

Digger

JANUARY 2024

The Retail Issue

The lure of
aromatic plants

PAGE 21

Building the best
retail team

PAGE 17

Millennials set stage
for nursery growth

PAGE 25

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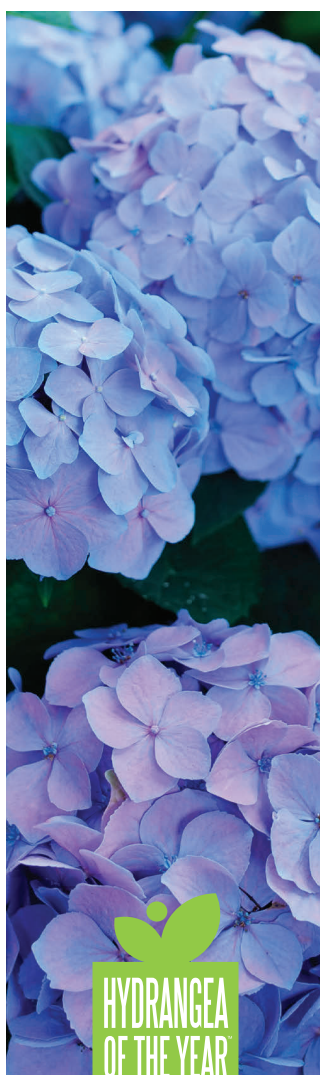
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On the cover: The drought-tolerant Illuminati Tower® mock orange (*Philadelphus coronarius* 'SMNPVG') from Proven Winners adds a citrusy scent to the garden. PHOTO COURTESY PROVEN WINNERS

On this page: Top: Lilacs add aroma and color to any garden and new varieties are more disease resistant. PHOTO COURTESY PROVEN WINNERS

Top right: Alayna Hauver (from left), Nancy Rice and Mark Peterson work at Bachman's. PHOTO COURTESY BACHMAN'S Bottom right: Pulse electric field application in nursery beds near Boring, Oregon. PHOTO COURTESY OF OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY



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The excitement of turning the page to a new year

Happy New Year! I hope everyone had a wonderful holiday season and was able to spend it with their loved ones in whatever traditions they celebrate.



Amanda Staehely

The craziness of December is always one of my most favorite months, and making traditions with our kids is something extra special during that time of year.

One of our new holiday traditions is mistletoe “hunting.” I always thought of it as fun and cute and a little romantic even, but my husband quickly corrected me that it is actually a parasite that got its name from the Anglo-Saxon word for dung. Thanks, honey.

But in all honesty, our new tradition is very special and something we all look forward to every year.

The rest of the month is filled with the “normal” traditions many others share as well. The holiday season comes with so much excitement, anticipation, and honestly, exhaustion.

I personally feel a huge downturn directly following Christmas as we approach the New Year. It is a time of reflection, yes, but that means we also have to look at our goals we have made and assess if they were achieved, or which new ones are taking their place this upcoming year. That’s a lot of pressure! And self-reflection is something that is not always so fun.

Both personal goals and business goals are front and center as we approach January 1. The big turn around for me is once we hit January. It’s game time. This is it!

I feel like we have the month of January to put into place all that we have as our goals before the craziness of spring hits. After that, we roll straight into other projects, repotting, planting, Farwest

Show, inventory, fall shipping, and bam! It’s Christmas again.

I know that there are many different businesses within our organization and that many do not share the same time frames that we have, but everyone has that one month that is their turnaround month or their beginning of the new year and for us, January is it.

I look forward to seeing customers in person at trade shows around the country. I also like to take this time to check in and see how their holidays were and what they are anticipating for the upcoming season.

Of course, we discuss what their needs for plant material may be, but I would be remiss to not mention the fact that they are also good friends. I love chatting with them about their families and telling them about mine and the conversation always transitions into how excited we are for the season right around the corner.

It’s a time of anticipation and excitement for all of us. I feel like one of my kids getting excited for Christmas as I look forward to the upcoming months and spring ahead. I hope all of you share in this exciting anticipation for the upcoming season, and I wish all of you a happy and prosperous new year.



Calendar

Get the word out about your event! Email details to Calendar@OAN.org by the 10th day of the month to be included in the next issue of *Digger*.

JANUARY 10-12

MID-ATLANTIC NURSERY TRADE SHOW

The Mid-Atlantic Nursery Trade Show will once again take place January 10-12 at the Baltimore Convention Center, 1 W. Pratt St. in Baltimore, Maryland. MANTS, produced by the state nursery and landscape associations of Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia, is one of the largest private trade shows serving the horticulture industry, with more than 11,000 attendees and 900 exhibitors in 2023. Registration is now open and convention lodging is available. There is a waiting list for exhibitors. For information or to register, go to MANTS.com.

JANUARY 17-19

NORTHWEST AG SHOW

The 54th Northwest Agricultural Show will take place January 17-19 at the Oregon State Fair and Expo Center, 2330 17th St. N.E., in Salem, Oregon. The annual event focuses on emerging trends in agriculture including small farming, technology, and education. For more information, go to NorthwestAgShow.com. A sister show, the Central Oregon Agricultural Show, will take place April 6-7 at the Deschutes County Fair and Expo Center, 3800 S.W. Airport Way, in Redmond, Oregon. For information, go to NorthwestAgShow.com/Central-Oregon-Ag-Show.

JANUARY 17-19

IDAHO HORTICULTURE EXPO

The Idaho Nursery & Landscape Association's two-day trade show bring together more than 1,100 attendees January 17-19 to the Boise Center on the Grove, 850 W. Front Street, Boise, Idaho. The show will also feature educational seminars and demonstrations. For more information and to register, go to INLAGrow.org.

JANUARY 22-24

UTAH GREEN

Presented by the Utah Nursery & Landscape Association, the event will be January 22-24 at Mountain America Expo Center, 9575 State St., Sandy, Utah. The show features green industry vendors from across the nation and officer seminars on topics such as business management, landscape design, plant material, irrigation, and many others. For information or to register, go to UtahGreen.org.

JANUARY 23-26

IPPS WESTERN REGION ANNUAL MEETING

The 62nd International Plant Propagator's Society (IPPS) Western Region Annual Meeting will be January 25-26 at Pechanga Resort Casino, 45000 Pechanga Parkway, in Temecula, California. IPPS will be hosting this meeting with UC Nursery and Floriculture Alliance. Speakers will focus on topics from water management to new plants. For information or to register, go to IPPS.org.



ADOBE STOCK PHOTO

JANUARY 17, 18; FEBRUARY 14, 15 FIRST AID/CPR CLASSES AT OAN

Need a first aid/CPR certification renewal for yourself or one of your employees? The Oregon Association of Nurseries is holding sessions in English on January 17 and February 14 and sessions in Spanish on January 18 and February 15. Class times are 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The cost is \$60 per person whether you are renewing certification or taking the class for the first time. Certification is good for two years and includes instruction and a certification card. Classes are held at the OAN office, 29751 S.W. Town Center Loop West, Wilsonville, Oregon. Register at OAN.org/Page/CPRclass

JANUARY 30-FEBRUARY 1 PROGREEN EXPO

ProGreen EXPO is the only green industry conference in the Rocky Mountain Region of its kind. More than 5,000 green industry professionals gather every year at the Colorado Convention Center, 700 14th St., Denver, Colorado, to gain vital knowledge and skills to improve business, educate employees and discover the latest information for the upcoming season. The show runs January 30-February 1. For information or to register, go to ProGreenExpo.com.

FEBRUARY 8

NOR CAL LANDSCAPE & NURSERY SHOW

The 2024 Nor Cal Landscape & Nursery Show will take place February 8 in the San Mateo Event Center, 1346 Saratoga Drive, San Mateo, California. The show is a one-day collaboration between California's horticulture and landscape industries featuring more than 250 exhibitors and five educational seminars. To register, go to NorCalTradeShow.org. For more information, contact Margo Cheuvront, MargoC@FrontierNet.net or 530-458-3190.

FEBRUARY 29

OAN HALL OF FAME CLASS OF 2024

Join us for a leap year celebration as we honor our newest inductees into the Oregon

Association of Nurseries Hall of Fame at 6 p.m. on February 29 at the Abernethy Center, 606 15th St., Oregon City, Oregon. Registration is \$109. Go to OAN.Org/HOF2024 to register by February 12.

