. From the beginning of the plant's life at the greenhouse (receiving, sowing, or sticking) to the "end" either finished products or shipping out to another greenhouse after the plants hardened. There is so much work and synergy between the beginning and the "end" of a plant's life in the nursery. Let's consider the pathways of a plants life in the nursery. We have the Receiving Department which receives the shipment of either seeds, cutting, or tissue culture. From here seeds will stay in sowing awaiting to be sown and will then germinate, cuttings and tissue culture will be sent to sticking and be planted either manually or by the ISO machine (automated planter). If they are a seed from here, they will germinate then propagate until they are strong enough to move to a hardening zone. If they are a cuttings or tissue culture they will be put in a misted environment until ready to harden off. Then

once hardened they will be pinched if need be if not they will grow until the “ship week”, once ready they will be prepped for shipping. If the tray of plugs needs to be patched, they will, and then they will be shipped off. If these plugs are meant for the finished product side, then they will eventually be moved outside to further harden until mature enough to be planted into pots. After they are mature enough, they will be planted into pots and they will grow until the time comes to ship them out to a customer such as Home Depot. While this whole process goes on other departments work in shadows. For example, the movers from moving will figure out where and how to move the plants. Inventory will keep track of where the plants are in the “PICAS” system which is where everyone logs all of their inventory information. As you can see the whole nursery is an intricately functioning system, interdependent on each other.

Considering the intricacy of a nursery and its several departments we can imagine how extremely complicated and important it is to have every level of department in order for the nursery to work at optimal efficiency. I feel as though I have learned many skills; making connection between all departments and the nurseries mission to provide quality plants, inter and intra personal communications skills, learned Spanish, take inventory, run an assembly line, learned how to use an ISO machine and sowing machine, proficient in excel, select and tag finish products, assess and evaluate departments, studied and gained knowledge on integrative pest management, scouted insects and reported findings, as well as made and followed plant trials (IBA concentrations at different levels). I have learned enough to write a book. I feel it is difficult to even express all that I have learned. I barely scratched the surface on the immense amount knowledge I gained. I am very grateful for the opportunity to gain experience and skills in my field of study horticulture. I now feel incredibly confident I will be more than capable of achieving my future career goals as a head grower. I wouldn't have been able to do this with the opportunity of a lifetime, my Vic and Margaret Ball Internship!



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