



# HANDS ON HORTICULTURE

NW horticulture program hopes to plant a love of greenery, cultivation in the students, staff on campus. Rooting education with their in-depth curriculum

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With soil-covered hands, potting trays and an overall love for anything green and growing, the NW horticulture department is truly a one-of-a-kind program at TCC.

The department can be found on the side of the WCTS building where four greenhouses are filled with racks of plants of all sorts of varieties, and a constant movement of seedlings being planted or up-potted. It's apparent by the greenery covering the walls of the hallways that the subject is all about plants.

The program offers an Associate of Applied Science degree in horticulture as well as certificates all aimed at getting the student ready for the working world of plants. The classes offered range from introductory classes such as Principles of Horticulture, to specialized classes like soil science and learning irrigation circuitry.

NW student Lizzy Chi, a student worker with the program, said the best qualities about the classes were how hands-on they were.

"One of my favorite classes was the plant disease class," she said. "We went around the campus looking at parasitic plants along Marine Creek and to the Fort Worth Botanical Gardens several times where we diagnosed diseases, pests and nutrient deficiencies. You got to see real-life examples of these issues in person, and in real time."

NW instructional assistant Stephanie Schmitz is a full-time employee with the department who helps with managing the greenhouses as well as preparing materials needed for the classes including mixing the soil.

Schmitz actually got her start with TCC as a student in the horticulture program in 2017 and graduated in 2019. Then, she came back and worked for the program that meant so much to her.

"Definitely being in the program

is what brought me here," she said. "Being accessible to people in all walks of life, and then being hands-on and being a tangible education in horticulture, landscaping and agriculture."

Schmitz has multiple plants in the TCC greenhouses that she brought from home. She believes it's best for students to see the types of plants they're studying and loves showing something new.

"Basically anything I have at home, I will usually either propagate and bring up here, or I'll just bring the whole plant up here because I want people to see it," she said. "I mean, that's one of the things I loved about being a student is going in there and just seeing new stuff. I wanted to help expose people to more different plants and things like that."

NW student and Horticulture Club president Kimberly Birge said she was introduced to the program through the club but soon realized there was even more to learn.

"And I've just enjoyed getting to know how to work with the soil," she said. "When I started out in the club, I had no idea what I was doing. I was just like, 'OK, soil, plants, it somehow works out.' After my hands-on experience with plants through the club, I started to get interested in the classes."

Birge said she believes the horticulture program is something that sets the district apart because she hasn't seen anything like it offered at other schools.

"Sure, you can go to UNT for music," she said. "Sure, you can go to Texas A&M for trade, but TCC definitely has the most in-depth horticulture program I've looked at. The teachers and the knowledge that they bring to the table, it is not a chore to go to school. I love going to classes now. The teachers make it so, so fulfilling."

The horticulture program isn't just manual labor and working in the fields, Birge said. It's modern with studies such as interior plant decorating and, most importantly, growing food crops

because with all the high-paced money-making jobs, who's going to feed the masses?

"And with the state of the world, why not just relax?" she said. "Be with a plant because at the end of the day, a plant's not going to cause you any drama."

NW horticulture instructor David Bulpitt said in the eight years he's been with TCC he's seen the department double in size.

"We're really the only comprehensive college-level horticulture program in the whole DFW area," he said.

He also talked about the National Collegiate Landscape Competition that is coming up. A group of students will travel to Mississippi in mid-March to compete with other colleges in the field of landscaping.

"NCLC is sponsored by the National Association of Landscape Professionals, so it's very career-oriented, what's going on in the industry and the field," Bulpitt said.

The department also holds annual sales where plants that the classes themselves have potted and taken care of are sold by the department. The herbaceous plants class students are there to assist in both the sales and the teaching of how to care for the sold products. The money from the Valentine's Day plant sale goes to making sure these trips are possible, Schmitz said.

"The hotels, the registration, the food, everything is paid for by people when they buy the plants," Schmitz said. "It does go to a good cause. It's a ton of fun to prepare."

Bulpitt said he believes, since the students see each other in multiple classes while completing the program, they can form a close-knit community and build friendships.

"I think the sky's the limit because there's a lot of things going on that make or generate interest in the horticultural field," he said. "I think we have a great community spirit in our department."



Photos by Alex Hoben/The Collegian

NW instructional assistant Stephanie Schmitz inspects her swiss cheese monstera that she brought from home. She says that since bringing it to the greenhouses on campus, the plant has flourished and has started climbing higher up the walls.



NW horticulture adjunct Amy Griffith shows her students Zayna Richardson and Jack Rodriguez the snake plants found in the connected greenhouse.



NW horticulture students Beth Berry and Mike McMeekin fill a tray with seedlings and soil. The trays were put into the on-campus greenhouses.



NW student Jose Alas works on trays of plants in greenhouse 3 during the herbaceous plants class. The seedlings, once grown, will be available for purchase during their annual plant sale April 7.