

Walter's Gardens internship experience



I started my internship at Walters Gardens Inc. (WGI) on May 18th 2011 and continued to work until August 18th of that same year. During that time, I was under the “command” of Clarence Falstad, who worked in the New Plant Development and as a Royalty Administrator. To this day, I am not sure why exactly he was my “Boss” because I should have spent most of my time with the greenhouse manager and on with people working in production. I spent most of my time working with the hybridizer’s completing different tasks that they had. Examples of my work include: planting out in trial gardens, crossing pollen, organizing plants in the green house, taking and sticking cuttings, labeling pictures on the computer, weeding, upsizing, weeding in the greenhouse, Creating a new plant development booklet. Some experiences that I was able to do a couple of times include: two presentations to the marketing team, one on Agaves and the other on daylilies, I got to take a couple of field tours of the bear root production fields, and I also was able to go scouting with the plant health team. While I was there I also conducted and PGR trial on Colocasias and Musa which allowed me to use some of my horticultural knowledge.

One of the things that I learned related to horticulture and greenhouse production is how to properly scout for and treat different insect and disease problems. I was able to work with plant health during my time at WGI, which I found to be quit informative because I have not been exposed to that information in school. Another skill I picked up was the ability to work as a team in a work setting. At my other jobs, I was always the only employee or the only one working during a shift. The most important thing I learned or rather came to understand is the importance of communication. WGI is like the United States, It is one big company broken down into smaller sections, AKA the states. WGI has a: shipment team, IT, marketing staff, accountants, sales department, plant production, Hosta department, breeding department, field crew, and so on and so forth. All of these different departments have to work together in order for the business to flow and work. Miscommunications can cause major hold up and loss of profit.

I feel that the company has the potential to become a great host for interns. This was the first time they worked with AFE as well as a college internship program. WGI calls any or there high school or summer help, interns. Most of the other “Interns” are children of people in upper management in WGI that are not planning on going into any Agriculture or horticulture field. All though the AFE and the UWRF internship requirements were clearly stated to the company before starting this internship, they were not implemented as well as I would have liked them to be. I tried a couple of times to communicate that I needed to be spending more time in plant production and with the greenhouse manager to my boss, but nothing would change. He would tell me that he emailed the Greenhouse manager but they never responded. Clarence and I had two very different personalities that did not communicate well together. I eventually after being so frustrated reach out to Clarence’s boss Hans Hanson for some guidance. He then stepped in, started to give me more work in different department, and gave me the opportunity to give two presentations.



Before I started the internship, it was to my understanding that my weeks were scheduled out with what departments I would be working in. When I got there this plan was never put into effect and each day felt like people struggled to find things for me to do. It was very unorganized. The communication was also bad, for example. On my second to last day the greenhouse manager finally took me around the greenhouse and talked to me about his job. At the end of the day, he told me that he had a bunch of different work planned for me the following week. I had to explain to him that the next day was my last day, which he obviously was not told.

After saying all that I still feel that WGI is an amazing company. Now that they have seen the type of responsibilities and experiences that are required by AFE and other College internship programs I feel they will be able to better guide future interns. I also think part of many issues I had were because of the manager that was put in charge of me, Clarence. He is a really great guy but just could not give me guidance that was needed. He was not able to work as hard for me as I was working for the company. Hans Hanson really made the whole internship worthwhile. He worked so hard for me and in the future, I would recommend

students working for him. Even though he is not the greenhouse manager he will work to get the interns involved in production.

This internship has really made me think harder about my career path. I know for a fact that plant breeding is not a career I would enjoy. I used to think that I wanted to be a grower, but after this internship, I see that one does not need a degree really to do that. I do not want the four years I slaved in college not stand for something. I am still considering working as a greenhouse manager but I have also been giving a lot of thought about going into sales. Both options are challenging and are more suited for a person with a four-year degree.

After I graduate I plan on moving to Ashville North Carolina. My Grandparents have offered me a place to stay and an opportunity to move to the city I have always wanted to live. I plan of filling out applications this winter break for greenhouses in the surrounding area and hopefully will have some interviews lined up for over spring break. If I am unable to find a career there than I am willing to move where ever I need to or go back to school for my masters.

Although I had some issues with my internship I still feel like it was a great experience and I would do it again in a heartbeat. The people I met at WGI and in my living arrangement are some of the nicest people I have ever met. I know that when I look back on this experience in the future I will realize that I learned a lot more that I originally though I did. Moving to Michigan and working for WGI helped me gain a better understanding of how Greenhouse companies operate. This summer helped me to mature as a person and better prepare myself for a world outside of college. Thank you some much for this opportunity.

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