

Digger

MARCH 2024

THE WELLNESS ISSUE

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THE WELLNESS ISSUE

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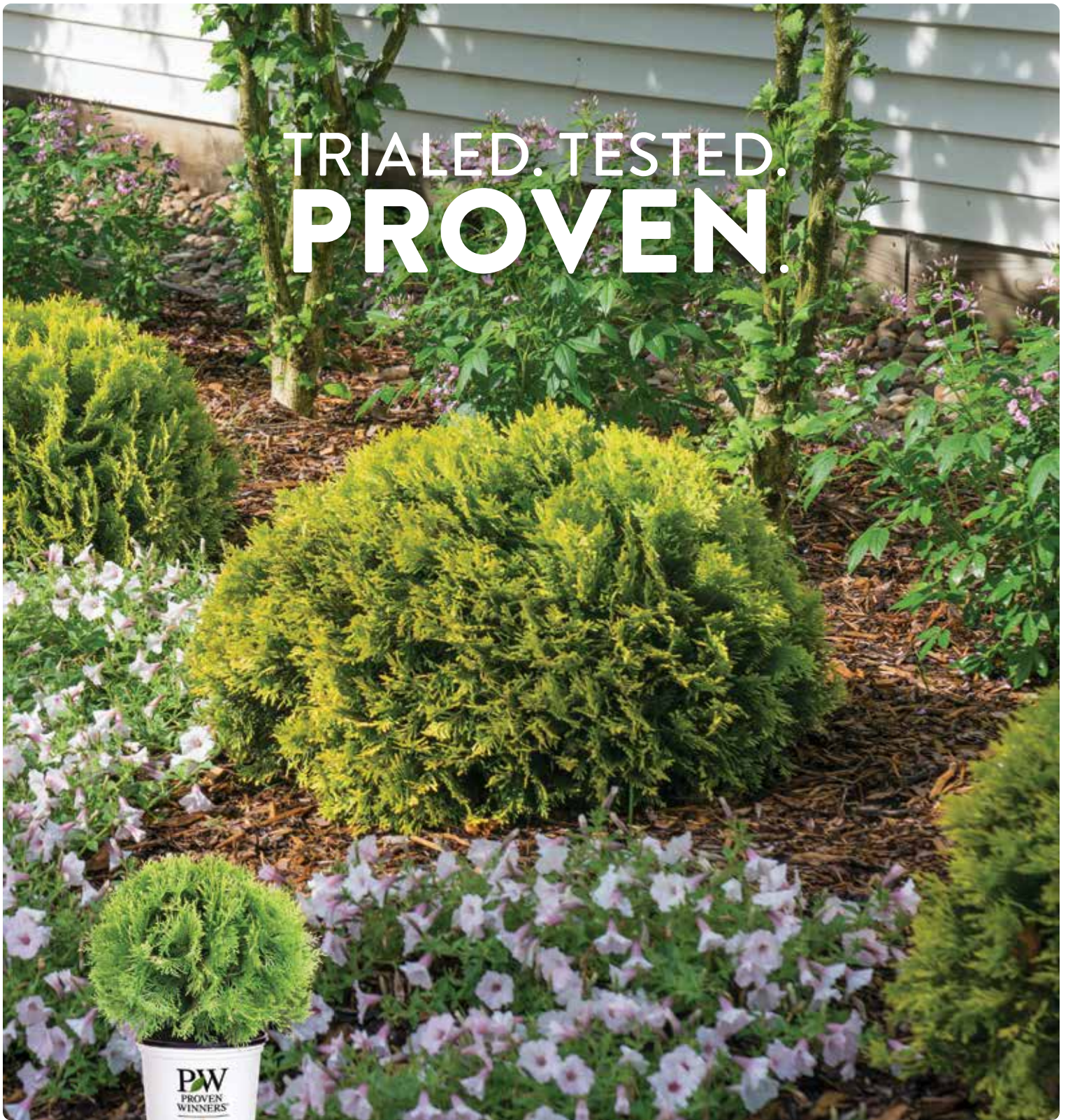


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On the cover: The therapeutic nature of plants helps people and can help nurseries too. ADOBE STOCK

On this page: Top: Nurseries know that a good work-life balance helps their employees and their business. ADOBE STOCK Top right: NexGen seizes the opportunity to help those who are new to the industry. PHOTO BY VIC PANICKUL

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info@oan.org EMAIL
www.oan.org OAN WEBSITE
www.diggermagazine.com DIGGER WEBSITE

STAFF

Jeff Stone EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	JStone@OAN.org 503-582-2003
Beth Farmer DIRECTOR OF MARKETING & MEMBER SERVICES	BFarmer@OAN.org 503-582-2013
Curt Kipp DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS & PUBLICATIONS	CKipp@OAN.org 503-582-2008
Tana Klum OFFICE COORDINATOR	TKlum@OAN.org 503-582-2012
Jamie Moore EVENTS AND EDUCATION COORDINATOR	JMoore@OAN.org 503-582-2010
Allan Niemi DIRECTOR OF EVENTS	ANiemi@OAN.org 503-582-2005
Vic Panichkul PUBLICATIONS MANAGER	VPanichkul@OAN.org 503-582-2009
Stephanie Weihrauch DIRECTOR OF FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION	SWeihrauch@OAN.org 503-582-2001

DIGGER

Curt Kipp EDITOR & DISPLAY ADVERTISING	CKipp@OAN.org 503-582-2008
Vic Panichkul MANAGING EDITOR & ART DIRECTOR	VPanichkul@OAN.org 503-582-2009
Beth Farmer E-DIGGER PRODUCER	BFarmer@OAN.org 503-582-2013
Dr. Lloyd Nackley GROWING KNOWLEDGE SERIES COORDINATOR	Lloyd.Nackley@OregonState.edu Oregon State University
Jon Bell, Mike Darcy, Erica Browne Grivas, Mitch Lies, Emily Lindblom, Kym Pokorny, Debbie Teashon	CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

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2023-2024 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Amanda Staehely PRESIDENT	Columbia Nursery 29490 S. Jackson Road Canby, OR 97013 Wayne@Columbia-Nursery.com 503-263-2623
Todd Nelson PAST-PRESIDENT	Bountiful Farms Nursery Inc. 17280 Boones Ferry Rd. N.E. Woodburn, OR 97071 Info@BountifulFarms.com 503-981-7494
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Patrick Newton TREASURER	Powell's Nursery Inc. 5054 SW Boyd Rd. Gaston, OR 97119 PowellNursery@gmail.com 503-357-0631
Jesse Nelson SECRETARY	Hans Nelson & Sons Nursery Inc. 30120 S.E. Waybill Road Boring, OR 97009 JNelson@HansNelson.com 503-663-3348
Chris Robinson MEMBER-AT-LARGE	Robinson Nursery Inc. PO Box 100 Amity, OR 97101 Chris@RobinsonNursery.com 877-855-8733