VARIOUS DATES

SAIF AGRICULTURAL SAFETY SEMINARS

SAIF is holding several free Agricultural Safety Seminars including several that will be conducted entirely in Spanish. Small employers attending will meet one of the four requirements that exempt small agricultural operations from random OSHA inspections. The Landscape Contractors Board will grant for four hours of continuing education credits. The Department of Consumer and Business Services will grant three regular producer and one law producer continuing education credits. Seminars are from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and include lunch. The following are dates and locations for January and February of 2024 for seminars in English: Bandon, February 26; Boring, January 16; Central Point, January 29; Hermiston, January 9; Hood River, February 13; Salem, January 22; The Dallas, January 24; Wilsonville, February 21. The following are dates and locations for seminars in Spanish: Boring, January 17; Central Point, January 30; Hermiston, January 10; Hood River, February 14; Mt. Angel, February 7; Salem, January 23, The Dallas, January 25; Wilsonville, February 22. To register, go to TinyUrl.com/SaifSeminars. 



Northwest News

OAN members and chapters are encouraged to send in relevant news items, such as new hires, new products, acquisitions, honors received and past or upcoming events. Email News@OAN.org.

Terra Nova Nurseries introductions recognized at Penn State Flower Trials

Terra Nova Nurseries, located in Canby, Oregon, announced that nine of its varieties received awards at the 2023 Penn State Flower Trials.

Echinacea Dark Shadows™ 'Mystic' was recognized as Best of Show and Best of Species in its second year of the In-Ground Trials at Penn State. The variety showcases bright-shell pink flowers, with petals gradually tuning to an antique pink.

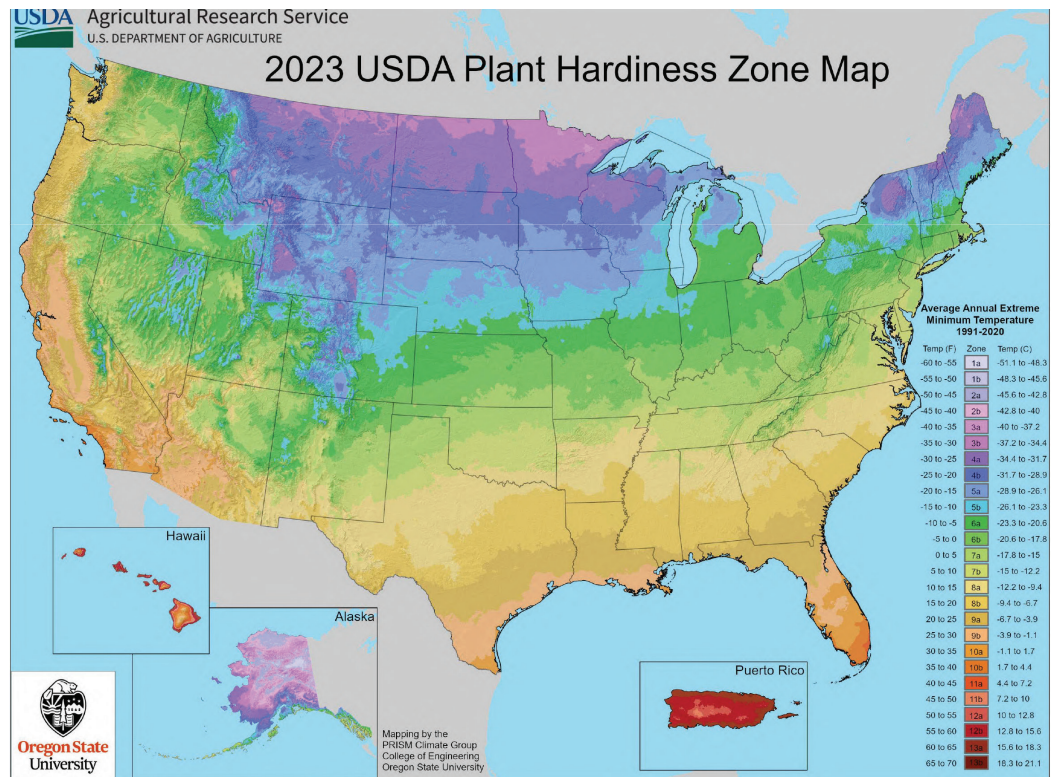
Sedum 'Conga Line' also received both the Best of Show and Best of Species honors. 'Conga Line' has short, compact habit and peach and cream flowers.

Terra Nova's third "Best of Show" plant was *Sedum* 'Peach Pearls'. The variety has burgundy leaves and rose gold flowers.

"The Terra Nova Nurseries team is very proud of our accomplishments at this year's Penn State Flower Trials and the recognitions we continue to receive for our best-of-breeding varieties," said Chuck Pavlich, director of new product development.

The nursery also had two varieties recognized as Director's Select and Best of Species winners. These included *Leucanthemum* 'Lemon Meringue,' which has lemon-yellow centers and crisp white flowers, and *Pulmonaria* 'Raspberry Frost,' a perennial featuring gray-green foliage with silver-cream edges.

Four additional varieties from Terra Nova were also honored as Director's Select varieties. These include *Coreopsis* NOVA™ 'Jewel', *Kniphofia* POCO™ 'Citron', *Kniphofia* 'Rocket Jr.' and *Nepeta* NOVA® 'Blue'.



Overall, the 2023 Plant Hardiness Zone Map is about 2.5 F warmer than the 2012 map, said Christopher Daly of Oregon State University, the lead scientist behind the update. PHOTO COURTESY USDA AND OSU

USDA'S NEW PLANT HARDINESS ZONE MAP REFLECTS CHANGES IN TEMPERATURE

The U.S. Department of Agriculture has released an updated Plant Hardiness Zone Map that reflects a small change in temperatures across the country.

"Overall, the 2023 map is about 2.5 degrees warmer than the 2012 map across the conterminous United States," said the map's lead researcher, Christopher Daly, founding director of Oregon State University's PRISM Climate Group. "This translated into about half of the country shifting to a warmer 5-degree half zone, and half remaining in the same half zone. The central plains and Midwest generally warmed the most, with the southwestern U.S. warming very little."

"If you're on the edge of a zone, it doesn't take many degrees to move your zone," Daly said. It could be just 1-5 F.

How does this translate for growers and consumers? "This could mean that those areas

that shifted could potentially grow plants that are slightly less cold hardy than they previously thought," said John Keller, vice president of production planning at **Monrovia**. "We recommend consumers consult the updated map and consider their new zone (if it changed) when selecting plants."

According to Peter K. Bretting, Crop Production and Protection National Program leader at the USDA, the updated plant hardiness map is more accurate and timelier than previous versions. That's because it incorporates data from 13,412 weather stations, compared to the 7,983 that were used for the 2012 edition. "That's a 68% increase" in data, Daly said.

What do the changes mean for growers and the industry?

"One of the best responses I've heard to date is that climate change doesn't change in a day, but policy does," said Alec Charais, chief marketing officer at **Bailey Nurseries**. "I think this is the right frame of mind. It doesn't change what we grow or how we grow it. At Bailey, we evaluate the best plant on the best ground" ➔

Northwest News

because the overarching goal for the end-user is quality and performance.”

Charais cautioned people not to make wrong inferences from the new map.

“From a marketing standpoint, the new zoning might create confusion at a consumer level,” he said. “New or inexperienced gardeners might attempt to grow a plant rated for their zone that is actually a marginal plant. On the other hand, plants don’t read plant tags; people do. So, if anything, this should make breeders think about how they establish the proper zone rating for their plant. I think it is too soon to say whether there will be any large changes in this area. But if it does, this updated map will have helped the industry do its best to zone plants appropriately.”

And zone levels are no guarantee of plant success or failure.

“There are so many factors that go into the survivability of a plant in any

area: water availability, temperature extremes, exposure, and placement in the landscape are just as critical to success as what zone the plant is rated for.” Charais said. “Our job as an industry is to continue to educate consumers about this and not let zone ratings be the deciding factor on whether they want to try something in their yards and enjoy the experience of gardening!”

In addition to the map updates, the Plant Hardiness Zone Map website was expanded in 2023 to include “Tips for Growers,” which provides information about USDA Agricultural Research Service programs of interest to gardeners and others who grow and breed plants. The website can be reached by going to PlantHardiness.ARS.USDA.gov. To download the updated Oregon Plant Hardiness Zone map, go to TinyURL.com/ORHardyMap. To download the updated

national map, go to TinyURL.com/USHardyMap.

LITTLE PRINCE OF OREGON NURSERY ACQUIRES WINTER JEWELS® HELLEBORES

Little Prince of Oregon Nursery in Aurora, Oregon, has acquired Winter Jewels® Hellebores from Ernie and Marietta O’Byrne.

