

PASSING THE TORCH

Garden Interns Take New-Found Knowledge into the Future

By Robin Parow

Over 30 years ago, Berkshire Botanical Garden initiated a college internship program for promising horticulture and landscape design students. The goals of providing hands-on instruction and learning opportunities were clearly congruent with the Garden's mission, but the many details of creating outreach, housing, and designing programs and curricula that would be appealing and suitable to students with diversified interests may have seemed daunting at the time. Through the efforts of many, the program has developed and evolved. Over one hundred interns have worked in our gardens, expanded their knowledge, and became part of the close-knit staff that works as a team on multiple levels.

What makes this program so successful is a trifecta of generosity, planning, and partnership. Donations from private individuals and organizations including the The Marcia Brady Tucker Foundation and Lenox Garden Club have provided stipends for housing and salaries; a comprehensive list of colleges and universities that offer horticulture and landscape architecture programs was developed, serving as the primary outreach tool to fill the four available intern spots each season. And, through a unique partnership with The Trustees of Reservation, our friends and neighbors at Naumkeag



Korey Adwell, Erica Hecht, Chloe Smith, and Yesenia Vega spend a rainy afternoon in the propagation greenhouse.

provide additional opportunities for interns, who split their time between Naumkeag's historic gardens and BBG. Intern housing is provided in Naumkeag's carriage house apartment. The Garden's professional staff and consultants, led by Horticulture Director Dorthe Hviid, share their skills and resources, providing a curriculum covering topics from entomology to tree identification to propagation and staking of perennials; staff-led field

trips to noted public and private gardens provide further learning opportunities.

According to Dorthe, the criteria for becoming an intern are both simple and complex: she prefers college juniors and seniors, with a notable passion for horticulture or garden design. Beyond that, maturity, a good work ethic and good attitude are also required. And most important, a sense of humor is mandatory! That Dorthe



routinely recruits appropriate interns who check all the boxes year after year is evidence that BBG continues to be a magnet to students of nature.

Last May, four exemplary students from as nearby as Springfield, MA, and as far away as Council Grove, KA, arrived at the Garden for 12 weeks of learning, work, and friendship. Here are the stories of their journeys, their aspirations, and hopes for the future:

Yesenia Vega heard about the intern program while visiting Naumkeag's gardens on a class field trip with fellow students from Springfield (MA) Technical Community College. Her interest in green spaces had already led her to advanced studies in landscape design management, horticulture,

and floraculture, and an internship at a public garden seemed a proper fit to round out her knowledge. She applied, was accepted, and made the 90-minute drive to BBG from her home in Springfield. "I fell in love," she said, smiling, "when I recognized that each individual garden is treated as its own entity and has its own personality. I was thrilled to know I'd be spending the summer there." Once at BBG, Yesenia opened an Instagram account to document her internship and share the experience with friends, students, and family. Whether she was assigned to work in the gardens or greenhouses, she focused on a personal goal of learning Latin plant names, which was put to direct use when she

Erica Hecht and Korey Adwell caught in a moment of impromptu plant anatomy studies at an after-hours staff event.

volunteered to help create the weekly bloom chart that is posted on the Garden's website and shared in a weekly newsletter to 7,000 subscribers. When asked where she hopes her studies will take her, she reflected on her experience, citing a commitment to continuing in horticulture, especially in an environment where she can continue to use her artistic abilities. She's off to a good start. On her last day at the Garden, her floral arrangement won a blue ribbon in the design division at the Garden's 48th annual Grow Show. We'll be seeing Yesenia again. . .she plans to

Yesenia Vega and Chloe Smith create the bloom chart for the Garden's website and weekly newsletter.

be married in her favorite spot at BBG - the Procter Garden.