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Patrick Peterson ASSOCIATE MEMBER	Simplot Turf & Horticulture Patrick.Peterson@Simplot.com 541-214-5802
Adam Farley CONTAINER GROWER	Countryside Nursery AFarley@CountrysideNursery.com 503-678-0511
Dave Daniel CONTAINER GROWER	Fall Creek Farm & Nursery Inc DaveD@FallCreekNursery.com 541-937-2973
Blake Nelson CONTAINER GROWER	Bountiful Farms Nursery Inc. Blake@BountifulFarms.com 503-981-7494
Joe Dula FIELD / B&B GROWER	Moana Nursery JoeD@MoanaNursery.com 503-266-8170
Sam Barkley FIELD / BARE ROOT GROWER	J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co. SamB@JFSchmidt.com 503-663-4128
Jay Sanders FIELD / BARE ROOT GROWER	KG Farms Inc. JSanders@KGFarmsInc.com 503-678-3245
Andrea Avila Aragon GREENHOUSE	Smith Gardens Andrea.Avila-Aragon@ SmithGardens.com 503-678-5373
Tyler Meskers GREENHOUSE	Oregon Flowers Inc. Tyler@OregonFlowers.com 503-678-2580
Gary S. English RETAIL	Landsystems Nursery Gary@LandsystemsNursery.com 541-382-7646

Getting in ship shape together

My main thought as we start March and the beginning of shipping season, is simple – good luck. This is what we are all here for; to sell plants.



Amanda Staehely

That's true whether you provide necessary items such as fertilizer, soil, or the plants themselves. Maybe you are the grower. Maybe you sell the containers. Or perhaps you are the retailers that just received their first shipment of beautiful plant material from Oregon.

Regardless of how you fit into this industry, we are all here together for this moment, where we see our hard work being sold to the end customer. Some growers may ship year-round, but for all of us associated with this incredible industry, spring is the busiest time of the year.

I have heard my husband say many times to our buyers, "Your success is my success. When you have a good year, we all have a good year." And it's absolutely the truth. The retailers experience the final "sale" of our product, but their success means that the rest of us have done something right to get to this point. We therefore all succeed with them.

But man! With this time of year comes those crazy hours. It is something I know my crew looks forward to. My family does also.

My kids have come to the same understanding that I had. There will never (and I mean, never) be a spring break vacation trip in our future. But instead of a "vacation," they get to experience a lot of excitement around the nursery during that week off from school. They look forward to it, and I am grateful to have them home to help.

When I was young and in school, I would hear about all the vacations my friends would go on. I also acknowledged and comprehended what was going on at our nursery at that time of year, and how crucial it was to our business. I knew the

importance of spring then, and am truly living it now.

As exciting as this time of the year can be, it is undoubtedly also the most stressful. I have heard others talk about "how many springs" a person can realistically make it through before it gets to be too much, or they experience burnout. I have heard varying numbers, but let's just say if you have over 15 years of spring craziness under your belt, you are a hero in my book and deserve a gold star.

I have to be honest, though. I love it right now. Every part of it. Without the crazy, we would all be out of a job. So, I am thankful for every early morning, every late night loading trucks by tractor headlights, and every emergency dig so we can get more trees onto trucks. We will see if I feel the same way a decade from now. I sure hope so.

So, as we begin this exciting season, remember I wish all of you the best of luck. From the newbies who are experiencing this for the first time, to the old timers that have "one more spring" in them, and everyone in between. Remember that our success as an industry relies on each other, and we succeed together.

And finally, to those retailers? Go sell the heck out of our plants! ☺



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*.

MARCH 3

PLANT NERD NIGHT

The Hardy Plant Society of Oregon is partnering again with gardening expert Mike Darcy to produce this year's much-beloved event on March 3 at the Lake Oswego High School Auditorium, 2501 S.W. Country Club Road. This is the 21st year that Darcy has been hosting Plant Nerd Night, which marks the start of the gardening season for many. Come hear regional nursery owners talk about the plants that get them excited and do some early shopping for the season. You'll also have the chance to win a door prize. Doors open at 12:30 p.m. and the program starts at 2 p.m. Admission is free and the Oregon Association of Nurseries is a sponsor.

MARCH 4, 5

OSU EXAM PREP FOR PESTICIDE APPLICATORS

Oregon State University's Pesticide Safety Education Program (PSEP) is hosting a pre-certification training program to help attendees be more prepared, efficient, and successful in passing the state Laws and Safety Exam. Pesticide applicators must know how to apply restricted use pesticides properly and safely. Most pesticide licensure types in Oregon require an applicant to pass the exam. Many students either choose or are required to then take additional "category" exams to complete their certification. PSEP is hosting in-person trainings in English, \$225 per person, from 8 a.m.-4 p.m. at the Linn County Fair & Expo Center, 3700 Knox Butte Road E. Albany, Oregon, March 4 and 5. Register for the in-person event at TinyURL.com/OSUExamPrep. A free self-paced online version that will take approximately 16 hours to complete is also available. Register for the online version at TinyURL.com/OSUOnlinePrep.

MARCH 7

WURDINGER MANUFACTURING DINGER DAZE

Meet the staff of **Wurdinger Manufacturing** and see examples of labor-saving solutions like tracking trailers, potting equipment, soil supply systems, conveyers, chemical spreaders, fertilizer spreaders, and a Whirl Winder for positioning drip irrigation systems. The event will be March 7 at 11 a.m. at Wurdinger Manufacturing, 4730 Brush Creek Rd. N.E., Silverton, Oregon. A complimentary barbecue lunch will be provided. Call or email to RSVP with your name and email address to Haylee@WurdingerManufacturing.com.

MARCH 13-14

NORTHWEST AG SHOW (RESCHEDULED)

The Northwest Ag Show, postponed from January because of icy weather, has been rescheduled to March 13-14 at the Oregon State Fair and Expo Center, 2330 17th St. N.E. in Salem, Oregon. See the newest in equipment, products and services to



PHOTO BY HAYDEN BROWN/HARDY PLANT SOCIETY

APRIL 5-6

HORTLANDIA

The Hardy Plant Society of Oregon sponsors this annual plant and art sale April 5-6 at The Wingspan Event and Conference Center, N.E. 34th Ave. and Cornell Road, in Hillsboro, Oregon. Vendors from all over the Northwest will provide the latest plant introductions alongside old favorites. Handmade, one-of-a-kind garden art made from materials like metal, wood, glass, ceramic, fabric and stone will be on display throughout the event. Admission is free. For more information, go to HardyPlantSociety.org.

keep your small, medium, or large-scale farm or ranch operation running at peak performance. The show is free; parking is \$5.

