Using the Community to Teach Plant Materials

– a real world study in plant identification,
University of Georgia, Hort 3510 –

Allan M. Armitage, Athens, GA, 2004
Perennial Plant Identification

Hor 3510 – 2 credit hours -

- No pre-requisite required, 2 lectures and 1 lab/week. Eight week (half semester) class in spring semester. In concert with Hor 3500 (Annuals, fall semester)

- Very popular among students in Horticulture and Landscape Architecture. Fills rapidly.

- Limited to approximately 30 students, each lab broken into 2 sessions.
Objectives of Perennial Plant Identification – Hort 3510 -

Learn to identify plants but also:

- Understand the growing habit, eg. tolerance to sun and shade, drought tolerance, nativity.

- Recognize familial relationships, eg. Boraginaceae, Lamiaceae, Asteraceae
Plant Identification Is Difficult

- This is often the first time students are exposed to herbaceous plants

- This may be the first time students are exposed to familial relationships

- The number of taxa can become daunting in such a short period of time - ~20 taxa per lab
Plant Identification Becomes Easier If

- Plants can be studied “up close”, to be able to touch, smell and feel them.
- Plants can be seen in a realistic setting, rather than on slides or in a greenhouse
- Plants can be seen in a realistic setting more than once – “The Rule of 7”
In A Nutshell, Plant Identification Becomes Easier If

- students can study the real thing, i.e.

LIVE PLANT MATERIAL GROWING IN THE GROUND!
It Is Hard To Find Live Materials For Class Study

- **Campus**: May not exactly be a Garden of Eden. Herbaceous plants are used much less around campus due to higher maintenance. And not everyone has a Botanical Garden next door.

- **Greenhouse**: Impossible to grow, maintain and flower a diverse collection.

- **Study Garden**: Building a study garden is an enormous amount of work.
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- The Horticulture Trial Gardens are used for teaching, but not enough material is available for the entire semester.
Where Can Live Materials Be Found?

- If not the campus, the botanical garden, a study garden, nor the greenhouse, then where?
Where Can Live Materials Be Found?

- Use natural resources in the community: Use Gardeners!
  - they are everywhere, full of enthusiasm and they love to talk about plants -
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- A plant ID quiz every two weeks based on two gardens. Students must get back to gardens. Specimens brought to lecture class.

- Therefore, good gardeners must be selected.
Selecting Gardeners For The Class

- Most are flattered to be asked, but are also often intimidated.

- Need gardens with a diversity of plants (perennials).

- Need to be relatively close (within 15 mins by car).
Selecting Gardeners For The Class

- It helps to be a gardener yourself, and use your own garden. Other gardeners are then more willing to help.

- Must be able to visit garden 2 days beforehand to select plants to be studied, we then place them on Web CT.
Benefits Of Involving Gardeners

- direct -

- Seeing plant material in situ; greenhouse or screen does not come close to that reality.

- Seeing the same plant material in different settings during the entire course semester.

- Students don’t get bored, as there is a new venue every week.
Benefits Of Involving Gardeners

- indirect -

- Students become involved in the community and vice versa. Very imp. in a college town.

- Students see the enthusiasm of the gardeners, it is catching!.

- Equally important, I don’t get bored, and am a far better teacher because of it.
Potential Problems of Involving Gardeners - for students -

- **Time**: Students must go back to gardens to study, this takes time. However, they have to study somewhere. I have never had complaints about this.

- **Travel**: Students need a vehicle or car pool. I offer a van for those who need it, I have used it twice in the 15 years I have taught the course. Kids have cars or friends with cars!
Potential Problems of Involving Gardeners - from gardeners -

- **So many students will hurt garden:** Never happened, walkways are used, and when they return, they respect the garden.

- **Gardeners don’t want students in the garden at certain times:** Students are given email and phone numbers, never been a serious problem.
A Few Examples of Gardens We Use

- Over the years I have taken students to approximately 10 private gardens in Athens.
- All gardeners have told students to return for studying, providing phone and email information.
- All gardeners have asked us back.
Gardens Used in Class
1. Lambert’s Garden
Gardens Used in Class

1. Lambert’s Garden
Gardens Used in Class

2. Gibberson’s Garden
Gardens Used in Class
2. Gibberson’s Garden
Gardens Used in Class

3. Armitage’s Garden
Gardens Used in Class

3. Armitage’s Garden
Perennial Plant Identification

The Final Exam

- The final exam consists of all plants and is conducted in one of the gardens. Students must get back to all gardens to study.
The Final Exam
The Final Exam
Does Involving the Community Make This A Better Course?

I do not know:

- if grades would be different without the gardens. Likely the good students would still excel, the poor ones would still struggle.

- if more or fewer students would take the course without the gardens.
Does Involving the Community Make This A Better Course?

I do know:

- that the community and the students are enriched. Each appreciates the other more than before.
- that the enthusiasm from gardeners rubs off, and stays with many students for their lives.
- my course evaluations are always excellent, which I credit largely to the garden experience.
The End – Questions?