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What did I do this summer?

At the summer meeting of the OAN Greenhouse and Retail Chapters, several of us had a good laugh about the questions we get asked about our summer. "What do you do all summer now that the greenhouse/nursery is closed? You must have so much time off! It must be great to be done for the year! What do you do with all of your free time?"



Leigh Geschwill
OAN PRESIDENT

The reality is quite different from what most imagine. After 8–10 weeks of pushing hard to get product out the door, yes — we do want to sneak off here and there for a little downtime.

But — and that's a huge "but" — there is a lot of behind-the-scenes work to do to make next spring just as successful. We spend time forecasting and planning new crops.

Those of us who grow trees and shrubs are counting inventory and making new sales sheets for summer and fall prebooks. Price lists, catalogs and marketing materials need to be assembled to let our customers know what great things we have in store for them.

People often ignore all this office stuff. They think we poke around in our posies 24/7, but today's business environment is not like "Field of Dreams." We cannot simply "grow it and they will come." We must carefully review sales and profitability metrics to keep our ships sailing in a forward direction.

The other secret most laypeople don't know is that we are still growing plants, even in the summer.

Ask any grower and they will tell you that summer is the most challenging growing season. The heat and subsequent watering can stress plants and create fertility issues. Summer winds desiccate foliage. Warm temperatures and a different season present new and added pest pressure. All these things challenge us to keep plants in top form.

Summer is also a time for us to get out and attend trade shows and meetings. We take advantage of educational opportunities that allow us to learn new concepts from local and national speakers.

We attend summer chapter meetings. These are great opportunities to network with our peers and trade war stories and successes from the spring. I always leave these events feeling hopeful and renewed, with a stronger sense of camaraderie with our fellows at arms.

Lastly, there are the summer plant trials. Looking at new plant material in a catalog can't compare to seeing it up close and personal. Attending plant trials is also a great way to assess performance in our climate. I also get inspired for how to use that material in new and interesting ways.

So this year, when you get asked what you did all summer, you don't need to groan like a schoolchild having to write the same essay every September. Think back on all you accomplished. Take the time to educate the questioner about how much really goes into giving them those beautiful plants in the spring. ©

Leigh