VARIOUS DATES

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 March 14, June 18, July 18, September 18, October 16 and sessions in Spanish on March 15, June 20, July 19, September 19, October 17. Class times are 8 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. The cost is \$60 per person. It's the same for first-time certifications as well as renewals. 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

VARIOUS DATES


SAIF'S AG SAFETY SEMINARS

SAIF is holding several free agricultural safety seminars in cities throughout Oregon in 2024, including several that will be conducted entirely in Spanish. Anyone working in the agricultural industry is welcome. Small employers attending the seminar will meet one of the four requirements that exempt small agricultural operations from random OSHA inspections. The

Landscape Contractors Board has approved the seminar for four hours of continuing education credits. The Department of Consumer and Business Services has approved the seminar for three regular producer and one law producer continuing education credits. Seminars are held from 9:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. and include lunch. The following are dates and locations for the first three months of 2024 for seminars in English: Klamath Falls, March 12; Mt. Angel, March 6. A seminar in Spanish will be held in Madras on March 14. There will also be online webinars in English on March 18 and 19 and in Spanish on March 20 and 21. To register for in-person or webinar safety seminars, go to TinyURL.com/SAIFSeminars.

APRIL 15

ONF SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS DUE

Do you know a high school, college or graduate student who is considering a career as a nursery or landscape professional? If so, applications are being taken until April 15 for 20 scholarships ranging from \$1,000 to \$3,000 from the Oregon Association of Nurseries Foundation. The scholarships are sponsored by individual OAN chapters, and its members. Go to OAN.org/ONF for more information, or contact OAN Director of Finance Stephanie Weihrauch at 503-582-2001 or Scholarships@OAN.org. 



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.



Leigh Geschwill

Leigh Geschwill takes office as HRI president

Leigh Geschwill, co-owner of **F & B Farms and Nursery**, began her term as president of the Horticulture Research Institute at the Mid-Atlantic Nursery Trade Show in Baltimore, Maryland, recently.

The mission of HRI is to direct, fund, promote and communicate horticultural research, which increases the quality and value of plants, improves the productivity and profitability of the horticulture industry, and protects and enhances the environment.

As president of HRI, Geschwill wants to improve internal processes; improve grant and scholarship review; improve connections between board members and researchers receiving grant funds and connect the industry with our federal agencies that direct funding into research; grow awareness of grants and scholarships available; and improve the visibility of the industry to those not yet connected with it.

Geshwill will serve as HRI president until MANTS next year, and then will remain a year as past president on the Executive Committee. Geshwill also serves on the OAN Research Committee. She served as OAN president in 2014-15.



Weeks Berry Nursery co-owner Bradley Weeks said it wasn't one thing, but a combination of things that drove him to the decision to sell the nursery. OAN FILE PHOTO

WEEKS BERRY NURSERY SELLING BUSINESS, PROPERTY

Weeks Berry Nursery has decided to sell its nursery and property, co-owner Bradley Weeks said.

The nursery, which was started in 1908 and has been in business for more than a century, includes 45 acres of land on Windsor Island Rd. N. in Keizer, Oregon, north of Salem. The nursery leases an additional 120 acres and specializes in small fruit-bearing shrubs and supplies about 1,800 home and garden centers in the U.S. and Canada. The nursery employs 14 full-time staff.

Weeks said it wasn't one thing, but a combination of things that drove him to the decision to sell the nursery.

"Honestly, Oregon has become extremely hostile towards small farms when it comes to labor laws, taxes, and certification issues," he said. "Five or six years ago, when the state decided to raise the minimum wage, our labor was \$350,000. Last year, it was \$795,000. Then, in 2022 the Legislature

passed ag overtime."

Weeks said he actively worked with the Oregon Association of Nurseries to try to affect legislative decisions on minimum wage and ag overtime.

"I don't think that [legislators] understand how agriculture works, even though it is one of the largest industries in Oregon," Weeks said. "We're a wholesale company that does a lot of business out of state and our competitors are out of state and my profit margins disappeared."

He noted that out-of-state nurseries don't have the same labor costs as Oregon nurseries.

"We used to be one of the few certified nurseries to sell table grapes, and due to regulations that have come down and lack of funding for Oregon Department of Agriculture, the burden of testing fell on my lap and the cost of growing that product became too much to bear for us so we had to get out of that product," Weeks said.

"My overhead has just exploded. Covid hit pretty hard too and it affected fuel prices, supply shortages, fertilizer costs. All of these things added up and quickly ate up our profit



Northwest News

margins,” Weeks said. “This is a gut punch for me. My dad’s half owner and he was honestly surprised that I’ve kept it going as long as I have.”

While the nursery is looking for a buyer, Weeks said he’s also looking at consolidating resources and examining other business models.

“We’re just doing our best to try to change the business model,” he said. “I still want to see some sort of agriculture work on this property. Whether or not I can make that happen, we’ll see.”



The closure of Skagit Horticulture affects both the Skagit Gardens brand and its sister company, Northwest Horticulture. PHOTO COURTESY SKAGIT HORTICULTURE

SKAGIT HORTICULTURE BRANDS ANNOUNCE CLOSURE

Wholesale grower **Skagit Horticulture**, based in Mt. Vernon, Washington, has announced plans to close effective April 7, 2024. The closure affects both Skagit Horticulture and the two sister brands under it, Skagit Gardens and

Northwest Horticulture. It is a shocking end for two brands that have been major players among wholesale nurseries in the Pacific Northwest.

A notice viewed on their website on February 8 read as follows:

“It is with deep regret that we announce the closure of Skagit Horticulture which includes our Skagit

Gardens and Northwest Horticulture brands. We have made the difficult decision to cease operations. However, we will continue the sale of our products until March 29th or while supplies last. We want to express our gratitude to all our customers, employees, and partners for their support throughout the years. Thank you for being a part of our journey.”

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The website refers people to a closure letter on company letterhead, which can be accessed at TinyURL.com/SkagitClosure. The letter cites business conditions, rising costs and the business climate in the state of Washington. This includes the highest minimum wage in the country and a state-mandated 40-hour work week followed by overtime, according to *Greenhouse Grower*.

