



Past Experience Helps Her Hit the Ground Running

By Lori Ward Bocher

Past job experience: Landscaping, interior plant maintenance, landscape maintenance, teaching, research, plant mapping, lawn care, working at floral shop and a garden center. Dr. Laura Jull came to the University of Wisconsin-Madison with a wealth of practical experience that helped her hit the ground running in her first year as an assistant professor and Extension specialist for woody ornamental horticulture. She replaced the retired Dr. Ed Hasselkus.

"Readers are going to think I can't hold down a job," Laura says of the long list of jobs in the preceding paragraph. "But I've been working in horticulture since I was 17 years old. I worked while going to college. Every year I'd try to do something different to get as much exposure as I could."

Horticulture in high school...

Laura grew up in Farmington Hills, a suburb of Detroit. She attended a vo-tech high school that happened to have a greenhouse and landscaping curriculum. "I took that for two years," she recalls. "Probably the biggest project I did in high school was to be in charge of growing 5,000 geraniums, which we later sold. That peaked my interest in horticulture and made me want to pursue higher education."

After high school, Laura attended Oakland Community College in the Detroit area for three years, then transferred to Michigan State University where she received a BS degree in horticulture in 1991. For her advanced degrees she traveled to North Carolina State University in Raleigh where she received her MS in 1994 and her PhD in 1998, both in horticultural science.



"I pretty much worked throughout my undergraduate years, so already I had a lot of job experience," Laura explains as to why she went to graduate school right out of college instead of entering the work force full time. "I wanted to go further, to get involved in the educational side of horticulture."

Teaching and research...

Her teaching and research experience came during her undergraduate and graduate years. "Most of my time at NC State I was either a research assistant or I taught classes. I taught a lot of classes. I also worked at the arboretum there," Laura recalls. "Between my BS and MS degrees, I had six months off (from schooling) so I worked as an interim teacher at Lansing Community College in Michigan where I taught two courses."

For her thesis, Laura researched seed germination, seedling growth and heat tolerance of different provenances (seed sources) of Atlantic white cedar - a conifer that's native to the eastern U.S. When finishing her degree, she decided she liked teaching and Extension a lot and wanted to get more involved, so that's where she looked for a job.

Laura interviewed at two universities and chose the UW partly

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because it was in the Midwest where her family is. "And the position was a teaching/Extension split (40/60), which was what I wanted," she adds.

One-year anniversary...

She arrived in July of 1998 to a full schedule. In the fall semester, she taught nursery management, nursery management lab, and two sections of plant identification. In the spring semester she taught the second plant identification class.

Then there is her off-campus schedule. First, speaking and teaching engagements at events such as the Professional Landscapers Conference, the Grounds Management Short Course, the Turf and Ornamental Workshop, the Wisconsin Turfgrass Expo, the Parks and Recreation Association convention and the Master Gardener train-

ing program. A new program that she and some colleagues will debut this fall is a nursery IPM workshop.

"I'm doing a lot of Master Gardener training this year," Laura points out. "Each year they have a different specialized training area, and this year it's turf and ornamental. So I'm giving nine talks in a month's time, all over Wisconsin."

As she speaks at conferences around the state, what are the most frequent questions? "A lot of people want to know what the new plants are," she answers. "They also ask about plant evaluation and disease resistance, especially for crab apple trees."

Heavily involved...

Other responsibilities include being on the boards of the Wisconsin Landscape Federation, the Wisconsin Nursery Association, the

Wisconsin Arborist Association, and the Longenecker Gardens at the UW Arboretum. She's on the Urban Forestry Council, and she's coordinator of the Wisconsin Woody Plant Society. And she's in charge of the woody plant introductions for the new gardens at the UW's West Madison research station.

One project she's worked on recently is a large, 4-color brochure for Madison Gas & Electric, the Alliant Power Company, and Trees Forever. "It will be on trees that you can plant under power lines," Laura explains. "It will be distributed free to all of their customers."

She's expected to do research, too. This fall Laura will be working with a graduate student on the effects of road salts on woody plants, screening different de-icing chemicals. "And I'll be working with



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a researcher in the soils department on the use of compost in nursery field production," she adds. "With my counterparts from Iowa State and Minnesota, I'll be studying fall transplanting of balled and burlap trees."

Long-term goals...

One of her goals for the future is to initiate some educational programs on nursery practices. She also sees the need to update many Extension publications. And she'd like to start some type of a plant introduction program in Wisconsin. "Many states have programs where they have a 'plant of the year' and more formal plant evaluation and introduction programs. I'd like to be able to evaluate plants at several locations in Wisconsin, not just Madison."

In her first year on the job, she has seen quite a bit of the state, from Bayfield and Eau Claire all the way down to Racine and Kenosha. "I want to see a lot more of the state, obviously," she adds. She was most impressed with a trip to Kohler. "I went up there to visit with the landscape crew. Their golf courses are just beautiful! Oh, are they beautiful!"

With so many things that could be done, how does she prioritize? How does she determine where to start? "I wish I knew the answer. Then I wouldn't be in the office until midnight," she admits. "I want to concentrate on things that are going to help the industry, that are going to make the biggest impact, and that are practical."

Golf course contact...

She hasn't had much contact with the turfgrass industry yet, but she is scheduled to speak at the Turfgrass Expo in January. She sees golf courses as a very important part of Wisconsin's green space. "I'm not a golfer myself, but I've always had golf course superintendents asking me what plants they can use that are beautiful but don't require a lot of

maintenance," she says.

"Yes, golf courses have to be a great place to golf, but they also have to look great," she continues. "If you have, for example, a hawthorne tree with the leaves infected with rust, the tree's not going to look good and neither will the course. It's very important for golf course superintendents to know what trees and shrubs

are low maintenance, allow for turf growth, and have exquisite ornamental value."

Laura, who is single, enjoys living in Madison. "It's a pretty cool town," she says. Not surprisingly, in her spare time she enjoys gardening along with other outdoor activities such as camping, hiking, fishing and bike riding. ♣

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