



NURSERY COUNTRY

FOUNDED
1968

OWNERS
Barbara Hupp

KNOWN FOR
Supplying seedlings for Christmas trees, reforestation, nursery stock and native restoration.

PEOPLE
Jan Hupp, manager
Cindy Hupp, manager
Savannah Barnes, office manager
Scott Barnes, farm manager
Jason Hupp, manager

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39 listings

Jan and his wife Cindy Hupp run the nursery in a team-inspired style with Office Manager Savannah Barnes, Farm Manager Scott Barnes and Jan's nephew and Manager Jason Hupp. PHOTO BY CURT KIPP

Drakes Crossing Nursery

BY KYM POKORNY

WHEN JAN HUPP tells people that **Drakes Crossing Nursery** drapes across the foothills of the Cascades by Silver Falls State Park, near Silverton, Oregon, their jaws drop as they picture the idyllic countryside.

He and the rest of the nursery's staff appreciate the view, as well.

But they say the nursery's family-centered business model is what makes it special.

Jan is the second generation to operate the 50-plus-year-old nursery, which was started by his parents, Delbert and Barbara Hupp, in 1967. Jan and his wife Cindy Hupp run the

nursery in a team-inspired style with Office Manager Savannah Barnes, Farm Manager Scott Barnes and Jan's nephew and Manager Jason Hupp.

No matter who you talk to — Jan, Cindy, Savannah, Scott or Jason — the first thing out of their mouth when asked about the nursery's greatest strength, is the team approach. Each morning, the group gathers around a tall, rectangular wooden table in the office to go over the day's operations and talk about future predictions and growth, anything and everything to do with Drakes Crossing.

"It's a group effort," Barnes said. "We



Drakes Crossing supplies seedlings for Christmas trees, reforestation, nursery stock and native restoration. PHOTO BY CURT KIPP

really try to talk through everything. What we are doing in different fields, the trees we're planting, what we've taken out. We talk about what we might want to do differently with the land, how to put up greenhouses, what kind of equipment we need."

Jan has never been the type of boss to say, "This is the way we're going to do this."

"We all do the planning," Jan said. "Even though Mom and Dad started it and I kind of run it, we have a management team. We say, 'I've got an idea' and we all sit around the table and talk a whole lot. That's how we're thinking about what the market will be like next year, in two years. We'll say, 'Oh, I think it will be pretty good so let's plant more seed.'"

One of the things they've discussed a lot is the new Trojan fir Drakes Crossing is now growing. The uniform, dark green tree is like a noble fir, only better, Jan said. He predicts it will be the Christmas tree of the future.

The Hupps' farm covers more than 1,200 acres with some in timber and the

rest dedicated to seedling harvested by Drakes Crossing Nursery and Christmas trees harvested by **Hupp Farms**. Currently, 3–4 million seedlings are sold each year.

The land, which sits at 1,650 feet elevation and is anything but flat, is divided into Christmas tree seedlings and understock, nursery stock, timber land and a small quarry that supplies the nursery. Some trees are pruned sustainably for Christmas boughs and other decorations.

Last year, a million pounds of material went out.

But the big news for Drakes Crossing is a major expansion into greenhouse growing. In 2021, they brought in K&E Excavating to level out an impressive eight and half acres.


"We had to do a lot of work," said Jan as he walked through a greenhouse to the sound of gravel crunching underneath his boots. "In the valley, they have all this nice, flat land and this is what we have. The only thing flat up here is what you've manufactured."

The 12 greenhouses are already

stocked with seedlings of Douglas-fir, noble fir, Colorado spruce and a few other species. Next year, those greenhouses will hold 2.25 million plants. As expansion continues — 12 more greenhouses are scheduled to be built by planting season in February — that number will grow to 7–8 million seedlings, Jan said.

The inspiration to begin

Barbara, matriarch of the Hupp family and farm, lives on a farmhouse that abuts the road in front of the nursery. Even after eight surgeries for hip problems, she keeps her hand in the game. She signs checks and, though she no longer drives to town, you'll still see her driving around the nursery, keeping her eye on things. Sitting at her kitchen table, she looks out on the road to see who's passing by.

"People come and go," said Barbara, who often drives 10 miles a day around the nursery. "I check everything that goes by. The fire station is right there, so I've got activity all day long. I'm the spy who knows everything." 



The Hupps' farm covers more than 12,000 acres with some in timber and the rest dedicated to seedling harvested by Drakes Crossing Nursery and Christmas trees harvested by Hupp Farms. PHOTO BY CURT KIPP

She knows a lot. It was Barbara who was urged to start a nursery. She was working for Ralph Jack at Silver Falls Nursery, a mail-order outfit further up the hill that sold seedlings, while her husband Delbert worked as a welder after retraining from a logging accident. The nursery inspector who dealt with Jack watched Barbara at work and encouraged her to start her own nursery.

"The inspector up there came frequently because a lot of shipments had to have shipping information on them to ship," Barbara said. "He said, 'You need to go into business.'"