President and CEO of Skagit Horticulture LLC Scott Crownover declined to answer questions from *Digger* magazine. However, he told *Greenhouse Grower*, “Between now and April 7, we will clean out the facility and potentially sell what we’re able to sell. There’s always the opportunity for someone to come in and buy part of all of the business, but there’s nothing in place right now.”

The Seattle Times reported that 169 employees were given a 60-day notice of layoff in accordance with Washington's

Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN) Act.

According to their website, Skagit Horticulture is the overall umbrella for a family of brands.

- Skagit Horticulture is the company’s agriculture division.
- Skagit Gardens provides finished plants to independent garden centers, small-chain retailers, landscapers and municipalities.
- Northwest Horticulture serves large-scale home stores exclusively.

The company operates greenhouses, container yards and open field production centers in both Washington and California.

Skagit Horticulture came about when Skagit Gardens and Northwest Horticulture merged in 2016. Skagit Gardens was founded in 1966 by Jim and Ruth Youngsman. Northwest Horticulture started in 1998.

PANZER NURSERY CLOSURES AFTER 60 YEARS IN BUSINESS

Panzer Nursery, which specialized in top-quality florist azaleas, has closed after 60 years in business.

“I’m soon to be 68 and after 42 years at it, I decided it was time to retire,” said owner Brad Bloes. Bloes started working at Panzer in 1981 and was a partner in it. In 2010 he bought the rest of the business from his partner Fred Panzer. “It was a fun 40 something years and I met a lot of good people in the industry but it’s tough to stay in business here,” he said.

Bloes said the nursery survived the Covid-19 pandemic and had a few good years, but the labor situation and the economics of the business just made it too difficult to continue.

The nursery encompasses two



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Northwest News

sites, the main location in Beaverton with 28 acres and another site in south Hillsboro with 58 acres. Bloes leased the Beaverton site from Panzer and owned the Hillsboro site. The nursery employed 50 people full time, but at the time the nursery was starting to wind down, it employed 30.

INEQUITIES PERSIST FOR WOMEN FARMERS, STUDY FINDS

Despite their rising presence in agriculture, disparities persist for women farmers in accessing financial and technical resources and key information networks, according to research by the American Farmland Trust (AFT).

“The State of Gender Equity in U.S. Agriculture” found that internal and institutionalized sexism were core barriers, which contributed to disparate outcomes for women-led farms, according to a statement by the AFT.

“The findings of this report are profound and concerning, in terms of what they say about the uphill battles that the growing number of women and gender-queer people trying to make it as farmers continue to face,” said Caitlin Joseph, deputy director of AFT Women for the Land. “Given the nearly 300 million acres of agricultural land set to change ownership in the next 20 years ... it is critical that we ensure that all people have a fair shot at being successful in agriculture. We still have a lot of work to do to get there.”

To download the report, go to [TinyURL.com/AFTGenderReport](https://www.tinyurl.com/AFTGenderReport).

OREGON CONSTRUCTION JOBS POISED TO KEEP RISING

The number of construction workers in Oregon hit a new high last year, 123,000, and the industry may add considerably more jobs in the years ahead, *The Oregonian* (Portland, Oregon) reported online.

The increase in 2023 is almost a 5% increase from a year ago. “That growth was concentrated in residential building construction,” said Anna Johnson, an economist with



“The State of Gender Equity in U.S. Agriculture” found that internal and institutionalized sexism were core barriers, which contributed to disparate outcomes for women-led farms. PHOTO COURTESY AMERICAN FARMLAND TRUST

the Oregon Employment Department.

Industrial and commercial construction has been flat, but that is likely to change. Amazon is building huge new data centers near Boardman, Oregon, and Intel is preparing to start work on a “multibillion-dollar” expansion to its Hillsboro, Oregon, manufacturing campus. Other chipmakers are preparing to grow, too, spurred by \$240 million in state subsidies and the prospect of millions more in federal aid.

“The growth of construction creates a market opportunity for plant material,” OAN Executive Director Jeff Stone said. “However, we’re concerned the push for housing could lead to supersiting and possible loss of farmland. The housing push is the governor’s top priority in the legislative session that opens Monday and we will work very deliberately to ensure farmland is not threatened.”

AMERICANHORT LAUNCHES GREENHOUSE TECHNICIAN CERTIFICATION

Whether nurseries are looking to onboard new employees quickly, enhance

the horticultural knowledge of existing employees or develop best workers to lead greenhouse operations, AmericanHort’s new Greenhouse Technician Certification program may meet the need.

In response to the growing demand for specialized education in greenhouse growing, this certification equips your team with the knowledge and skills needed for both short- and long-term success.

The program offers comprehensive curriculum covering key horticultural concepts such as plant anatomy, nutrition, growing media, environmental factors and pest management. Certification is valid for two years and can be maintained through continuing education credits.

The program would benefit individuals without formal education in horticulture, aiming to increase their knowledge and confidence in greenhouse operations; greenhouse team members needing fundamental technician skills; and supervisors responsible for training new growers.

For more information or to enroll, go to [TinyURL.com/AmeriHortCert](https://www.tinyurl.com/AmeriHortCert).

OREGON APPEALS COURT ISSUES FAVORABLE WATER RIGHTS DECISION

The Oregon Court of Appeals has issued a favorable decision on water rights in *Bridge Creek Ranch, LLC v. Oregon Water Resources Department*, the *Capital Press* of Salem, Oregon reported online.

The court determined that state regulators had the authority to transfer water storage rights in certain instances, overturning a government policy established five years ago.

“Oregon Association of Nurseries’ attorneys, **Jordan Ramis PC**, submitted a ‘friend of the court’ brief on behalf of the OAN and Oregon Farm Bureau Federation in support of our position that OWRD has authority to process transfer applications involving reservoir storage rights,” OAN Executive Director Jeff Stone said. “This is a great win for OAN members who might want or need to change the point of diversion or location of a pond or reservoir in the future.”

MOORE JOINS OAN AS EVENTS, EDUCATION COORDINATOR

Jamie Moore has joined the Oregon Association of Nurseries as its new events and education coordinator.

“I’m really excited to work for an organization that’s doing something meaningful and contributing to a greener future,” Moore said.

Moore joined OAN from the film industry where she was operations coordinator,

scheduling coordinator, scheduling sight visits, meetings, scheduling staff, managing payroll, coordinating purchasing,

shipping, and logistics. She was also a wedding planner for many years. Moore recently relocated from California to Oregon. >>



Jamie Moore



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“I really love what they do here, and I want to work on things with longevity,” Moore said.

“I’m excited about Jamie coming on board. Her blend of experience and passion for events and the industry will make a big difference for the members,” OAN Executive Director Jeff Stone said.

