

GRADUATE AG RESEARCH SPOTLIGHT



Chris Currey

“We’re enhancing the efficiency of propagation. That’s the compelling part for me—trying to contribute a more efficient system.”

—Christopher Currey, Ph.D. Candidate in Horticulture and Landscape Architecture

THE GRADUATE STUDENT: In the summer between his high school graduation and enrollment at the University of Minnesota, Chris Currey worked at a public garden along the Mississippi River in his hometown of St. Cloud, Minnesota. Although he had no gardening experience, he found that he liked, quite literally, getting his hands dirty. The discovery led him to a bachelor’s degree in environmental horticulture and a master’s degree in applied plant science at the University of Minnesota. Along the way, he learned that an affinity for plants might be in his genes, after all: His great-grandfather was an early member of the Minnesota State Horticulture Society.

WHY PURDUE?: Currey narrowed his focus to greenhouse production and prioritized people over place in choosing a doctoral program. “I was looking for the one person in horticulture who’s the ‘greenhouse guy,’” he explains. His own interest in orchids led Currey to read a paper on the subject by Dr. Roberto Lopez, Associate Professor and Purdue Agriculture’s “greenhouse guy.” Currey contacted Lopez, arrived in West Lafayette in 2009 and was pleased with what he found: “Our greenhouses are fantastic, and the support is fantastic,” he says.

THE RESEARCH: Many ornamental horticulture plants and bedding plants are propagated from cuttings, Currey explains. “I work on the influence of light on root growth of cuttings in propagation. Greenhouse crops are a significant part of agriculture in the United States. They require lots of inputs—energy, water, fertilizer—

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MYSTERY SOLVED: People walking down Main Street at night might wonder about an eerie glow emanating from one window. Currey and his wife live in an apartment there, and in their bedroom he keeps 24 orchids under lights. “I guess it is fitting for a guy who works on light!”

TEACHER IN THE MAKING: Currey has been a teaching assistant in Ornamental Plant Production and helped develop a new course, Total Crop Management. His efforts earned him Purdue’s Graduate Student Teaching Award. His hoped-for next step after graduating in May is a faculty position that combines teaching and research. “Teaching is very important to me,” he says. “People talk about the impact factor of a specific journal article, and that’s totally valid. But I think about the impact of getting some student, a future professional, excited about their education and career—that’s very impactful.”