

Greenleaf Industries

<http://www.greenleafindustries.org/>

Established in 1981, Greenleaf Industries is a private, non-profit corporation, serving as the Northwest's largest horticultural training center, providing training and employment opportunities to twenty (20) men and women who have varying developmental disabilities plus Greenleaf partners with several local high schools that bring over part-time students who have developmental disabilities. Please use the navigation above to learn more about our services to the community..

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AHTA ANNUAL CONFERENCE ABSTRACTS

The following abstracts summarize oral presentations and poster sessions given at the AHTA Annual Conference "Freedom to Grow" in Victoria, British Columbia, Canada.

Greenleaf Industries: Vocational Horticulture Serving Developmentally Disabled Adults in a Commercial Nursery Setting

David James, Greenleaf Industries

Since 1981 Greenleaf Industries has provided a variety of horticultural training and employment opportunities to developmentally disabled adults, including production of Christmas wreaths and operation of a wholesale and retail nursery and landscape maintenance services. Over 90% of the program's total operating budget is derived from product sales. An overview of Greenleaf's year-round activities with special emphasis on bedding plant production on both wholesale and retail levels was presented. Points of interest include utilizing transplanting/seeding jigs to improve work quality and production, task analysis and matching the right person to the job, facility requirements needed to produce quality plants, and some good how-to information on growing specific crops.

Established in 1981, Greenleaf Industries is a private, non-profit corporation, serving as the Northwest's largest horticultural training center, providing training and employment opportunities to eighteen men and women who have varying developmental disabilities.

- ◆ Wholesale Nursery
- ◆ Retail Nursery
- ◆ Landscape Maintenance
- ◆ Christmas Wreath Sale
- ◆ 4-H Horticulture
- ◆ The Greenleaf Retreat





Our primary source of program revenue is derived through the successful operation of our wholesale/retail bedding plant nursery, landscape maintenance service, and Christmas wreath production. Over 94% of our program's 'total' operating budget is generated through plant sales or related services. Our nursery annually produces over 2.5 million plants including over 300 varieties of flowers and vegetables.

Aside from our production work, Greenleaf offers a variety of recreational opportunities for its employees including participation in 4-H horticulture activities, the growing of a community garden to help feed our area's homeless, and an annual four day camping trip, the Greenleaf Retreat.

Striving to attain self-reliance and dedicated to improving the quality of life for those with disabilities, Greenleaf has become an admired model for its achievements in opening up new horizons for the D.D. population within our community. While we receive little in the way of ongoing government support (less than 5%), most of our facility expansion has been the result of acquiring generous financial and material contributions from private benefactors who agree with our determination to become self-reliant as a social service agency.

Through the 80's Greenleaf was strictly a wholesale nursery selling its bedding plants to retail nurseries throughout southern Oregon.

By 1990 market conditions had changed as a variety of stores began to carry plant products and often sold bedding plants as 'loss leaders', which in turn, reduced the volume of plants local nurseries purchased from Greenleaf.

At the same time our operational expenses began to skyrocket. Major hikes in insurance premiums coupled with a 30% increase in Oregon's minimum wage forced Greenleaf to reevaluate its operating procedures. For Greenleaf to financially survive it needed to increase self-generated revenues within its limited production capabilities.

A pre-fab retail greenhouse was purchased with a foundation grant and a vacant parking lot was utilized for Greenleaf's venture into the retail world. The first Retail Greenhouse opened seasonally, from April through June, selling our plants to the general public. First year success exceeded project goals. Self-generated program revenues significantly increased and the new work setting also provided opportunities for our D.D. employees to work directly with the public.

Tasks included straightening up and restocking plant displays, watering, and helping customers carry purchases to their cars. The Retail Greenhouse also helped to educate the community as to the strengths and abilities possessed by our workers.

In 1997 with the assistance of a Federal loan and private foundation support, a permanent site was purchased and developed to house Greenleaf's Retail Garden Center. Having our own site allowed us to expand our seasons of operation to spring, fall and Christmas, and has increased work opportunities at both our Retail and Wholesale nurseries.

In addition to an expanded retail plant display, our Retail Garden Center includes:

- A Horticulture Therapy Interpretative Center which features a pictorial display of hort therapy programs 'in action' throughout the United States.
- A Vegetable Display Garden whose produce is donated to two local soup kitchens that feed our area's homeless. Over 700 pounds of fresh produce has been annually donated

Greenleaf's wholesale nursery is the backbone of the organization, producing a majority of the work and training opportunities for our DD employees. Our three and one-half acre nursery includes over 60,000 square feet of greenhouses and cold frames in which over 2.5 million plants are annually produced. We grow over 300 varieties of annual and perennial flowers, herbs and vegetables.

Twenty-five years ago when Greenleaf was just an idea on paper, we chose the production of bedding plants because it was felt the work would compliment the skill levels and potentials of our D.D. employees.

A majority of the tasks associated with bedding plant production are very labor intensive. They include transplanting, filling flats, pulling spent flowers and leaves, and moving plants from the greenhouses to cold frames and finally, when appropriate, to areas of full sun. The repetitive nature of such tasks has allowed our employees to develop specific skills needed in bedding plant production. While our D.D. work force is considerably slower in terms of production, compared to industry norm, the quality of performed work, especially amongst long-term employees, is quite exceptional.

A majority of the bedding plants produced by Greenleaf (70%) are wholesaled to our Retail Garden Center with the remainder being sold to small nurseries in southern Oregon.

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