“We are excited to have Jamie join our team and bring her many years of event planning and logistics to boost the OAN and Farwest Show for our members,” OAN Director of Events Allan Niemi said.

Moore’s responsibilities will include Farwest Show, coordinating the training seminars at the trade show, assisting with the OAN annual conventions, Hall of Fame awards, and other events and programs at the OAN.

FARMS REQUIRED TO FILE REPORTS UNDER ANTI-MONEY-LAUNDERING LAW

The U.S. Department of Treasury’s Financial Crimes Enforcement Network (FinCEN) has begun accepting ownership reports from farms and small businesses that are required to provide the federal government under a law intended to curb money laundering.

Farms and small businesses can start filing the ownership reports they are required to provide the federal government under a law intended to curb money laundering.

The online portal for filing reports opened on January 1, according to a statement from FinCEN.

Farms operated as LLCs, including those with a single member, have to file the reports, as well as limited partnerships and S or C corporations. Businesses have

until 2025 to file. Businesses will subsequently have 30 days to report changes in ownership or control. New companies have 90 days from their creation or registration to file the reports.

For more information or to file a report, go to FinCEN.gov/boi.

RULES SET FOR DE FACTO NEW GROUNDWATER MORATORIUM

The Oregon Water Resources Department (WRD) has new rules in the works that would effectively shut off new groundwater applications.

The purpose is to protect the viability of existing wells, in the face of declining groundwater levels.

“As currently proposed, the rules will create a de facto moratorium on new groundwater applications,” Oregon Association of Nurseries Executive Director Jeff Stone

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said. "This is the most significant change to Oregon water law in many years."

WRD's Groundwater Availability Rules Advisory Committee (GWARAC) met January 23 to set the rules, which also need to be published and approved by the Water Resources Commission.

The rules are a mixed bag for Oregon nurseries since they'll restrict new uses in the name of protecting existing rights.

"This is a hard call for the OAN since many members have senior water rights and a more restrictive policy halting new groundwater permit issuance could be beneficial," Stone said.

"Expansion of operations, however, would be significantly curtailed by the likely rejection of a groundwater application and the lack of sensible transfer rules."

Announcements

ANGI BAILEY ELECTED TO AMERICAN FARM BUREAU FEDERATION BOARD

Angi Bailey, president of the Oregon Farm Bureau Federation and an Oregon Association of Nurseries member, was elected to the American Farm Bureau Federation Board of Directors for the Western Region.



Angi Bailey

"With the depth and breadth of challenges facing Oregon farmers and ranchers, including issues surrounding ag labor, the farm bill, water and drought, and livestock predation just to name a few, this board seat secures Oregon and the West a voice at the table and gives us a national platform to highlight the unique challenges we face," said Bailey, who owns **Verna Jean Nursery** in Gresham, Oregon with her husband Larry.



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DREW PUTHOFF JOINS BAILEY AS STRATEGIC ACCOUNT REPRESENTATIVE

Bailey Nurseries Inc.

has appointed Drew Puthoff as strategic account representative.

Puthoff joins Bailey with more than 20 years of experience in retail, most recently as buyer for shrubs, trees, perennials, tropical blooming, and ferns at a national retailer.

In his new role, he will be working on Bailey's direct business with The Home Depot.

"Drew's extensive experience and expertise in purchasing and sales will



Drew Puthoff

play a crucial role in driving growth and strengthening our relationships with key accounts," shares Chief Sales Officer Marc McCormack.

"I am excited to have him on board and confident that we will continue to deliver exceptional service and exceed our customers' expectations."

"I have always had a passion for horticulture, and I am thrilled to remain in the industry working with the Bailey Nurseries team," adds Puthoff.

"I have been an avid supporter of the Bailey consumer brands as both a consumer and decision maker in the industry."

PORTLAND JAPANESE GARDEN APPOINTS NEW EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Lisa Christy has been named executive director of the Portland Japanese Garden. Christy has been with the garden

since 2014 and, for the past five years, served as chief external affairs officer.

Christy led and championed the organization's community access programs for underserved

populations, allowing families receiving public income-related assistance to purchase annual membership for only \$20 and those who receive food stamps to purchase daily admission for \$5.

She will incorporate the oversight of day-to-day operations of Portland Japanese Garden into her existing responsibilities. ©



Lisa Christy

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Patrick Newton of Powell's Nursery (left) and Tyler Meskers of Oregon Flowers visit during an OAN open house at the office in Wilsonville, Oregon. OAN FILE PHOTO

Beneficial for all

Discover how your participation in member programs can strengthen the OAN's collective purchasing power

BY STEPHANIE WEIHRAUCH

AT THE OREGON ASSOCIATION OF NURSERIES, we are dedicated to providing our members with relevant benefits that add value to their businesses. Yet did you know that by taking advantage of these benefits, you are also playing a pivotal role in supporting the association?

Many of our benefit programs, when offered in a group format, generate residual revenue for the group holder, the OAN.

In the past, our members have looked for tangible ways to support the association that provides them a return on investment. It's all in the ROI, correct?



Stephanie Weihrauch

Nursery Guide listings. This increases the revenue to support this endeavor, but also gives the member advertising potential with Nursery Guide, both print and online.

What about other programs offered by OAN? Do those return revenue and support the association's mission? The answer is a resounding yes!

Let's take a closer look at a few:

Fuel Discount Program: OAN and Ed Staub & Sons joined forces many years

In a recent instance, rather than support the association with a cash donation during the membership renewal

process, several members looked to increase their

ago to create a comprehensive fuel management program. This OAN Fuel Discount Program enables members to pool their collective buying power to ensure favorable pricing and participants gain access to multiple commercial fueling networks with thousands of sites available nationwide.

Did you know? The discount program has a rebate of .5%! Currently a very small portion of our members utilize this program, providing a minimal revenue stream to the association. By increasing members enrolled in this program, we could potentially see great growth in this easy-to-use program.

Credit Card and eCheck Processing Program: OAN's partnership with EVO Payments simplifies the selection process for credit card processing. EVO offers credit card processing and electronic check (echecks) options, offering your customers convenient choices

▶▶



Beneficial for all

for paying invoices.

Did you know? OAN receives a rebate on the volume of money processed through this group program based on a very detailed formula. With less than 25 members currently utilizing this benefit, there is untapped potential to create additional revenue for the association. This would be ideal for a business, such as retail nurseries, with high volume credit card transactions.