The O’Byrnes have been growing, selecting, and improving this line of seed-grown hellebore hybrids for more than 30 years at **Northwest Garden Nursery** in Eugene, Oregon.

“We are so excited because we are convinced that they will continue, and even improve, the quality that we have worked so hard to achieve in over 30 years of working with *Helleborus × hybridus*,” the O’Byrnes said in a statement.



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From left: Winter Jewels breeders Marietta O'Byrne and Ernie O'Byrne gather with Joan Dudney, director of sales & marketing for Little Prince of Oregon and Mike Hicks, production director for Little Prince. PHOTO COURTESY LITTLE PRINCE OF OREGON

“They are the first nursery that we have worked with that truly understands the dedication to meticulous detail that it took and will take going forward to preserve and improve the legacy breeding program that we have developed.”

“Little Prince of Oregon Nursery is honored that Ernie and Marietta deem

us worthy to carry on the legacy of the Winter Jewels® Hellebores,” said Mark Leichy, director of business development at Little Prince of Oregon. “We recognize that their diligent and patient work over many decades has created the most beautiful and desirable hellebore hybrids found anywhere in horticulture. We plan

to enlarge the program through careful selection and evaluation, providing even more improved varieties for Hellebore enthusiasts.”

Little Prince of Oregon Nursery has been known for more than twenty years as a provider of high-quality, retail-ready houseplants, perennials, groundcovers, ornamental grasses, ferns, native plants, succulents, and rare plants.

AG COALITION CALLS INTO QUESTION PESTICIDE STEWARDSHIP PARTNERSHIP DATA USE

On behalf of a broad coalition of natural resource industry organizations, Oregonians for Food and Shelter (OFS) submitted a letter to state and federal agency staff outlining ongoing concerns with Oregon’s Pesticide Stewardship Partnership (PSP) and the error and



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misinterpretation happening with PSP data analysis and presentation.

“Given that we have been formally raising these concerns for close to two years now, we are hopeful for a timely resolution to this issue, which has damaged the scientific integrity and trust that has long been a feature of this unique program. We hope to see this program return to a spirit of true partnership, support, and problem-solving in the future,” OFS stated in the letter. The Oregon Association of Nurseries was one of the organizations that signed on to the letter. To read the letter, go to TinyURL.com/PesticideLetter.

Announcements

OAN PROMOTES BETH FARMER TO DIRECTOR OF MARKETING AND MEMBER SERVICES

The Oregon Association of Nurseries has promoted 18-year veteran Beth Farmer to director of marketing and member services. Farmer was previously communications and web design manager.

“This is a position of tremendous need for the OAN and simply put, elevating Beth to a director level was an easy decision,” OAN Executive Director Jeff Stone said. “Beth’s tenure and experience is a blend that will take the internal and external marketing of the association and its members to a new level.”

“Retaining our existing members is just as important as recruiting new members,” Farmer said. “My priorities are to develop an innovative retention strategy, ensuring that you find ongoing value in your membership and are motivated to remain an internal part of our community; and to employ strategic marketing campaigns and outreach efforts to attract



Beth Farmer

new members, broaden our community and foster a vibrant and inclusive environment. Working with people and the industry are my absolute favorite part of the job.”

Farmer is a native Oregonian and before she joined the OAN, she was a regional accounting manager for a printed circuit board design company. Farmer came to OAN in 2005 as financial and administrative services coordinator. She was promoted to web and member communications manager in 2008 and then to communications and web design manager in 2015.

BUCHHOLZ NURSERY ACQUIRES NEW MANAGEMENT

Buchholz and Buchholz Nursery, a wholesale grower of Japanese maples, dwarf and unusual conifers and other choice ornamental trees and shrubs has hired Joel Johnson as chief operating officer/nursery manager and Jordan Ellis as the horticultural manager at their 25-acre Nursery in Gaston, Oregon. Buchholz and Buchholz was purchased by Mr.Maple.com of East Flack Rock, North Carolina, in September.

Johnson brings more than 20 years of experience in the wholesale plant nursery industry. “I am excited to continue to build on the legacy of this company, the success of Mr.Maple.com, and to apply the principles of nursery management, business marketing, and customer relations to elevate this brand to



Joel Johnson



Jordan Ellis

the next level,” Johnson said in *Nursery Management* magazine.

Ellis attended Oregon State University where he graduated cum laude with a degree in Horticulture concentrated in sustainable production.

ESCHENFELDER FARMS HIRES FARM MANAGER, PROMOTES STAFF

Eschenfelder Farms has hired Mikaela Eaton as farm manager, a newly-created position, and promoted six-year staff member Flor Cantoran to assistant farm manager.

Eaton has been focused on putting organizational systems, structures, and processes in place. She previously worked at Serendipity Nursery as farm manager and at Bountiful Farms in the plant health department. She is a graduate of the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, with a degree in horticulture and landscape design.

Cantoran has been focused on task management, fulfilling material and resource needs on the farm, and payroll. She’s studying landscaping management at Clackamas Community College.



Mikaela Eaton



Flor Cantoran

AGROMILLORA QUALITY ASSURANCE LAB ADDS NEW LAB DIRECTOR

Agromillora Quality Assurance Lab in McMinnville, Oregon, has added Melinda Guzman as lab director.

Guzman received a bachelor's degree in microbiology and master's degree in botany and plant pathology from Oregon State University. She later pursued a PhD at the University of Georgia studying *Xylella fastidiosa* in southern high-bush blueberry before starting her new position with Agromillora.



Melinda Guzman

Agromillora QA Lab specializes in comprehensive genetic true-to-type testing and plant pathogen analysis.

MONROVIA EXPANDS NEW PLANTS TEAM

Monrovia has expanded its New Plants team to allow it to trial and test more plant material and bring more new plants into the market, the company said in an announcement.



Fela Lafi

Fela Lafi has taken on the role of new plant trials manager. She joins the plant hunting team and will manage plant trials at all Monrovia nurseries, work with data collection, and explore new plant testing opportunities with breeders.

Lafi joined Monrovia in 2022 as an intern while studying horticulture at Oregon State University.



Georgia Clay

During that internship, she was hired as a propagation team leader and was promoted to assistant buyer of green goods.



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Georgia Clay is now the plant selections manager. In this new role, Clay will be focusing on new plant choices, bringing selections to market, managing intellectual property, and developing breeder relationships. She will also continue her consumer outreach, participating in Monrovia's webinars and plant care videos. Clay joined Monrovia in 2019 and has been an integral part of the company's plant hunter team.

ODA APPOINTS NEW WATER QUALITY PROGRAM MANAGER

The Oregon Department of Agriculture has appointed Kevin Fenn as the Water Quality Program manager.

Fenn has been with ODA for 16 years in the Water Quality Program as a water quality specialist. His years of experience at ODA and educational background at Oregon State University, where he focused on environmental sociology with an emphasis on natural resource management related to agriculture, fisheries, and forestry, strengthens his ability to lead the Water Quality Program effectively, ODA said in a statement.

"Kevin will be a steady hand in this program," Oregon Association of Nurseries Director Jeff Stone said. Stone was part of the interview panel for the finalists for the position.

You can reach Fenn at Kevin.Fenn@ODA.Oregon.gov or 503-510-8214.

Correction

It is the policy of *Digger* magazine to correct errors when brought to the attention of the editors. Reach out to CKipp@OAN.org.

Due to a reporter's error, some facts in the Drakes Crossing Nursery story in December's *Digger* were incorrect. The farm encompasses more than 1,200 acres. More than a million pounds of material was shipped for Christmas boughs and other decorations, but Drakes Crossing is not the nation's largest supplier of material for boughs.

Digger regrets the errors. ☺



DIGITAL GROWTH

The transition to Google Analytics 4



Ron McCabe

Ron McCabe has been a technologist for over 35 years and an expert digital marketer for 14 years. He is the president of Everbearing Services, a full-service digital marketing agency dedicated to the green industry. Visit his website and subscribe to his newsletter at www.EverbearingServices.com or email him at RMcCabe@EverbearingServices.com.

WHEN I DISCUSS THE NEED to measure online advertising performance with people I am often met with various forms of disinterest.

The problem with traditional marketing and advertising is best expressed in this old quote: “Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is I don’t know which half.” Once I explain that measurement and analytics help us know precisely what is working and not working, most people want to know more.

Online measurement tools such as Google Analytics 4 (GA4) are powerful management tools that help us know if the money being spent is effective, or if we should shift this spending elsewhere. Too many people make their marketing decisions based on their interest or how they feel about things.

