

SCC Horticulture Instructors



Spartanburg Community College Horticulture Instructors

By Ellen Vincent, Clemson University Environmental Landscape Specialist

Have you noticed that the finer things in life often contain an earthy element and floral notes? Or they make you smile and feel part of something truly worthwhile? And the really lasting experiences appear to blend art and science seamlessly? The horticulture instructors at Spartanburg Community College are making this happen on their college campus in upstate South Carolina.

The horticulture degree program at Spartanburg Community College awards an Associate's degree (AAS) in Horticulture Technology and serves between 60-65 students each year. The majority of students are local while 30-35% comes from distant SC counties and even from North Carolina and Georgia. Students who choose this program typically love being outdoors and prefer hands-on learning. The instructors report there is a push in the beginning to develop a strong work ethic and reliable study skills; but the students are fast learners and make coming to work each day worthwhile.

The 44 year old program, started by Jimmy Painter in 1970, has been developing steadily and strongly over time. The program has earned nationwide rec-

ognition for its arboretum/grounds that result in grants and scholarships. Doug McAbee, a valued instructor who taught for 20+ years is credited with early development of the arboretum. Recent innovations include two new learning opportunities that reach a larger educational audience. The first is an evening on-site certificate program. The second is an on-line certification program developed and taught by Kelly Lewis, who also serves as Greenhouse Production instructor. The beauty of these programs is that they are linked-the certificate classes may be transferred into the AAS degree program as well as stand-alone as valuable certificate programs.

Jason Bagwell, Jay Moore, and Kevin Parris are three full-time instructors and Kelly Lewis is an adjunct instructor. These educators agree that the 100 acre campus grounds/arboretum create an outdoor classroom unlike any other. Jason Bagwell, Department Chair, explains "We are as real world as you can be in an educational setting. First year students spend more time in the classroom but during the second year a student will be outside every day learn-

ing- pruning or mowing for instance. The students work in groups, just like a landscape company."

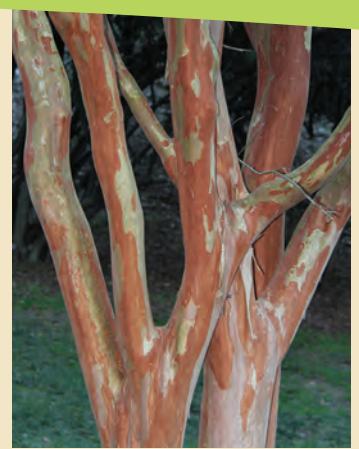
Twenty acres are intensively landscaped spaces for classes to impact. Jay Moore describes the opportunity, "It's like a canvas-we keep adding to the canvas-making changes that are more sustainable." Jay Moore teaches the Landscape Installation class, Irrigation class, and Nursery Operations class. "The Landscape Installation class continually leaves their mark on this campus. They set up tables, build stone-walls, install gardens in prominent places like the front of the library, and create arboretum niche gardens."

Jason Bagwell has been an instructor for 16 years and the Department Chair for 7 years. He teaches the Horticulture and Pest Control classes, Soils class, and Turf Management classes. He earned his BS in Agronomy (1997) and his MS in Agricultural Education (1998) from Clemson University. He worked for Milliken Corporation in the arboretum while going to school. His family was involved in farming and produced row crops and peaches. He and his father also ran a wholesale greenhouse business-so he

is deeply saturated in both practical and classroom field knowledge. He still farms and in addition to teaching he produces Lowline Angus (miniature) cattle and alfalfa and fescue hay. He is married with two children.

Kevin Parris is the Arboretum Director who first served as an adjunct instructor in the 1990s and became a full time instructor 7 years ago. He teaches Landscape Plant Materials, Plant Propagation, and Landscape Management. He earned his BS in Ornamental Horticulture (1989) and began a joint MS/ PhD in Plant and Environmental Sciences at Clemson in 2011. His contributions as a plant breeder are widely recognized and in 1993 he introduced *Magnolia grandiflora* 'Kay Parris'. He is a former owner of LandArt Design Group, a successful landscape design company (see *SC Nurseryman* magazine, Sept/Oct 2007, pp. 4-7). At Spartanburg Community College he receives strong satisfaction by expanding the plant palette on the arboretum/campus grounds. Kevin Parris is happily married with two children.

Jay Moore has been an instructor for 6 years at SCC and he teaches Introduction to Horticulture





and Sustainability in Horticulture in addition to the previously mentioned landscape installation classes. He is a Spartanburg native who came through the Horticulture Technology Program at SCC. He then attended Clemson and earned his BS degree in ornamental horticulture (2000) and his MS in Plant and Environmental Science (2009). He started working in a retail garden center at age 15, which he later purchased (Carolina Garden World) and still runs. He also worked for the Extension Service in Alaska for two years performing educational outreach in the bush community. [I can't help but wonder if this is where he grew the beard?] Moore is married, lives in Spartanburg, and has two children.

Program success is linked to the arboretum/campus and to the relationships that students build during their two years in the program. Jay Moore, once a student at SCC describes the experience "These students stay together for two years-their ages range from 18 to 50 years old and there is plenty of diversity. It becomes a family with strong friendships. Most of these students would take a bullet for each other."

Former SCC student Phillip Carnley, now a horticulture major at Clemson, describes his experience, "The education and hands on training, accompanied by the genuine care, compassion, and enthusiasm of all the instructors helped to transform the way that I see the green industry. Throughout the program, each class and instructor nurtured the visions and dreams of each and every student. This helped push the limits of my knowledge, to pursue more education, and to strive to find true answers and new solutions." Carnley echoes other students when he adds, "I would ultimately like to give a heartfelt Thank You to each instructor for the guidance, knowledge, and life lesson that you all impart-

ed to me along the journey."

It doesn't take a degree in psychology to see that the instructors are modeling respect, diligence, and excellence by their own high quality interactions. Jason Bagwell compares the team to the Chicago Bulls-he says Kevin Parris is the Michael Jordan, Jay Moore is the Dennis Rodman, and he is the Scottie Pippen; "It's an awesome team" he admits. Kevin Parris celebrates the team work and claims "We fill in each other's gaps and weaknesses." Jay Moore identifies the team-based leadership style of Jason Bagwell as essential to the good working relationships and adds "We aren't afraid to learn from each other."

Plans for the future include continued international connections and adding a small engine repair class. Students have conducted internships in Germany and Great Dixter, England. Kevin Parris and student Tanner Howell presented "An American Gardener in London" which showcased their experience studying gardens in England during the summer of 2014. The small engine repair class requires a laboratory shop/facility before it can be realized. Continued investment in garden development and production facilities are also ongoing. The program hosts two productive plant sales each year.

The instructors' collective talents and individual prowess make this a program to celebrate. But Jason Bagwell is quick to point out that success is linked to others. "We have industry support and administrative support. This gives us confidence and encourages us to give 110%. The students recognize the effort and they get on board." He also recalls those early green industry professionals when he reminds us, "There are a lot of awesome people who built this industry in South Carolina. Some aren't around much anymore or even at all-but we have a lot to be grateful for."