Medical and Dental Insurance

Program: Everyone has a choice when providing medical and dental benefits to their employees. OAN and Leonard Adams have been partners for the OAN insurance program, and it has been, by far, our biggest success. Our members benefit from group rates so whether you are a small organization with three employees or a large one with more than 100, the group rates remain competitive and at



Value from your membership

Visit OAN.org/Benefits for more information on how to sign up for these member programs and discover how your participation increases the buying power of the OAN, directing rebates and commissions towards the association.

times, better than the general market.

Did you know? There are close to 150 members enrolled in the insurance program through Leonard Adams and it helps keep membership dues stable as a result of its steady stream of residual revenue.

Office supplies:

Although Staples Business Advantage does not provide a rebate on purchased supplies, this pro-



gram offers a better pricing structure, next day delivery, and additional discounts to OAN members. This program is offered through Staples Business Advantage only, and you will not find these prices in their retail stores, direct mail order, or at Staples.com.

Did you know? This exemplifies the collective buying power the members have as a group.

Change can be challenging, especially when you have established relationships with vendors and no immediate need to switch. What you may not realize is that these programs not only lead to cost savings for your business, but also make a positive contribution to the association at no extra expense to you. ☺

Stephanie is director of finance and administration for the Oregon Association of Nurseries. Reach her at 503-582-2001 or SWeihrauch@OAN.org

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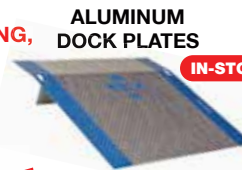
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New Department of Labor guidelines on how to determine if a worker is an independent contractor go into effect March 11. OAN FILE PHOTO



Peter Hicks



Anthony Blake

Shareholder Peter Hicks' practice focuses on litigation and counseling with an emphasis on employment and commercial matters. He can be reached at 541-797-2079 or Peter.Hicks@JordanRamis.com. Within his litigation practice, Anthony Blake focuses on contract disputes and employment matters. He can be reached at 503-598-5516 or Anthony.Blake@JordanRamis.com.

A test of independence

U.S. Department of Labor issues new guidance for the ever-evolving 'employee or independent contractor?' determination

ON JANUARY 10, the U.S. Department of Labor (Labor Department) published new guidance for determining whether a worker is an employee or an independent contractor under the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA).

Why it matters

As most employers are aware, the misclassification of an employee can expose the business to liability, including employee wage claims, fines, penalties, and back taxes. Depending on the size of your business, misclassifying employees could also lead to a class action and damage to your public reputation. Uber and FedEx are two well-known examples.

According to the Labor Department, the new rule, effective March 11, will reduce the risk of misclassifying an employee by providing a more streamlined analysis.

A brief description of the rule is described below, but please note that

the final rule only revises the Labor Department interpretation of an employee or independent contractor under FLSA; The final rule has no effect on other laws, state, federal, or local. However, states will likely look to the Labor Department guidance.

Determining factors

Consistent with previous interpretations, the new final rule affirms the concept that a worker is not an independent contractor if they are, as a matter of economic reality, dependent on the employer for work. Ultimately, when determining whether a worker is an employee or an independent contractor under FLSA, courts consider the following factors:

1. Opportunity for profit or loss depending on managerial skill;
2. Investments by the worker and the potential employer;
3. Degree of permanence of the work relationship;
4. Nature and degree of control;
5. Extent to which the work performed is an integral part of the potential employer's business; and,
6. Skill and initiative.

As to changes from the previous version, the new final rule considers six factors instead of five and provides addi-

tional context to some of the factors. For example, when determining the nature and degree of control a business has over a worker, the new rule provides helpful guidance as to how scheduling, supervision, price setting, and the ability to work for another should be considered.

Consistency

Though the nature of every employment relationship is different, the Labor Department hopes that the new final rule will provide more consistency for businesses that engage with individuals who are in business for themselves and ultimately reduce the risk of employees being misclassified as independent contractors.

Employers always should be mindful of the subtle changes in the independent contractor vs. employee analysis to protect themselves from future liability.

Agricultural employers using farm labor contractors should be careful to verify that labor contractors are also observing the rules and properly paying employees. Under some circumstances, if labor contractors fail to pay their employees properly, agricultural employers may be liable for any unpaid or improperly paid wages and any associated penalties. ☺



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Aiming for equilibrium

Oregon nurseries say a good work-life balance is critical to their success

Work-life balance typically just refers to time spent at home versus time spent at work. In reality, it is about much more than that. ADOBE STOCK

BY MITCH LIES

IN AN INDUSTRY RELIANT ON LABOR, maintaining a healthy workforce is critical. And for many nurseries, ensuring the health of a workforce means much more than ensuring employees get home safe at night.

It also means doing what they can to create a healthy work-life balance.

Nursery workloads are cyclical, and overtime is often a fact of life. With these givens, achieving good work-life balance can be difficult, but it is critical to the success of their operations and the health of their employees. That's why it is something they work at continually.

At **Robinson Nursery** (Amity, Oregon), a grower of bare-root, shade, flowering and ornamental trees and shrubs, that can mean offering a generous vacation package that includes four weeks of paid vacation annually after ten years of employment.

At **Fall Creek Farm and Nursery** (Lowell, Oregon), a blueberry breeding company and nursery serving commercial fruit growers and nurseries, in Lowell,

Oregon, that can mean cross training workers and moving them around when necessary, so an employee isn't overwhelmed with work when returning from time off.

At F&B Farms and Nursery

(Woodburn, Oregon), a grower of finished annuals, certified organic herbs and vegetables, perennials and potted indoor plants and hanging baskets, that can mean allowing flexibility in how a worker uses his or her paid time off.

In all, Oregon nurseries employ multiple techniques to encourage a good work-life balance among their work force.

It's (not just) about time

Work-life balance typically just refers to time spent at home versus time spent at work. In reality, it is about much more than that, said Josh LaPoint, sales manager at **Rio Verde Plantas** (Cornelius, Oregon), which specializes in premium shrubs and uprights.

"It's more about the quality of your time at home and the quality of your time at work," LaPoint said. To that end, Rio Verde emphasizes that employees should

tune out work when they get home.

"I tell my team that 'We don't work from home,'" LaPoint said. "I don't call my team when they are at home, I rarely text my team. If I need to get something done first thing Monday, I'll send an email, and I encourage them to 'Please don't check your emails or respond to me on the weekend or in the evening. I don't need your immediate response. You aren't being graded on that.'"

"We tell our team that when you're at home, you've got to be at home mentally," LaPoint said. "You've got to put down your phone, be with your kids, go on a date with your wife. Do the stuff that you should be doing at home, because when you come to work, you'll be happier."