Analytics and online measurement help us make rational decisions about where to spend our money and resources. In an area that was once undefinable, being able to precisely define and understand performance is a huge advantage. The people and companies that use these tools have a significant performance edge.

A revolutionary concept

This all started in 2005 when Google purchased the startup “Urchin” and morphed this into the original Google Analytics. This was the first time we were able to measure the performance of our marketing activities. This was a revolutionary concept that changed how we market and sell products. This matured to the last version of Google Analytics, Universal Analytics, over 18 years.

Unfortunately, Universal Analytics was “too good” and started to get very detailed information on what people were doing online, their interests and associations online and offline. This culminated with information mined by political consulting firm Cambridge Analytica, who utilized these tools to target individuals or groups very precisely or in some cases avoid undesirable people or groups.

During the 2016 election there was literally a tool that told people canvassing neighborhoods for political campaigns which houses were likely to be receptive as well as the ones to avoid. This type of technology proved to be a bridge too far and caused a privacy backlash that resulted in the European General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and United States hearings and legislation around personal privacy.

Privacy-friendly version

Out of these hearings and legislation, Google negotiated the terms of a new, safer analytics system that protects personal privacy. This became GA4 and public testing started in 2020. There was a hard stop on Universal Analytics and a forced switchover in August 2023.

The new GA4 is a privacy-friendly tool that does not include some of the invasive personal details that Universal Analytics once did. GA4 now provides better information about your customers, their activities online and consumption of media like radio and TV. This new tool makes it much easier to create reports that give you the information you need to make more informed decisions about your

sales and marketing activities.

With this transition and availability of GA4 here are some things you should do:

Check with your team or digital marketing (website) professional to see if your Universal Analytics was migrated to GA4. If not, it is important to do this simple migration by logging into your Universal Analytics and using the migration tool. If this has not been done, Universal Analytics is no longer measuring anything and your company is no longer gathering any information. It is important to start gathering information again in GA4 by performing this migration.

If you check and your company does not have any type of Google Analytics measurement, get GA4 installed.

Migration is the first step, you still need to set it up to measure things the way you want to and provide the information your company needs in easy-to-read reports. This set up can be done by someone on your team or you can hire a professional to do this.

Whether you get help or not, this tool will be more useful if you get training. I highly recommend that any manager that plans marketing activities understands and uses this tool to make better decisions. Fortunately, Google provides simple and free online training. You can access this through this link, TinyURL.com/AnalyticsTrain.

Once you get GA4 rolling you will have a new set of powerful tools to help your company focus on the sales and marketing activities that provide the most benefits. Get started today! ☺

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First Class Customer Service with Integrity



Shaping your retail team

Here's what to look for when hiring front line garden center workers

From left: Ryan Bigej, Annie Ruef, and Mark Bigej showcase a section at Al's Garden & Home in Sherwood, Oregon. PHOTO COURTESY AIS GARDEN & HOME

BY ERICA BROWNE GRIVAS

THE PANDEMIC MAY HAVE GROWN 16 million new gardeners. But for garden centers, gardening's spike in popularity also raised the level of competition, from large-scale retailers to pop-up propagators on Etsy.

What has historically set independent garden stores apart is service — and it's even more critical today as customers seek transparency and connection. Here's how some successful garden centers are finding and keeping staff to knit a culture that customers adore.

People skills come first

With seasonal hiring, it's important to make the right hiring choices fast to have time to train your team up for the busy spring and/or holiday seasons.



"... We are looking first and foremost for people who like people and are great at communicating"

— Mark Bigej, part owner, Al's Garden & Home

In interviews with sources for this story, people skills topped the list as the most sought-after attribute for new retail employees.

At Moltbak's Garden and Home in Woodinville, Washington, with about 75 retail employees, Store Operations Manager Matt Porter has switched his focus since he started 15 years ago.

"I think the knowledge I need now is different than 10 years ago," he said. "I used to look for a lot of [plant] knowledge. Now my baseline is enthusiastic, outgoing people who love gardening. I'm looking for people who are excited, who want to learn and share what they've learned."

Because so many people have a computer in their back pockets, customers may be looking for



Shaping your retail team



Leon Lonstein is one of the staff members at one of Bachman's six nurseries in Minnesota. The company begins hiring seasonal staff in March for an April start and aims to bring back as many experienced seasonal staff as possible. PHOTO COURTESY BACHMANS

community more than trusted advisors, although he is always thrilled to find new staffers with strong plant experience.

"On the retail end when we hire, we are looking first and foremost for people who like people and are great at communicating," said Mark Bigej, part owner and chief operating officer of **Al's Garden & Home**, a family-owned, third-generation business with four retail locations in Sherwood, Woodburn, Gresham and Wilsonville, Oregon. Across the four stores, he estimated Al's staff numbers close to 100.

So-called soft skills, he said, are "definitely harder to train" than procedures and plant care.

"What we've been finding lately is our sweet spot is people who have those interpersonal skills and love gardening," he said. "They don't have to be plant experts."

Al's hires "people, not paper," said Brian Kriesel, director of retail stores.

At Bachman's, a Minnesota-based chain of six garden centers that also includes several in-store shops in the area, they begin hiring seasonal employees, which make up approximately 65% of the

staff, in March for an April start.

"It is our goal to bring back as many experienced seasonal team members as possible," said Sherri Eriksrud, vice president of retail operation. "This helps with quick onboarding and provides us with a workforce of people already trained in standard operating procedures and product knowledge."

In fact, Bachman's has one employee who just celebrated 50 years at the company, and several more at the 45-year-mark.

Eriksrud says Bachman's is seeing fewer applicants with deep plant knowledge, but she's more concerned about customer service skills. And each store has horticulturists or Master Gardeners ready for complex questions.

Bigej said the hiring process has changed in recent years. "We are leaning much heavier on social media, saying 'Text to apply' much more than emails," he says.

If someone is more introverted, they may be better suited to a less public-facing position in ordering, administration, or plant care.

Knowing, communicating your values

Creating a positive, sustaining culture of teamwork is a combination of understanding and translating into policy both the company's values and the unique benefits it offers its customers.

Bachman's "core focus" is "We bring beauty to life," which offers a framework for training, priorities and decision-making.

"Whenever a customer returns to the store and asks for a team member by name, I know we have made the kind of connection that really makes a difference, Eriksrud said. "We have a team member in one of our locations who received four hand-written customer comment notes last year."

"I think my whole job is creating a team," said Porter. "Once you have that, training is really easy."

Spring training is for retail too

In training, the onboarding process is key at Molbak's, which welcomes new employees with a gift, a group orientation with pizza and role-playing. Porter said staff are trained to work multiple roles and encouraged to switch departments.



Zoreh Jamjoo puts together a display at Al's Garden & Home in Sherwood. PHOTO COURTESY ALS GARDEN & HOME

Understanding other people's jobs makes it easier to support them, he notes.

For Al's Garden & Home, "Training starts on day one — we have an extensive process working in partnership with our store leaders," said Kriesel.

Al's has a customer service program called "Seeds of Knowledge" that everyone takes. "When it's time to go live, we've created a buddy system where new employees shadow an experienced employee," Kriesel said. "They're encouraged to ask questions, and we've found that to be really effective."

Bachman's offers refresher training for returning seasonal employees, and more in-depth training for new staff, customized to position.

For instance, garden sales team members receive a catalog of plant offerings, organized by customer need, such as drought-tolerance or deer resistance. A company-wide "garden kick-off" meet-

ing opens the garden season, covering new products, vendor demonstrations, and safety protocols. They also employ a buddy system for the first shift.

Being word-of-mouth worthy

Customer service consultant Anne Obarski of Merchandise Concepts said that if you want to build an engaged team of customer service wizards, the same rules apply to any size garden center — even a small mom-and-pop operation.

The goal, she said, is to make the business "contagious on purpose," to the point where customers are telling their friends all about the great experience they had.

You get one chance, she said, to make a customer fall for you, starting with greeting them and finding out their needs that day. Almost worse than not finding any employee to help you is finding one that ignores you or that is uninterested in your questions. >>

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Shaping your retail team

Each successful business or garden center has what she calls its “pink pig” — the unforgettable something that sets it apart. Having that clearly in mind keeps the team on-message with every interaction.

For Al’s, it’s the nearly 75 years of family-owned service in the community. Obarski cited Groovy Plants Ranch in Marengo, Ohio, which offers a kids play area centered around a Volkswagen Beetle and a dirt bar potting area, but you might bring in rare plants, a food truck, chef demonstrations, or Master Gardener visits.