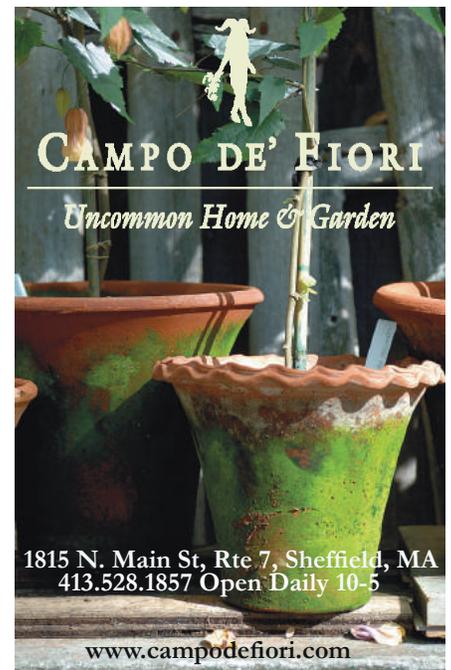
Erica Hecht came to her internship at the Garden with just one semester to go before attaining a degree in agriculture from Kansas State University. Gardening and horticulture are part of her lineage – her mother is a gardener, and her father an agronomist. She grew up in Council Grove, KA, identifying plants, studying native grasses, and collecting specimens for her flower press. Once in college, studies in greenhouse/nursery management led to an interest in working at a public garden. Applying to BBG's intern program and working at a garden in New England was especially appealing, and once she arrived, she was happy with her choice. "I didn't expect such beautiful, hilly geography," she said, adding that her love of shade plants and ferns was more than rewarded at BBG. At home in her new environment, she was intent on learning all there is to know about how a public garden functions. On a broader scale, Erica takes a sober approach to climate change. "People will have to plant differently as the southern plants move north," she said. "Climate change forces a shift in the way you think about gardening." Because of her internship at BBG, Erica would like to continue her work in public gardens. "Caring for and maintaining a landscape is enjoyable," she said, adding, "I'm more aware now



of how an entire garden works, so the combination of gardening and interacting with the public is gratifying."

Chloe Smith graduated with a degree in actuarial science and horticulture from the University of Illinois just weeks before her arrival in Stockbridge. Before applying for the internship, Chloe was at a crossroad with several job opportunities and some tough decisions to make. She was offered a position as a horticultural instructor through the correctional education program for Land Lake College at Southwestern Correctional Center in East St. Louis. Another offer involved working at a production nursery in Albers, IL, in horticulture outreach. But her professors inspired and motivated her to apply for the intern position, and in the end, she chose BBG. Once she arrived, she quickly found her niche. "I love talking about horticulture and

plant propagation," she said, "and I love learning about regional plants and the historical aspects of an area. I had never worked in a public garden or been to the northeast," she said. "Interacting with



people and working within a tight group in awesome gardens was the right choice.” Her passion for academia may eventually lead to a PhD with the goal of teaching at the college level. “I’ll decide once I return to O’Fallon [Illinois],” she said, “in the meantime, I’m enjoying learning about the regional plants and interacting with the staff and visitors here. Once I leave, I know I’ll stay in touch.”

A junior at Northwest Missouri State University, **Korey Adwell** chose to major in Agricultural Business but soon recognized that his interest in plants should include a minor in horticulture as well. No stranger to gardening, he grew up in Ravenwood, MO, helping with the family’s vegetable garden. He credits his mother for teaching him basic tilling, planting, weeding, and

harvesting techniques. BBG’s intern program was on his radar — he’d seen it on the website as both a freshman and sophomore — but had to wait until he was a junior to apply. The waiting paid off when he was accepted into the program over the winter: suddenly his goal of working in the northeast and seeing a Red Sox game was within reach! Once in Stockbridge, Korey’s broad interest in gardening and landscaping provided a plethora of opportunities, from transplanting boxwoods to creating a stone path to the Vista Garden, working in the greenhouses, and general garden maintenance. His goal of seeing as much as possible of the region was fulfilled by field trips to The Mount, Wave Hill, High Meadows, and Hollister House. Since

the intern program is shaped around students’ individual interests, he also participated in a tree walk led by Dorthe Hviid, and staff-led workshops in floral design, weed identification, and beekeeping. Down the road, Korey hopes to own a landscaping business in Ravenwood. “Gardens will become more diversified in the future,” he said, “they are like art, always changing — minimalist to intricate.”

Our staff eagerly awaits the arrival of the 2019 interns, with recruitment underway through March 1, 2019. Information on the application process is available at berkshirebotanical.org.

The 2019 internship program will be funded in part through the generosity of The Marcia Brady Tucker Foundation.



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