Efforts to improve work-life balance at Rio Verde also extend to the workplace. In recent years, the company started giving employees more ownership over responsibilities, which has enabled them to be more organized and flexible, LaPoint said. The change has helped workers make their time more effective and more fulfilling, while improving their ability to make accommodations for appointments, ➤

Aiming for equilibrium



Shay Boga (right) perennial shipping lead at Peoria Gardens and owner Ben Verhoeven discuss the importance of taking time off and balancing work and life. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

vacations and other activities.

“Putting our accountability chart in place and encouraging ownership at every level of our company, making team members responsible for their own tasks, has been super crucial to our productivity, and our workers enjoy it,” he said.

Cross training

One key to creating a good work-life balance in the workplace, nursery executive said, involves cross training and moving employees around to facilitate continued productivity to cover staff taking time off. The nursery benefits because productivity is maintained during worker vacations and it helps the mindset of workers who know that their tasks will get done while they are away.

“We feel really strongly about this, and it starts at the top, where we do cross training among the management and the supervisory team,” said Dave Daniel, who manages the U.S. and Canada business for Fall Creek. “The idea is that people know they have a backup when they go to take some days off or go on vacation. That way, they are much less stressed. They know that when they come back, they aren’t

going to pay a price. And we do that all the way down through the system.”

Daniel acknowledged that there is a cost to the policy. “It is an added expense that you have to budget,” he said. “But we feel it is worth it.”

Chris Robinson, co-owner of Robinson Nursery, said he too cross trains employees to ensure flexibility in employee scheduling and continued productivity when workers take time off.

“We have a really deep bench, so that if any single person has to go, someone else can step in,” he said. “It doesn’t matter what time of the year it is or what we’re doing or what position they are in, if your kids have things at school that you need to go to, or if they have sporting events that you want to attend, or just for any reason, we like to let our team members take time off when they need to. We think that is really important, regardless of how much vacation time a person may or may not have left.”

Generous vacation packages are common in an industry, where pressures can mount during shipping seasons and workers need time off to recharge. And, according to Robinson, it is also important to

encourage workers, both through communication and through example, to take time off when they have it coming.

“The big key is the leadership team at the company needs to use their time off,” Robinson said. “You can have all the policies in the world, but if your culture says, ‘Well, we just don’t use our time off. We always work,’ then that is what is going to happen. So, it’s really important that the leaders of the company model the behavior that you would like to see.”

Ben Verhoeven, owner of **Peoria Gardens** (Albany, Oregon), a bedding plant nursery producing annuals, perennials, vegetable starts and hanging baskets, also offers a generous vacation package, along with flexible work schedules, health and dental insurance and a pension.

He echoed Robinson’s comments that when workers take time off, everyone benefits.

“When they come back, they are recharged, productivity improves, worker morale is up and the culture benefits from it,” Verhoeven said.

Extracurricular, social events

Hosting annual picnics and other extracurricular activities is another



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Aiming for equilibrium

technique nurseries employ to promote a good work-life balance among employees.

At Rio Verde, for example, workers who have recently been promoted or who have passed leadership courses or achieved other accomplishments are honored once every three months in a company luncheon. “We just talk about our successes and what cool stuff has happened,” LaPoint said.

At Fall Creek, the company hosts an annual picnic after the busy fall shipping season each year that includes multiple activities. And families come and really enjoy it, Daniel said.

At F&B, head grower Michael Lamberson said he takes it a step further, letting workers organize parties. “You give them control of the Christmas party three weeks in advance, and they really enjoy that.”

Reaping the benefits

In one sense, incentives to improve the work-life balance of employees can be a smart business decision, in that a healthy workforce typically results in improved productivity and better worker retention.

“We’ve proven over the years that we have low turnover,” Fall Creek’s Daniel said. “And we are confident that our added investments in policies and programs that support work-life balance are playing a key role in employee retention.”

And speaking of retention, Peoria Gardens has had employees with 40 years of tenure, Verhoeven said. “A new employee might be somebody who’s been her for six or ten years,” he said.

But that isn’t necessarily the driving force behind executives’ decisions to encourage a healthy work-life balance, executives said. In most cases, they said, creating an environment that encourages a healthy work-life balance is simply the right thing to do.

“We recognize that family is more important than work,” Robinson said. “So, our philosophy is a family-first environment, and then we set everything else up to show that that’s what we believe first and foremost. It’s just the right thing to do.”



Jose Rios loads trees on a cart at Bountiful Farms. PHOTO BY CURT KIPP

“The plants don’t grow themselves,” said Verhoeven. “It’s people who grow the plants. And you’ve got to support the people who support you.”

“The reality is, if I’m having a really crappy home life, it’s going to wash into work,” LaPoint said. “And if I’m having a really crappy time at work, it’s going to wash into my home life. Conversely, if they have a great day at home, they come to work happy. So, we try and be really conscientious of that when we’re working with our people. It can be a vicious cycle or a really uplifting cycle, and we try and make sure that it is an uplifting cycle.”

The industry’s uniqueness

In many respects, the nursery industry is unique from other industries, and, according to Todd Nelson, co-owner of **Bountiful Farms Nursery** (Woodburn, Oregon), grower of pot-in-pot and B&B grafted ornamentals, topiary plant material, sculptured art forms and unique plant material, a good operation can take advantage of that.

“When we’re aware that someone might be struggling with anxiety or other mental health issues and wants to be left alone and not around others, we give

them that opportunity to be outside and enjoy the clean fresh air and the sunshine or the rain,” Nelson said.

“I think there are a lot of health benefits that come from being in the natural light and not in an office complex where you’re kind of crammed inside,” he added. “And I think that can improve the work-life balance of a worker.”

In fact, according to Lamberson of F&B, the reason many people are in the profession is a love of plants and being outdoors.

“I think most people who get into this line of work do so for a reason,” Lamberson said. “It started out with some kind of passion for plants or passion for cultivation. They started out probably feeling like it was as much play as work. And I think probably a big part of finding work-life balance is not losing that. It is remembering that at one point this was your dance, this was your sport, this was your art. It is remembering that this isn’t just work, it is your joy.” ☺

Mitch Lies is a freelance writer covering agricultural issues based in Salem Oregon. He can be reached at MitchLies@Comcast.net.



The restorative powers of plants

Research has shown that people seek out nature in times of crisis or grief. ADOBE STOCK

People benefit simply from being in gardens and nature, which can, in turn, benefit nurseries as well

BY ERICA BROWNE GRIVAS

Science and industry are catching up with what gardeners intuitively know: that our relationship with nature is both innate and reciprocal. It's as foundational to us as breathing. We need each other. And growers, nurseries and garden centers are perfectly poised to become restorative havens.

Humans and plants thrive on each other's mutual well-being, and garden spaces can be healing, therapeutic spaces for people.