Employees should be able to engage the customer, identify their needs, and make the sale while ensuring the customer will be successful with their purchase. They also need, Obarski said, to be able to say “in a nanosecond” what the features and benefits of the business and products are for the customer. For instance, when asked why this mugo pine costs more than at the nearest box store, the employee might

explain that it’s grown locally (or on-site) and let the customer know they can come back with questions or issues.

Communication

Molbak’s keeps staff informed with monthly meetings, weekly “FYI” emails and twice-daily “huddles” for on-the-ground news. The FYIs might include sales goals, duty rosters, tips on new products, or reminders about staying hydrated in the August heat.

Al’s sends out a monthly PowerPoint highlighting the upcoming season. “It’s not only information, but inspiration,” Bigej said.

Engage, acknowledge employees

Attracting engaged employees starts with competitive wages. Since the pandemic, Molbak’s has raised its wages to compensate for the local cost of living and commuting, even though it meant hiring fewer people and asking staff to multitask.

It streamlined the company structure to enable people to work across departments.

For example, instead of being two distinct departments, “live goods” employees merge into the “home department” during the winter months.

Another key element is motivation, Obarski said. “The trend is, ‘If I don’t feel worthwhile and that I am making the company a better place, I’ll work somewhere else.’” She references a recent study by Investopedia indicating 1 in 4 employees surveyed are actively looking for work. As a result, she said, “You better have the ability to train, educate and motivate the employees who are working for you.”

Obarski recommends empowering employees with new responsibility, like asking them to merch the seeds, or take charge of the vegetable displays, ideally with targeted goals and accountability. You can offer rewards, like a percentage or commission on sales. “Then they feel they have some skin in the game,” she said.

She also recommends regular employee reviews, even if they are just check-ins versus performance evaluations.

Molbak’s holds staff appreciation events throughout the year. “We’ll bring a food truck in and wear fun clothes that day, and I’ll write a card to all my employees telling them why I appreciate them,” Porter said.

Likewise, Al’s Garden & Home staff comes out for summer potlucks and barbecues, and an annual January meeting to plot out the year ahead. Bigej said he also encourages the staff to have fun on the job.

With a team that is engaged in the work and supporting each other, everything works more smoothly. One husband-and-wife team Obarski consulted with years ago reported gleefully after implementing some of these customer service and hiring tips: “My wife and I were able to go on vacation for three weeks because we had people trained in the right seats, within our company, and it went perfectly.” ☺

Erica Browne Grivas is an award-winning journalist and gardener pushing some boundaries in Seattle, Washington. She can be reached at EBGrivas@Gmail.com.

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Fragrant and up front

Aromatic plants are not just a timeless gardening staple, but part of a wellness trend



Camellia sasanqua hybrids mostly bloom in mid to late fall through December, with a splattering of flowers in January. PHOTO BY DEBBIE TEASHON

BY DEBBIE TEASHON

FRAGRANT FLOWERS ARE IRRESISTIBLE in any garden. We know this by the first reaction most people have when presented with a flower. They immediately put their noses into it in search of its scented treasure, even though they do not know where the blossom has been, what has crawled on it, or what may still be inside.

Fragrance is a powerful force in our lives, so powerful that memories are often triggered by certain scents.

Katie Tamony, chief marketing officer at **Monrovia**, believes that fragrant plants are not just a timeless garden staple, but part of a trend towards wellness gardening.

“Gardening is increasingly becoming an activity that allows people to remove themselves from the noise of life,” she said. “It makes them feel rejuvenated and provides a more positive outlook. Our research shows that this trend has been increasing since 2020. Fragrance is a big part of this trend.”

With the availability of choice plants, anyone can have a fragrant garden.

“Of course, fragrance has always played; and will continue to play a major role in gardening, but it also speaks to a recent trend of using nostalgic plants – like roses, lilacs, and hydrangeas,” said Natalie Carmolli, a spokeswoman with the **Proven Winners** brand of plant introductions.

Fragrance is possible every season in milder climates, such as west of the Cascades in the Pacific Northwest. Each season, including winter, has a palette of scented flowers.

“There’s something humanly innate about the need ➤



Proven Winners Reminiscent® garden rose series have large, lush flowers with a powerful scent and come in hues of pink, cream, or coral. These plants resist black spot and powdery mildew.

PHOTO COURTESY PROVEN WINNERS

Fragrant and up front

to experience the outdoors with all our senses,” said Heidi Mortensen, rose portfolio manager for **Star® Roses and Plants**. “Consumers now want more than just a pretty plant — they want an experience. The consumer demand for fragrance is higher than ever. If we as an industry can help them discover which plants will give them the best experience for their dollar, then I think fragrance is here to stay.”

A plethora of roses

According to Tamony, roses had fallen from prominence as a fragrant plant, but they are roaring back.

“In the past, rose breeding focused on disease resistance and unfortunately removed fragrance from many varieties,” she said. “Modern breeding brought fragrance back, allowing us to bring easy care, fragrant roses to market.”

Monrovia’s Eau De Parfum™ rose series features easy-care plants that do not sacrifice beauty or fragrance. The bushes carry lush foliage and large, scented blossoms that flower repeatedly from spring until the first frost. The patented roses include Bubbly Rose (*Rosa* ‘Noa1112130’), Bling Rose (*R.* ‘Noa16079’), Blush Rose (*R.* ‘Noa1811108’), and Berry Rose (*R.* Noa11356’). The 2023 Farwest Show’s New Varieties Showcase featured the Bling Rose.

One of the roses Mortensen recommends from Star® Roses and Plants is a disease-resistant, white flowering Bolero™ rose (*Rosa* ‘Meidelweis’), which has a robust fragrance with a suggestion of tropical fruit and roses. Another recommendation is Parfuma® Bliss (*Rosa* ‘KORmarzau’), a rose with disease-resistant foliage, blooms in flushes during the season with warm pink petals and apricot centers.

One of the roses recommended by Carmolli was developed in Serbia. Proven Winners Reminiscent® garden rose series have large, lush flowers with a powerful scent and come in hues of pink (Reminiscent® Pink Rose – *R.* × ‘BOZFRA021’), cream (Reminiscent® Crema Rose – *Rosa* × ‘BOZFRA121’), or coral (Reminiscent® Coral Rose – *R.* ×



The species Korean spice viburnum (*Viburnum carlesii*) and the cultivar Spice Baby™ Koreanspice Viburnum (*Viburnum carlesii* ‘SMVCB’) are deer resistant and provide a spicy fragrance that seasons the fresh spring air. PHOTO BY DEBBIE TEASHON

‘BOZFRA221’). These plants resist black spot and powdery mildew.

A disease-resistant tea rose for the cutting garden, Romantica® Moonlight (*Rosa* ‘Meikaquinz’) has highly fragrant, light yellow flowers.

Improved lilacs

Lilacs are notorious for succumbing to powdery mildew. But several new varieties from Star® Roses and Plants are more disease resistant, Mortensen said. The New Age™ Syringa ushers in a better era with New Age™ White Lilac – *Syringa vulgaris* ‘G13103’. This modern lilac is compact, growing 4-5 feet tall, and mildew-resistant. Another compact is New Age™ Lavender Lilac – *Syringa vulgaris* ‘G13099’.

The lilac season quickly comes and goes. So reblooming lilacs like Bloomerang® Dark Purple (*Syringa* × ‘SMSJBP7’) from Proven Winners are a great addition, Carmolli said. The disease-resistant, deciduous shrub reaches 4 to 6 feet tall in a pleasing round shape.

The best-smelling lilacs come from *Syringa hyacinthiflora*. The hybrid Scentara® Double Blue (*Syringa* × *hyacinthiflora* ‘SMNSHBBL’) is Proven Winners’ most fragrant, said Carmolli. The disease-resistant lilac reaches 6–8 feet tall. The flowers acquire a blue tone under the spring sun.

Other aromatic offerings

But there are many other options beyond the traditional roses and lilacs.

The drought-tolerant Illuminati Tower® mock orange (*Philadelphus coronarius* ‘SMNPVG’) from Proven Winners adds a citrusy scent to the garden, Carmolli said. In late spring, the plant offers upright branches smothered in white blossoms. The shrub claims only a small footprint, growing 6 feet tall by 3-4 feet wide. The variegated Illuminati Sparks™ mock orange (*Philadelphus coronarius* ‘SMNPVB’) is shorter and has the same fragrance.

