



James W. Boodley

August 9, 1927 – February 12, 2016

James Boodley, Professor of Floriculture and Ornamental Horticulture, died February 12, 2016 in Sebring, Ohio. He was 88.

One of eight children, he was the first in his family to attend college. His love of greenhouses first started in high school when he worked one summer in a greenhouse in his hometown of Morrisville, PA. He came to Cornell as an assistant professor in 1958, having been recruited by Professor John Seeley. Jim received his Ph.D. from Pennsylvania State University. He was promoted to full professor in 1968 and served as chair of the Department of Floriculture and Ornamental Horticulture from 1970 to 1975.

Jim, along with Cornell colleague Raymond Sheldrake, developed the Cornell Peat-Lite Mixes – which came to be known simply as Cornell Mix – that transformed the greenhouse industry in the '60s.

The pair based their soilless mixes on peat moss and perlite and/or vermiculite combined in various proportions with limestone, fertilizer and other ingredients to match the needs of different greenhouse crops. From poinsettias to potted bulbs and orchids to tomato transplants, these lightweight artificial soils provided good drainage, were free of weed seeds, and reduced disease problems for growers. Jim often joked, "If Sheldrake and I got a nickel for every bag of Peat Lite sold we'd be rich".

"Cornell Mix revolutionized the industry by providing a uniform and consistent soilless substrate that made plant care and handling much easier," said Neil Mattson, associate professor and greenhouse specialist in the Horticulture Section of Cornell's School of Integrative Plant

Science. “The Peat-Lite recipes formed the basis for modern potting mixes that are still widely used by the commercial greenhouse industry and consumers today.”

“The clean, well-drained growing medium empowered generations of flower growers to produce bedding plants and flowering potted plants in a new and better way,” said Margery Daugherty, plant pathologist at Cornell’s Long Island Horticultural Research and Extension Center, Riverside, N.Y. “Root rots and damping off were thwarted by the new growing medium, and the so-called Cornell Mix was ever so much lighter to handle and ship. A source of steam for pasteurization of the mix was no longer needed for every greenhouse. Their mix brought a new uniformity to the industry, paving the way for plug production and automation.”

In addition to developing the soilless mixes, Jim conducted early research on the use of artificial light to speed production in greenhouses, tissue analysis to assess the nutrient status of floral crops, and chemical solutions to prolong the shelf life of cut flowers. Cornell greenhouse staff, Barbara Stewart and John Kumpf remember Professor Boodley as a passionate, hard-working researcher who was “never afraid to get his hands dirty” and “was always thorough in his research approach.”

He wrote *The Commercial Greenhouse*, now in its third edition. The book is a complete reference on greenhouse systems and technologies, and the science of growing crops. “It’s considered ‘The Bible’ by many in the greenhouse industry,” says Mattson. “Thousands of today’s industry professionals were trained from this textbook.”

Jim was elected a fellow in American Society for Horticultural Science (ASHS) in 1982 and received the prestigious Alex Laurie Award from the Society of American Florists in 1983, presented to the author of the most significant applied floriculture research paper published in any of the ASHS publications during a calendar year. After retiring from Cornell in 1983, he continued his career as a research scientist at the Smithers- Oasis Company in Kent, Ohio.

Jim taught numerous courses on greenhouse management and flower crop production that influenced many future growers, educators and researchers. He was admired as an outstanding mentor and supporter by a generation of floriculture students.

“One of the best days of my life was getting a call from Professor Boodley when I was a senior at the University of Arkansas,” recalled W. Randolph Woodson, a student of Boodley’s who went on to become chancellor of North Carolina State University. “He called to offer me a graduate fellowship to work on a rose nutrition project. I quickly learned that Dr. Boodley cared deeply for his graduate students. He helped Susan and me find housing and upon our arrival in Ithaca hosted us in his home to get acquainted. We developed a strong relationship that made it clear to me that he cared about my success. Dr. Boodley left Cornell before I completed my doctorate to pursue his dream of working in the private sector for the leading company producing artificial substrate for potted plants. While our day-today interactions came to an end with his departure, his interest in my career never faltered. He stayed in touch and always sent me a note of congratulations at every major juncture in my career. Jim was a thoughtful, and caring mentor and I will always be grateful for that call.”

“Jim Boodley was an incredibly supportive advisor,” recalled Leonard Perry, Horticulture Professor Emeritus, University of Vermont. “His emphasis on useful and practical research and results was a great fit for me, and has served me well in obtaining what turned into a career position as the Greenhouse and Nursery Specialist with University of Vermont Extension. Having had the opportunity to work with one of the top names in floriculture at the time, and one of the pioneers of soilless media that so much of our current growing is based on, is an experience I cherish and feel fortunate to have had.”

“As a teacher turned horticulturalist, I came to Cornell for an MPS (Masters of Professional Studies),” recalled Elizabeth (Liz) Berens, MPS, 1978. “Once I arrived I was somewhat intimidated by the other graduate students in the department, most of whom were getting Masters Degrees on their way to Ph.D.’s. As my advisor, Professor Boodley made me feel validated in the different path that I was taking. He encouraged me when I chose to work on a second project towards my degree. He made the journey as valuable as the destination”.

Colleagues remember how Jim was courageous both at home and abroad: on a floriculture study tour in Mexico a number of years after he left Cornell, he impressed his colleagues with his derringdo in the bullring-for-tourists, where, armed with only a faded piece of red cloth, he successfully challenged a small but equally determined bull.

Dr. Boodley is survived by his four children and four grandchildren.

Written by Steve Reiners, chair; Craig Cramer and Joann Gruttadaurio