

GROWERTALKS

Paul's Pointers

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Returning to Horticulture

Paul Pilon



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I have great news to pass along: I'm coming home ... back to horticulture, that is. I actually never fully left horticulture, but did spend the last year working as a Technical Manager for OHP. In this role, I largely worked on researching and developing new products and only had limited exposure to the reason I got into horticulture—the plants.

As you'll learn below, from an amateur gardener to a seasoned professional, horticulture is a large part of who I am. I can't fully explain why I'm so drawn to plants, but I do know that my position at OHP just didn't provide me with the same satisfaction I get when working with plants daily. Before I reveal the next chapter of my career, please allow me to tell you about why horticulture is the career for me.

Why plants are important to me

Plants have intrigued me from as far back as I can remember. There are numerous reasons why plants sparked and maintained this fascination throughout my life. It's everything from how a seed is a living organism to the miracle of germination. And then there's photosynthesis and how plants respond to different environmental conditions. The list for my infatuation goes on and on.

This interest was there from a very early age, as early as 3 years old, I'm told. By elementary school, I was already a young gardener and even spent many recesses collecting tree seeds from the playground and starting them in small pots at home. In middle school, I had grow lights in my room to start bedding plants, perennials and vegetables. In high school, I built a small greenhouse and began selling vegetables to a farmers market and grocery store.

After completing career assessment questionnaires in ninth grade, I discovered the word "horticulture" and decided immediately that horticulture was the career for me. I began working with the Horticulture Department counselors at Michigan State University in 10th grade. Not once have I ever wavered or second-guessed this career choice; I knew if I chose a career I was passionate about that I would be happy for the rest of my life.

I've never known exactly where in horticulture my career would take me. Over the years, I've worked hard, learned a lot (and continue to do so) and have been fortunate to have had several opportunities that have allowed me to grow both personally and professionally.

Overall, I'm happy with where horticulture has taken me, but as I mentioned above, my latest role doesn't fully satisfy my desire to work intimately with plants. As with many things in life, career or job changes are difficult, uncertain and stir up tons of emotions and anxiety. Having shared these things about why horticulture is the career for me, my decision to leave my role and the great team at OHP is necessary for my own sense of self-fulfillment and happiness.

I recently learned of an opportunity that would provide what I need emotionally and otherwise—I've accepted the Director of Growing position at Opel Growers in Hudsonville, Michigan. Not only will I be working with perennials on a daily basis, but I'll also be performing research to solve various challenges, exploring new perennial varieties, developing a team of passionate growers and helping a successful business grow to the next level.

Are you doing what makes you happy?

Before I complete this article, I'd like to leave you with a few of the career rules I live by ("Paul's Pointers"). These guidelines have kept me motivated and happy throughout the years.

- I believe it's very important to work in an industry you love and are passionate about. In this way, your job is never just a job; it's essentially a hobby that you get paid to do.
- Much like in life, your career is a series of choices. These are your choices to make. What makes me happy might be totally wrong for you. When deciding which career choices to make, always make them based on what's best for you and your family. Make choices that will make you happy in the long run.
- I encourage you to embrace, rather than fear, change. Opportunities won't develop and flourish if you're not willing to put yourself out there. It's one thing to be totally happy emotionally, and perhaps financially, and another to be dissatisfied in some facet. If you fall into the latter category, I can tell you things won't improve unless you're open and willing to change.
- It's very valuable and eye-opening to self-analyze where you're at in your career and in life from time to time. Ask yourself tons of difficult questions, such as what you like and don't like about your job or career. Be open and honest with yourself about how truly happy you really are and what's missing.
- I've never wanted a job that was just a job or that was tolerable. My approach has been to love what I do and let the rest take care of itself. There's only so many days of your life to work—why shouldn't all of them be enjoyable and fun?

I have no idea if these pointers that I live by will work for you. Regardless, I encourage you to find your own happiness and to not be afraid of making difficult decisions if you're not quite there yet.

As for me, I've found my way back to perennials and it feels so good. I look forward to the years ahead working with plants and learning all the awesome things about them. **GT**

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