“Some describe the flowers as having citrusy smell with just a hint of jasmine. But traditionally this shrub didn’t offer much beyond the bloom,” Carmolli said. “Our Illuminati® series of *Philadelphus* offers both the allure of deliciously scented blooms and interesting foliage that stays neat and clean all season.”

Some gardens cannot go without a fragrant viburnum in spring to tickle the fifth sense.

The species Korean spice viburnum (*Viburnum carlesii*) and the cultivar Spice Baby™ Koreanspice Viburnum (*Viburnum carlesii* ‘SMVCB’) are deer resistant, Carmolli said. The fragrant white flowers with a blush of pink provide a spicy fragrance that seasons the fresh spring air. Spice Baby reaches 3½–5 feet tall.



The drought-tolerant Illuminati Tower® mock orange (*Philadelphus coronarius* 'SMNPVG') from Proven Winners adds a citrusy scent to the garden. PHOTO COURTESY PROVEN WINNERS

Year-round aroma

With more interest in creating attractive gardens for all seasons, customers of Swanson's Nursery, a Seattle-based retail garden center, look for plants that flower in winter, according to Aimee Damman, the store's marketing director.

"This usually means plants that flower in the winter, have fall color, and interesting bark or structure, or are evergreen," she said. "Fragrance is more of an integral part of the holistic garden experience, another attribute like color and texture."

On a mild November to January day, it is delightful to have the surprise of a sweet scent flooding the garden. Swanson's Nursery blog helps introduce people to fragrant plants from each season.

The nursery's perennials buyer, Katy

Lockwood, agrees. "I think gardening is an extremely sensory-rich pastime, and that fragrance is just another way to experience your garden. We receive many requests for specific fragrant plants and for fragrant plants in general."

"We often get requests for cold-season fragrant plants such as sweet box, paper bush, winter daphne, *Clematis* 'Snowdrift,' winter jasmine, and witch hazel," Damman said. "It's hard to say whether the customer specifically wants fragrance or if it's because these plants are the only ones flowering at that time, and they happen to be fragrant as well."

It is an excellent opportunity to introduce them to something new and less well-known.

"*Sarcococca* is a great example of a

lesser-known fragrant plant, as are scented geraniums and groundcovers that emit a fragrance when stepped on or rubbed. People often associate fragrance only with large, showy flowers," Damman said.

Sarcococca, commonly called sweet box, is related to the boxwood with foliage that smells like cat urine whenever it rains. However, *Sarcococca* hits the jackpot with a lovely winter fragrance. On a mild winter day, the sweet fragrance awakens the fifth sense, making anyone within smelling distance take a deep breath. Yet the white flowers are tiny, almost inconspicuously nestled in its glossy, green foliage.

Daphnes are highly sought after. Swanson's shrub buyer, Bram Olson, confirms their popularity. "We recommend them because they are highly fragrant and can be grown in sun or shade. We can't get enough daphne plants to keep up with demand." He continually looks for more sources to stock their shelves.

The Banana Split® Daphne (*Daphne odora* 'Monzulzay') was a new selection from Monrovia that debut at the 2023 Farwest Show's New Varieties Showcase. The fragrant, late winter flowers may have to take a back seat to the green leaves and wide golden margins of its variegated foliage. For the shade garden, the foliage will be a highlight all year. The shrub grows 3 to 4 feet tall.

Going beyond the popular *Camellia japonica* cultivars opens the home gardener to another world filled with a winter wonderland of fragrance. *Camellias* are fall-to-winter and winter-to-early-spring flowering, evergreen shrubs, some with highly notable fragrant flowers.

Camellia × 'Ack-Scent' is one of the most prized fragrant pink flowers with its delicious, spicy scent. The shrub is a cross between two fragrant shrubs, *C. japonica* 'Kramer's Supreme' and 'Fragrant Pink Improved' with its *C. lutchuensis* and *rusticana* parentage. 'Fragrant Pink Improved' has a scent similar to *Osmanthus*.

Camellia sasanqua hybrids mostly bloom in mid to late fall through December, with a splattering of



Fragrant and up front

flowers in January. The following have scented white flowers: ‘Fragrant Fairies’, ‘French Vanilla’ with a vanilla fragrance, ‘Setsugekka’, and *C. x* ‘Winter’s Snowman’.

Many plants, especially herbs, exude scent through their evergreen foliage. *Lavendula* is one species that has almost a cult-like following in popularity and brings another way to bring fragrance into the garden.

“Many varieties are on the market, allowing home gardeners to choose what works best in their climate,” Tamony said. “Monrovia selected several varieties with unique foliage, larger blooms and, of course, that wonderful fragrance.”

“We love Javelin Forte™ Deep Purple Spanish Lavender (*Lavandula stoechas* ‘LABZ0004’) because it flowers early and has stunning deep purple bracts,” she said.

The English lavender plant, *Lavandula angustifolia* ‘Annet’, is

not only fragrant, its strong stems are perfect for the cutting garden. Home gardeners will like it for culinary use or its deep purple buds for fresh or dried cut flowers, crafts, and fragrances.

Marketing fragrance

Marketing fragrant plants in the off-bloom season can be a challenge. It is easy to sell a plant with fragrance when it is displayed in full bloom, tossing fragrance into the air.

The difficulty comes when the plant is flowerless. It takes a little ingenuity and signage with descriptions that include many scent descriptions to help convince a buyer that this plant delivers fabulous fragrance in the garden.

Carmolli suggests when plants are not in bloom in the spring, group a variety of plants that flower at different times. Give people a reason to buy ones that bloom in

spring, early summer, and late summer.

“The thing that’s so great about plants is there are always multiple reasons to love them! If a plant with a fragrant bloom doesn’t have flowers, highlight its other unique qualities, like foliage color, compact habit, disease resistance, or adaptability,” she said.

“Gardeners are savvy and not afraid to take risks as well. The pandemic taught many folks that they could read plant descriptions and make a purchase without touching or smelling the plant first and be pretty happy with their choices! If you have a rose with a particularly intriguing scent, push that information forward in your description. Describe the scent; it could be fruity like apricots or juicy-fruit gum! Be creative and lead with the qualities that can’t necessarily be seen,” Carmolli said.

“Selling the lifestyle and the experience is the best way to sell fragrance,” Mortenson said. “Help them connect with how fragrance will improve their life and mental health and bring some of the freedom of the outdoors into our indoor spaces through cut flowers — using catchy icons and callouts on retail products with a call to action to engage the shopper with that product. The color draws them in, and the fragrance seals the deal.”

“Marketing fragrant plants is no different than marketing other products that need to be tasted, touched or smelled,” said Katie Dubow, president of Garden Media Group. “By using descriptive language, ‘reminiscent of a summer’s day,’ we can evoke the sense of scent. Use imagery associated with certain smells, such as visuals of fresh lemons, to evoke the idea of a fresh, citrusy aroma.” ©

Debbie Teashon is co-author and photographer for Garden Communicators award-winning Gardening for the Homebrewer, and a regular contributor to regional magazines. Her gardening website is www.RainySide.com.

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A generational opportunity

Millennials are growing up, finally buying homes, and setting the stage for the nursery industry's future



Homes under construction off S.W. Roy Rogers Road in Sherwood. All signs are currently pointing to a positive future for the nursery industry, fueled in large part by a potential wave of first-time homebuyers unmatched in recent history. The number of 25- to 35-year-olds in the country is currently almost 50 million. Bump up the top-end age to 44 and it's more than 85 million. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

BY JON BELL

BACK IN 2005, AL'S GARDEN & HOME opened a new location of its longtime, family-owned garden center on a 10.5-acre site outside of Sherwood, Oregon. At the time, the area was rural, sparse and undeveloped. It took a country drive just to get there.

Not anymore.

Like much of the Portland metro region, developable land around Sherwood has sprouted with new homes, big box stores and other new construction over the past couple of decades. Where Al's in Sherwood may have once been out in the country, now it's not.

Sherwood has added more than 5,000 new residents in the past 15 years. Other Oregon suburbs and cities like Tigard, Tualatin, Wilsonville and Woodburn have grown as well. That growth been good for Al's and other retail garden centers, not to mention the nurseries who supply them.

Now, nurseries and retail garden centers are looking at a long-term — and younger — source of continued growth: mil-

lennials and other younger folks who are growing up, buying homes, starting families and gardening. In fact, right out by Al's Sherwood location, 40 more acres are about to be developed with new housing, much of which will likely be snatched up by younger homebuyers.

