

GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Production

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Learned Anything New Lately?

Chris Fifo



CHRIS FIF0

As my son is now halfway through his junior year in high school, he has an eager eye on his senior year. Meanwhile, I'm looking beyond and we're having more of those conversations about what lies ahead. We've talked about college for many years, and now that it's within reach, he's not so sure he's ready for a standard college education.

It was easy for me. I've been collecting seeds and growing plants since second grade. I always knew what I wanted to do. I always knew I would go to college to do it. My son wants to be a pilot and has talked of joining the Air Force. I told him I would be incredibly proud if that's what he chose to do. Continuing education doesn't necessarily mean a classroom.

My continuing education has been never-ending. Even after 30 years in horticulture, or should I say especially after 30 years, there are more

opportunities than ever to learn new things or ways to do things better.

It was so exciting getting out of college and into the greenhouse full time, but I quickly found out how little I knew. Still being in the classroom and study mode, I continued to absorb as much as I could.

My main resource for continuing education was professors and there were no better gatherings than the International Plug Conference—then held at Iowa State University—and the OFA Short Course. I would sit through days of talks on every cultural and environmental topic there was. Always taking notes and asking questions.

By the time my love for the classroom waned, I'd gained more experience and knowledge of the industry. My interest then turned to other greenhouses. How were other growers doing things?

I took every opportunity possible to get a tour of other greenhouses.

Visiting my sister in Seattle, I stopped by Skagit Gardens. Staying with a high school buddy in Fort Collins, Colorado, Gene personally showed me around Gulley Greenhouses. Coming home from Short Course, we stopped at Green Circle and then Rakers (not really on the way home). I even remember one summer going on vacation to see my parents in northern Minnesota. I had to stop in Minneapolis and Ron Wagner showed me around his place. (My kids were not very happy with me!)

Though my love for touring other greenhouses will never wane, much of my continuing education is now coming from other sources.

Some of my favorites are the single-day, regional conferences—“grower” days held by suppliers, brokers or educators. Not only can these attract top-notch speakers, it’s a great opportunity to spend time talking with other growers who are obviously interested in the same thing as I am.

To make these events even more attractive, they’re often held at beautiful venues. I recently attended a grower day at the Como Park Conservatory in St. Paul (WOW!) and Dr. Chris Currey held his fourth annual ISU Greenhouse Short Course at Reiman Gardens on the Iowa State campus—both excellent events and venues with great speakers.

There’s a downside to these, though, in that they’re day-long events and maybe not all the speakers are relevant to my operation. They also require planning and travel, which can complicate schedules.

Which brings me to my favorite form of continuing education: A term that’s become a generic trademark: the webinar.

I love webinars! And what’s not to love? There are so many advantages to webinars:

- Many speakers are giving webinars and you can choose individual speakers and/or topics.
- They can be viewed from nearly anywhere with a computer, tablet or smartphone.
- They only take 30 to 60 minutes out of a day.
- They’re free!
- Your whole team can join a webinar. Great for teambuilding.
- If you miss a webinar, they’re often archived for future viewing.
- Questions can be typed to the speaker or emailed later.
- You don’t get called out for your phone ringing.

And anybody can give a webinar. There are several services available at a reasonable cost. It’s very easy to set up and doesn’t require much technical skill. That’s why I use them to help promote our product.

I wonder ... does anyone have a webinar on how to get a teenager to clean their room? **GT**

Chris Fifo is Technical Services Advisor for Swift Greenhouses, Inc. in Gilman, Iowa.