

Transcript

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□ Reid

My name is Reid, Reid Suddaby. I'm a post-bac in my second year, currently working for Dr. Nath.

Stella

I'm Stella Whittaker. I'm a post-bac as well. I just started my third year. It's like just over two years; in the lab of Dr. Roll-Mecak.

Virgil

Perfect. So, with the gardening group, why do you think it's an important group to be a part of, or an important group to have here at NIH?

Stella

Being in the gardening group's important for not only connecting with other post-bacs that are in the building or on the campus in general, but it's a great way to connect. We usually meet weekly, and it's a good stopping point for doing stuff in lab; coming outside and getting some time outdoors to relax and dig in the dirt a little bit.

Also, it's a good complement to doing science in the lab because you can experiment in a much more low-stakes, low-stress environment. You can just experiment and see what kinds of things grow and *how* different kinds of things grow. It's science in a way that is a little bit less stringent. It's a good complement to the scientific stuff that you do in lab.

Virgil

That's a neat perspective!

Reid

I share a similar sentiment as Stella. Another thing to add on to a lot of that is: for me, it's a great way to be part of a community – community building. It started for me being friends with a [former member of the Garden Club, AJ](#), who convinced me

to come one day. I didn't have much expectations for what it was or what we'd be doing, and I ended up just really enjoying it. I've stuck around for a year and a half, even though we're not doing a lot of gardening right now in February.

It's a great way to unplug after work, after doing all this "using my brain". It's nice just to get on my knees, get in the dirt, weed, and have a very stress-free environment.

Virgil

Yeah, I can see how that could be a good [method of] catharsis. I guess you sort of answered my next question here. I was going to ask: what parts make this the most fun? Then the opposite side of the coin was: the most difficult. I'll pitch that to you, just in case there's some other things that you think are fun and difficulties to add along with that.

Stella

The most fun thing is also the most difficult for me. I really enjoy the final product of being able to see what kind of stuff we can grow. But on the other side, when stuff doesn't grow, it's very frustrating, even though we're not doing this in any sort manner that is very streamlined. We're just putting a seed in the ground and seeing what happens. Another fun thing is just like Reid was saying: the community that you can get from it for sure.

Reid

Yeah, I would agree with a lot of those sentiments. A very challenging thing for us is: there's a lot of interest for the Garden Club, but a lot of people will come for a couple meetings and then decide maybe it's not for them, which is totally understandable.

So, one issue that we always have been struggling with is, not necessarily finding people, but finding *dedicated* people who are really devoted to gardening. Who understand that it's more than just coming for a week or two. To garden, you reap what you sow. It can be a multi-month process where, yeah, maybe it's not fun having bugs biting you after work, but the reward of it is truly amazing.

Our garden is all organic and the fruits and vegetables that we're able to grow from it are the tastiest produce that you could ever find, and you can't find it in the store

or anywhere else.

Stella

I echo Reid saying that: it's hard to find people that are willing to come for more than one or two meetings.

Virgil

I can see how that could be frustrating. Like how you said; if you're running a garden, if this is a long-term thing, then you need some long-term commitment. You all have been in more of the long-term commitment side. What all have you learned from being involved over such a long period of time with this group?

If you want to get into gardening techniques, sure, but [let's see] if there's been any other developments that you've got from it.

Stella

It's similar what we were saying before about getting people to show up. I learned a lot of strategies of how to try and keep people in Garden Club and how to organize groups where people are kind of scattered or maybe have other commitments going on; how to organize that together. Beyond that, I've learned patience. That's a big thing with gardening as well.

Reid

I echo the same sentiments. There's a lot of the hard skills that come with gardening that you learn, like how to actually garden, and that's been fun. Navigating that, learning what crops do well, what crops do poorly. Trial and error. Learning that, because there's certain aspects of an organic garden, like lack of pesticides, you're going to run into a lot more roadblocks. And being OK with that; maybe you're not going to get the same yield or you'll have pests eating your produce.

But a big lesson that I've learned outside of all of the hard skills is: working in a group is really fun. It's very low stakes, so it's never felt like there was any conflicts that we had as a group. It could just be because everybody's very easy-going and works well together. It's nice working in a group where an idea such as, "oh, what if we planted *this* this year?", there's not really competition. It's a very stress-free experience.

Virgil

It's nice to hear. That's definitely good; to get as many stress-free things as possible, and learning not only those hard gardening skills but also those interpersonal skills. You're selling me on this!

Reid

We're glad!

Virgil

This is quite a nice group. If some of our listeners are also being sold on this idea and they're interested in gardening or just curious about the program, what would you say to that person? They're like, "I've always wanted to garden, but I'm not sure." What sort of things would you discuss with them?

Stella

You don't need to really be invested in what the final result will be. It's kind of the fun, at least for me, just getting to see the plants grow and enjoying the process of gardening. Just once a week for an hour is enough to keep the garden going and growing. It doesn't require a huge weekly commitment; it's more of a commitment over time. They should come and join the Garden Club if they want!

Virgil

Absolutely, yeah!

Reid

Yeah, I would agree: join! You're always welcome. We're always taking new people. Don't feel like the pressure of maintaining it is too daunting. Don't let that prevent you from just coming for a week or two. If you don't like it, it's OK. We're very used to that, and we're a very welcoming environment.

We're always happy to have new people. We'd love to have you reach out to any of us, or you can find us: NIH Post-Bac Gardening Club. You could also just show up; that's a great way to get in touch with us too.

Stella

One thing else: don't be stressed if you're not there at the beginning. You can join in

the middle. You can join towards the end. You can join at any time. Don't feel like you need to be there for the seed to be planted to get the benefits of Garden Club.

Josh

Just curious, did you guys have any background in gardening before you joined the club?

Reid

Absolutely not, no. My mom gardens. I'm very used to working with my hands. I was a Boy Scout, I did lots of landscaping service projects. I was very used to weeding and stuff like that. But when it came to the practical skills of understanding crops, planting them, what time of year to plant them, shade, watering... I didn't know any of that.

Stella

I also didn't have a big background in gardening. My dad had one as a kid and my grandfather was a big gardener, but I didn't have any personal background. I could barely keep a house plant alive!

Virgil

I had one technical question that came to mind. So, I know this is post-bac gardening, but can engineers, contractors, or other researchers join too? Do you have to be post-bac?

Reid

No, we're pretty welcoming environment. We're open to anyone coming. We definitely need people, so we're always happy to take people. We've actually discussed working more closely with... is it the Women's Center?

Stella

The Women's Scientist Fellows Group. They [also] have a garden plot that they work at, and we've been a bit coordinating with them to try and bring people together at the same time.

Reid

Yes. And just for context, the Women's Scientist Group of Fellows: there's not all women, anyone can join. The whole message is: anyone is welcome, anyone can come. You don't have to be a post-bac to join our club. We call ourselves that because that's our target audience. But anyone's welcome to come.

Virgil

Well, awesome! I hope this article gets you guys some new members.