"We are definitely seeing it and marketing toward it too," said Mark Bigej, owner of **Al's Garden & Home**, which has four retail centers in Sherwood, Gresham, Woodburn and Wilsonville. "There's a younger trend. We'd seen that slowly over the past several years, but it really started with COVID. There's a distinct difference that we could see. We're just getting lots of younger customers."

Nothing's a sure bet, and situations locally, regionally, or even globally can spring up and change markets almost overnight. But all signs are currently pointing to a positive future for the nursery industry, fueled in large part by a potential wave of first-time homebuyers unmatched in recent history. The number of people aged 25-35 in the country is currently almost 50 million. Bump up the top-end age to 44 and it's more than **>>**

A generational opportunity



Developable land around Sherwood has sprouted with new homes, big box stores and other new construction over the past couple of decades. Where Al's in Sherwood may have once been out in the country, now it's not. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

85 million.

“If you look at the demand from these demographics, the picture is pretty bright,” said Charlie Hall, professor and Ellison Chair in International Floriculture at Texas A&M University. “This is what I think will be a boom period coming up because, after we get through the initial recovery stages of 2024 and 2025, the last five years of the decade will be strong in housing, and that bodes well for us.”

Millennials 101

So who are the millennials, how many of them are there, and why do they matter? For starters, the Pew Research Center defines Millennials as anyone born between 1981 and 1996, which puts them between ages 27–42; the generation after that is Generation Z. Pew also reported that there were 72.1 million millennials as of July 1, 2019, the year they surpassed the Baby Boomers in number. According to the National Gardening Association, Millennials are responsible for almost 30 percent of the gardening demographic in the U.S.

When COVID hit and people had to stay at home, gardening shot up. The National Gardening Association reported that



“As a generation, millennials are much more interested in connecting with anything organic. I see them loving plants, loving the environment, so I think we’ve got to keep encouraging that.”

— Danny Summers, managing director, Garden Center Group

more than 18 million new gardeners emerged during the pandemic, a good portion of them younger. And many of them, including those who are starting to buy homes, have stuck with it.

“We were worried about whether they would come back or not, but they did,” said Danny Summers, managing director for the Garden Center Group, an alliance of garden centers, service providers and vendors who work together on business solutions designed to help garden centers improve operations. “We were up about 23% (in member sales figures) from 2019 to 2020 and we gained another 12% in 2021. Prior to that, we’d already seen Millennials getting into tropical and house plants, but this was more than that.”

Housing help

In addition to more green thumbs among the populace, there is also a strong and extended need for new housing. According to tax and audit consultant RSM LLP, the U.S. needs 1.7 million housing units annually between now and 2030

to close a gap in housing. In September, the U.S. Census Bureau reported that housing starts were on pace to hit close to 1.5 million by year’s end.

Despite the demand for new housing, higher interest rates and inflation in recent years have proven to be headwinds, preventing some younger homebuyers from purchasing and some more established homeowners from selling.

“There has been a dearth of existing homes to sell because of the golden handcuff,” Hall said. “People are anxious about selling their homes and then having to turn around and buy something else at a higher rate. That’s limited some of the activity.”

That said, the Federal Reserve Board in early November held rates steady, and while there is still a possibility that rates could be bumped up one more time, Hall said the situation should smooth out over the coming year.

“We should start seeing the Fed, after a short correction next year, ease off on interest rates, which will stimulate housing,” he said.

Spending wisely

Another good piece of the generational puzzle for the nursery industry is the fact that Baby Boomers are aging and, as Hall put it, “exiting planet Earth.” As this happens, Hall said “trillions of dollars of wealth” held by the Boomers is being transferred to younger generations, many of whom will use it for housing and gardening.

“It will depend on how much saving is going on versus spending,” he said, “but if it continues the way it’s gone with Gen X and the Millennials, they are going to do more spending versus saving, so that’s a bright spot.”

The Axiom 2023 Gardening Outlook Survey underscored Hall’s assumption. It found that 80% of new gardeners planned to spend the same or more in 2023, and both Gen Z and millennials planned to spend significantly more time in the garden this year than last year. Similarly, Axiom’s 2024 survey found that more than half of Gen Z and millennial respondents expect to spend more time gardening in the coming year and nearly three-quarters of them plan to plant

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A generational opportunity



Millennials and other younger folks who are growing up, buying homes, starting families and gardening, are providing a strong source of growth for nurseries. PHOTO BY KHALETSKI SIARHEI/ADOBE STOCK

more and expand their gardens in 2024. Hall said that's all positive, but it should be taken with a grain of salt.

"That is what they said they were going to do," he said, "but they said they were going to do that in 2022, and we found that they didn't because of weather conditions and some other factors. So there's a difference between what's stated and revealed."

Making the connection

Although the fundamentals related to millennials look strong for the nursery industry, the opportunity for their business isn't just going to happen on its own. Hall said despite the boost in new gardeners during COVID, the industry will need to work hard to retain them.

"Our industry has done poorly in terms of capturing the new ones and making sure people stay interested," he said. "We have not had a good track record of

keeping them engaged, but it can lead to future sales if we remain relevant to them."

One way to do that is to play up the different beneficial aspects of gardening and plants. Those include environmental, health and lifestyle boosts that come from not only plants but from being active and outside.

"As a generation, millennials are much more interested in connecting with anything organic," Summers said. "I see them loving plants, loving the environment, so I think we've got to keep encouraging that."

Bigej, of Al's Garden & Home, said one of the biggest shifts his company has made to capture the younger crowd is marketing through social media.

"We use different platforms to reach different ages," he said. "It used to be all Facebook, but we've branched out more and we're using Instagram reels and other platforms so that we stay on trend and reach that audience."

Capitalizing on Millennials will also be about connecting with them.

"The key to this is how effectively our garden centers can build a connection with the audience," Summers said. "I don't think there's a question that they are going to be connected to plants and gardening, but there has to be an emotional connection to keep them coming back. I think that's something that some garden centers have done. If they are really listening, I think they'll realize how important it is. The industry has built itself the last 50 years on the Boomers, but this is an even bigger opportunity than that." ©

Jon Bell is an Oregon freelance journalist who writes about everything from Mt. Hood and craft beer to real estate and the great outdoors. His website is www.JBellInk.com.

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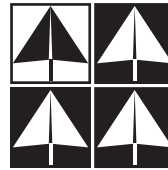
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GROWING KNOWLEDGE

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An ongoing series provided by Oregon State University in collaboration with the United States Department of Agriculture and in partnership with the Oregon Association of Nurseries

A shocking treatment



Overview of pulse electric field application in nursery beds near Boring, Oregon, in the fall of 2023. PHOTO COURTESY OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

Pulse electric field technology may be a viable pest control alternative to methyl bromide

BY MARCELO L MORETTI, INGA ZASADA, JERRY WEILAND, TATIANA BENEDETTI, JASON CRISP

IN THIS ARTICLE, we will share some early results from our project that explores using a pulse electric field to disinfest soils in hardwood nursery beds. Here, we will focus on the effect of pulse electric field on weeds.

Methyl bromide is a broad-spectrum pesticide that disinfects soil, and eliminates weeds, soilborne fungi, and nematodes. It is also a potent ozone-depleting substance.

Over time, the uses of methyl bromide in agriculture have been phased out. Although limited methyl bromide applications can be deemed critical, and so still occur, costs and regulatory compliance standards make it a less viable pest control option.

Pulse electric field (PEF) employs bursts of high-voltage electricity to inactivate microorganisms (see photo above). Primarily used in the food industry, some researchers have reported prom-

ising results in nematode and plant disease control (Riga et al. 2020). We are collaborating with Lisi Global to adapt an existing technology for a new use in the ornamental nursery industry.

It's not entirely clear how PEF kills organisms. It may involve cell membrane rupture accompanied by loss of metabolic activity. Alternatively, particular proteins may absorb energy and generate cell-damaging free radicals.

The structure of proteins may be altered and cause them to lose function. It may be some combination of any or all of these mechanisms that does the trick.

Pulse electric field is considered a non-thermal technology, but our experience tells us it depends on how much energy is applied to the soil.

Treating soil with PEF involves placing soil between



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Growing Knowledge

two electrodes for the time required to deliver the desired energy. The goal is to sustain a high voltage current between the two electrodes. In the short term, energy is shortly stored in a capacitor, while voltage, pulse number, duration, and frequency can be adjusted to control the energy delivered. The distance between electrodes also affects PEF performance, as soil offers resistance to current flow.

What are the effects of PEF on weeds?