Jan heard his mother and added, "So that was the man who said you ought to think about getting into the business. That's awesome. You should have bought him a gift card to a restaurant."

The first generation of Hupps started out planting perennial grass seed and strawberries, which were common when Jan and his siblings were kids. In late 1967, the couple slowly transitioned to bare-root Christmas tree seedlings with what they called "paycheck financing" and in 1968 the nursery was open for business. Those first seedlings — Douglas-fir and Noble fir — were started in sand beds on the 27 acres that comprised the nursery's first iteration.

"We had a few Christmas trees up on the hill simply because some neighbors were growing Christmas trees and it was a

steep hill and it was hard to put anything else on it," Barbara said. "Christmas trees fit what the land was, and the hill back there is the hill we look at every day now."

Quickly, interest in the quality of Drakes Crossing stock grew. So did business.

"We expanded fairly fast," Barbara said. "We thought, 'Oh, that was fun; that was easy. Let's plant some more.' You know, you get the seed catalogs and it's like shopping for new clothes. It was kind of challenging figuring out what to plant, what will sell, but I've never had any regrets that we got into something that required so much of our time. I liked it. It gave me a lot of personal satisfaction."

Delbert and Barbara worked every day and the children participated as they got older. When Jan and his siblings were too young to be left behind, he remembers going on "Sunday drives" with their mom and dad. The drives, it turned out, were delivery trips.

"If it was a Sunday drive, that meant there was a bunch of product in the trunk," Jan said. "We used to go to Boring a lot and we'd go up to Heidi's restaurant for breakfast, so we got a breakfast out of the deal."

Growing Christmas trees was a way to extend the season and keep employees busy in the summer down season, so they could stay on full time. At first it was Jan and his siblings and some neighbor kids who worked in the nursery. The more trees the Hupps grew, the more employees they need-

ed, so they kept planting more and more trees and hiring more and more people.

Today, 20-25 employees work full time, many for years, and the nursery pulls in contract labor when needed. Come the first week in November, another 50-60 contract workers will come on board to help with the Christmas tree harvest. Now with the greenhouses, bare root trees — grown in blocks of cells — can be harvested in winter and held in the cooler for spring. Everyone can work, even on days with inclement weather.

A grower oversees the greenhouses and has a dedicated team to harvest the seedlings and move them to the cooler. Harvesting is much easier now, Jan said. The individual cells pull right out, and the roots aren't disturbed as they are with field-grown seedlings.

"When it's raining up to 75-80 inches a year, we can't harvest bareroot trees, because it's too wet, but we can come into the greenhouse and harvest these things and get them to growers so they can be using them when they're ready to fill an order," Jan said. "Last winter we had a nasty winter up here. We had 22 days that it snowed. We couldn't harvest in the snow. Now we're doing what we can to farm and not use dirt. I don't want to be out in the elements. It's wet to plant and it's wet to harvest."

The expansion and new technology offers the nursery the opportunity to fill

Drakes Crossing Nursery

customer demand on time, Barnes said. They are not dependent on the unpredictable weather brought on by climate change.

“Now we can have the product ready for customers when they need it. The keeps them happy and we keep our reputation for quality trees.”

The challenges ahead

The only thing that could put a wrench in the system is water. Hupp has filed for water rights to drill another well and is waiting for the application to go through the system. For most of the nursery’s years, they used pond and spring water. Five years ago, they drilled a well, but with the new greenhouses, there’s a need for another well.

“If we don’t have enough water, we did all of this for nothing,” Jan said. “We originally started out with three little greenhouses to play around with. And

then we said, ‘You know, this isn’t doing so bad,’ so last summer we built another nine and the state of Oregon said, ‘Hey, we need you to have the capability to grow even more seedlings for shortages when wildfires come.’ But unless we get water, we can’t do it.”

As they wait, Jan said they will continue to grow quality trees using superior seed sources from their seed nursery and by growing at an elevation that mimics the trees’ native habitat, so they grow better — stronger, hardier, taller, greener and with upright branches. Genetics play a big role, as well. But he has to bring other growers along slowly.

“A friend had his own genetics,” he said. “He believed and father believed it was the right thing. I say, ‘Dude, that’s old technology. We have better stuff.’ And he gets into my pickup, sees our trees and agreed they looked better. It’s all about

the genetics these days. You’ve got to start out with the right genetics to produce the right tree.”

Barbara has always looked to the future. She listened to customers, exhibited at the Farwest Show, went to Oregon Association of Nurseries meetings and paid attention to the market. There were challenges, but she was always ready and willing to face them.

“It was an 18-hour-a-day business,” she said. “It didn’t start at 9 and stop at 5. It’s not a regular job, but I enjoyed it.” ☺

Kym Pokorny is a garden writer with more than 20 years’ experience writing for The Oregonian (Portland, Oregon) and other publications. She is currently a communications specialist with Oregon State University Extension Service. She can be reached at Kym.Pokorny@OregonState.edu



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