

Graduate Student Professional Interest Group

Student Spotlight:

James Orrock

University of Florida

1) Tell us what you love about horticulture

Plants! There is nothing more rewarding than watching a seed germinate and mature. The beauty of the system and the hidden layers of complexity. The average American has no idea the effort that goes into buying the produce they purchase in the grocery store!

2) Why and when did you get into horticulture?

I'm the 4th generation citrus grower in my family. As a child I would get teased in school for being focused on plants. Growing up next to a scientist helped to foster my love of science, and what better thing to study than what I love, plants!

3) What inspired you to go into graduate school?

The devastating disease on citrus, Huang Long Bing (Citrus Greening), infected my family's orange groves just as I was graduating from my undergraduate. It seemed like a perfect opportunity to research a disease that was having such a devastating impact on our local economy. While I have since graduated with my master's degree in Plant Pathology, I now am working on a PhD where we are researching tea (*Camellia sinensis*) as a new crop for Floridians to grow.

4) What is your goal after school?

My current research has been on adapting a new crop for Florida. I love the direct application of my research, and would love to continue similar research in academia, government, or even industry.

5) Favorite plant?

Strangely, tomatoes. I am very very picky about what tomatoes I'll eat (usually only if I grow them), but I just love how the plant looks and smells. I actually grow tomatoes at home just to occasionally smell them!

6) What would you research if you had unlimited funds?

Physiology and plant pathology interactions. Physiology is an under-appreciated science (at least in my opinion), and I think the impacts of climate change on plant physiology may also change how we model plant/pathogen interactions.

7) What is the worst thing that happened to you during your research?

I've been pretty lucky, I think the worst thing that happened was my laptop quitting, but thankfully all of the data was recovered. Though working with an elderly grower/collaborator who would accidentally mess up our experiments was also a challenge!

8) Advice for incoming students?

If you think you have nothing to do, chances are you forgot something (or could spend that time writing!). During your qualifying exams, it's alright to say, "I don't know," but it's even better to say, "I don't know, but this is what I would do to find the answer."