Very little is known about the effect of PEF on weeds. For that reason, we started with pot studies to define effective rates. Controlled greenhouse studies eliminate the great variability found in the field, and can be a good starting place to define treatment control.

For reference, 25 J cm⁻³ (joules per cubic centimeter) controlled over 90% of nematodes in an earlier study (Riga et al.,



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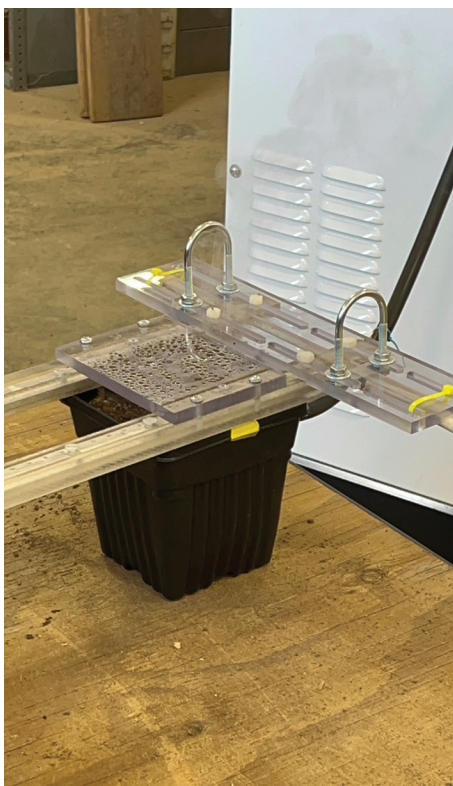
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Pulse electric field application in a pot study with yellow nutsedge tubers. The PEF energy quickly warms the soil; notice the water vapor. PHOTO COURTESY OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

2020). A series of 4-inch-long electrodes were placed in pots filled with sterilized silt-loam soil.

Weed seeds or tubers were soaked in water for a day, planted and later treated. An application of 480 J cm^{-3} was enough energy to produce heat, water vapor, and eventually melt the pots (See above photo). This counters the idea that PEF cannot be a thermal soil sterilant.

Electrical rates of 60 J cm^{-3} or more killed nearly all yellow nutsedge tubers (Page 36). A few crabgrass plants emerged after pots were treated with 125 J cm^{-3} .

We are expanding our testing to other weed species and looking for ways to increase efficacy. Our goal is to determine the lowest energy required to achieve consistent control of a mixture of weed species.

Next step: field validation.

Field studies in collaboration with Oregon nurseries will begin this fall. We are advancing multiple research fronts as we develop this new application for PEF. Development of a new technology is never easy or cheap.

The adaption of an existing technology to a new application presents multiple challenges. A major challenge we face >>

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Growing Knowledge



Yellow nutsedge plants 28 days after treatment with increasing rates of pulse electric field. PEF rates (L to R) were 0, 15, 30, 60, 125, and 250 J cm³.

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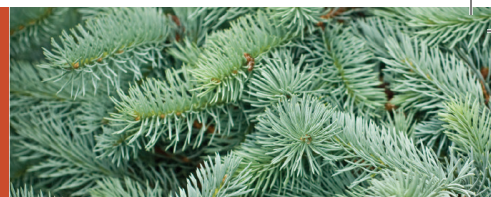
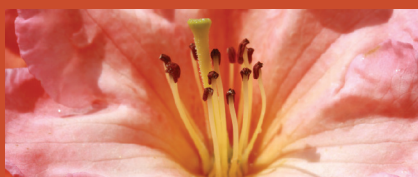
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This project is funded by the USDA-NIFA Methyl Bromide Transition Program (2022-51102-38259), the Horticulture Research Institute, and the Oregon Association of Nurseries. Finally, this work could only be conducted with the collaboration of J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co. in Boring, Oregon and Robinson Nursery in Amity, Oregon.

Marcelo L Moretti and Tatiana Benedetti work in the Department of Horticulture at Oregon State University. Inga Zasada and Jerry Weiland work for the USDA-Agricultural Research Service in Corvallis, Oregon and Jason Crisp works at Lisi Global in Richland, Washington.



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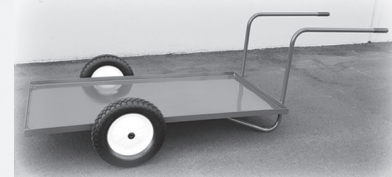
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But with all that said, economics are shaky for businesses and consumer confidence is fickle, which points to an uncertain future.

Lights and shadows

Recently, I attended the annual Evening of Lights Christmas Open House at Al's Garden & Home, which is one of the OAN's flagship, family-owned retail operations. Al's produced this event at all four of their locations. I went to the one in Sherwood. It was a sight to see and very well attended.

The Bigej family, which owns Al's, works hard to create memorable experiences. Their Fall Fashion Show is another example and was also well attended. The strong crowds at these off-season events were a good indication of the public's enduring interest in gardening, especially when presented with fun special events that build community.

Unfortunately, other indicators are cause for concern. Garden centers, at least in Oregon, had a miserable early spring, causing tree and shrub sales to dip. Additionally, statistics from Oregon and throughout the country showed that input costs were way up and profit margins were shrinking. Garden centers must consider this as they budget for 2024.

This Christmas, we saw increased consumer spending nationally, but big box retailers had to deploy big discounts to entice people. We don't know what that means for the nursery and greenhouse industry in 2024.

After all, consumers don't just have

less money, but more places to spend it. In talking to our most involved members, and reviewing economic data, it's evident the American public has fallen back in love with travel. During the pandemic, people did staycations to fix up the backyard. Now, vacations are taking some of that precious discretionary income back.

Showing up one's neighbors with a gorgeous front yard remains an American pastime. However, housing sales are slowing, and business costs are rising. Employees are expecting larger raises to cover the cost of inflation. Utility bills keep skyrocketing. More than ever, our retailers must find ways to be more efficient and do more with less.

The plant funnel is getting gray

American farmers are hardworking, and their workforce is as well, but there's a problem. Both are aging rapidly.

The average American farmer is 57½, according to the most recent USDA data. That's up sharply from 1978, when it was just over 50.

If the country doesn't recruit new farmers or adapt to having fewer, older ones, that will affect how plants get into the hands of the public. While there are examples of grower/retailers, most retailers across our state and country depend on growers to supply them.

While the OAN and its leadership are seeing the sons and daughters of our titans take the reins, that's not the case elsewhere in ag.

Nationally it has been well reported that ag presents formidable entry barriers for young people, particularly those who weren't born into multigenerational farming families. It takes money to buy the land, equipment, and other essentials to run a farm. The upcoming generation may have interest, but not the raw wealth.

Lifestyle stress is also a pressing concern for farmers. They are often at the mercy of weather, supply shortages, volatile markets and other external factors.

Gen Z to the rescue?

In a recent article in *Greenhouse Grower* magazine, Katie Dubow, presi-



Jeff Stone
OAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

dent of Garden Media Group, pointed to Gen Z (aka Zoomers) as a force that can "reshape the future of the horticulture industry." Born from 1997–2012, this demographic is ahead of Millennials and Gen X when it comes to homeownership.

In 2022, 30% of 25-year-olds owned their home, compared to the 27% of Gen Xers and 28% of Millennials when they were the same age, according to Redfin. "They see their home, and quality things to fill it, as a long-term investment," GMG reports.

Dubow correctly points out that the green industry can capitalize on Zoomers' nature-oriented value systems. Since Gen Z is the first generation raised entirely in a digital world, growers and retailers must understand, and cater to, their specific habits and preferences.

As for recent plant trends, fragrance is flying off the shelves. Or in my own vernacular: if it stinks, it will sell.

Retail garden centers are first to see the front edge of demand. They shape what is grown. It's become a challenge to sell larger growing plants and shade trees. Land use policies increasingly dictate that new houses are built with forced density, but there's always room for beauty. Porch plants (my description) will tap into the beautification arms race of prideful homeowners.

Perennials and annuals have grown in 2023, and nobody is sleeping on the edible market anymore. May our plant aromas, and the general public's hunger to grow their own food, be the light at the end of a shaky economic tunnel. I am so proud of our retail garden centers and growers. I hope 2024 lives up to the fullest extent of its promise. ☺

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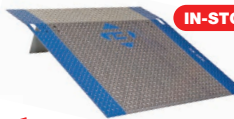


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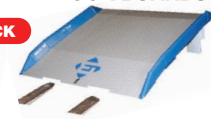
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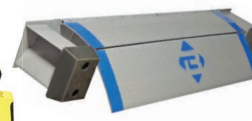


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