Humans are drawn to nature

Mounting evidence across disciplines shows that green environments boost physical and mental health, creativity, attention, feelings of safety, property values, and more. Just as importantly, new green spaces benefit wildlife and the sup-

porting ecosystem, now struggling with shrinking habitat, pollution and climate pressures. Doctors are ordering “park-prescriptions” through the Park Rx America program to get people to visit green spaces. From the beginning of mankind, we have had a strong connection with nature.

“We evolved in nature and thus we have this deep affinity for it,” said Kathleen Wolf, retired University of Washington social science researcher. “Because of civilization and how we crafted cities, we’ve removed ourselves from it, but we still contain that connection knowing we are dependent on nature.”

The prospect-refuge theory of design posits that our attraction to trees is hard-wired after centuries of finding shelter and safety among them.

Wolf notes that research at Cornell University has shown that people seek out nature in times of crisis or grief. Even when Japanese Americans were interred during World War II, they found ways to grow plants, sometimes smuggling cuttings in their pockets after being forced to work in the fields, she said.

Necessity is spurring us to find creative

ways to reconnect with nature today. City planners and landscape designers are weaving nature back into newly built environments using biophilic design, derived from biophilia, meaning “love of life” in Greek, and popularized by naturalist E.O. Wilson.

It's seen from Singapore's interconnected trails to Portland's Green Streets stormwater management initiative.

One of the surprising benefits, she said, is that plants may be able to reverse the screen-focused drive in our collective attention. When we engage with a collection of plants, nature's enchanting complexity draws our attention, but — here's the key — in an unstructured, free-form way. We're not trying to win a game, calculate a sum, or interpret the ramifications of an email. We're just following the hummingbird as it zips from branch to branch purely because it feels good.

As such, you can imagine even the smallest container, like a Japanese-style planter of mosses, can be beneficial. On a societal scale, all plant-able spaces can help increase health and biodiversity, Wolf said, from the smallest parking strip or patio to bus stops and schoolyards up >>

Restorative powers of plants



Teresia Hazen is a longtime horticultural therapist who worked with Portland's Legacy Health System to incorporate healing gardens into their facilities. Above and below is the healing garden at Legacy Mount Hood Medical Center. PHOTO COURTESY LEGACY HEALTH

to highway lids and utility corridors.

Transforming these pieces of cities into something we perceive as living and natural will transform our daily experience. "It's not only parks and greenbelts," Wolf said, "but what about these bits and pieces that could be with a little bit of design could be presented as microparks as well?"

Horticultural therapy

In the health sphere, therapeutic gardens and programs are helping to heal hospital patients, prison inmates and residents of dementia care facilities. But the idea isn't a new one.

As far back as 1812, Dr. Benjamin Rush, a signer of the Declaration of Independence, noted that patients who gardened recovered from "mania" more quickly than those who did not.

However, it wasn't until the 1940s and '50s that horticultural therapy became more mainstream in the U.S. after it was used to treat hospitalized war veterans.

The American Horticultural Therapy





Trees with interesting bark such as paperbark maple (*Acer griseum*) are great choices for therapeutic gardens according to Nancy Buley at J. Frank Schmidt and Son Co. PHOTO COURTESY J. FRANK SCHMIDT AND SON CO.

Association (AHTA) defines horticultural therapy as “the engagement of a person in gardening and plant-based activities, facilitated by a trained therapist, to achieve specific therapeutic treatment goals.” Those goals might be regaining or improving mental acuity, mood, or physical rehabilitation. Horticultural therapy can be performed in workshops or in dedicated programs, gardens and facilities.

Wolf is working with urban planners in Chicago and Maryland to incorporate horticultural therapy into cityscapes.

Closer to home, Teresia Hazen is a longtime horticultural therapist who worked with Portland’s Legacy Health System to incorporate healing gardens into their facilities. She wrote an article for AHTA, “Therapeutic Garden Characteristics,” describing standards for therapeutic gardens. (See TinyURL.com/TherapyGarden).

“In working for 30 years with stroke rehabilitation patients, they always got more engaged quicker when working with plants,” she said.

Tending plants can impart a much-needed sense of control, Hazan said.

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Restorative powers of plants



J. Frank Schmidt & Son contributed to the award winning Legacy Emanuel Medical Center Children's Garden. PHOTO COURTESY LEGACY HEALTH

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and are taking care of something and its theirs, they feel more competent. Everything we can do with positive leisure actively helps improve their mood and physical rehabilitation — even just walking around the block,” or to their local garden center, she said.

Get outside

Portland-based counselor and registered horticultural therapist Rannan Blatter finds taking her clients for nature walks helps them access their emotions more quickly than they can indoors.

“Mindfulness and grounding techniques that therapists often use in an office can be effortless when guided in nature,” she said. “Bringing attention to the smell of blooming jasmine, feeling the wind against your face or the sunshine on your skin, hearing the birds chirp, seeing the changing colors of the leaves in fall, these are all sensory activities that help clients attune to the here and now.”

Blatter puts this awareness to work in her practice.

“On our first session I may have a client that is so trapped in their own thoughts that they can’t experience what



Trees with unusual shapes or colorful flowers like this 'June Snow' dogwood work well in therapeutic gardens. PHOTO COURTESY J. FRANK SCHMIDT AND SON CO.

is happening around them,” she said. “Clients with high levels of anxiety start out racing through the trail or walkways and after time are able to slow their pace along with their heart rate. This slowing down is exactly what we need to counteract the impossible cultural demands that lead us to emotional dysregulation and poor health to begin with.”

Nancy Buley has long been aware of the benefits of horticultural therapy.

“J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co. has supported horticultural therapy and the science of healing gardens for more than 30 years,” said Buley, who serves as communication director for the Boring-based tree growers.

The nursery has contributed to many of Hazan’s projects, beginning with donat-

ing trees to Portland’s award-winning Legacy Emanuel Medical Center Children’s Garden. Since then, the nursery has also sponsored American Horticultural Therapy Association conferences and a therapeutic garden at the Legacy Mount Hood Medical Center in Gresham.

Growers, nurseries and garden centers are perfectly poised to become resources for gardeners to create restorative havens.

Picking the right plants

When selecting trees for a therapeutic space, Buley looks for ones with strong visual and sensual appeal. “Trees with interesting bark (such as paperbark maple, *Stewartia* and American hornbeam) are great choices for therapeutic gardens. Trees with

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Restorative powers of plants

fragrant flowers, unusual form, and bright and colorful summer and fall foliage are also important design considerations.”

Some of the most popular plants at these gardens are ‘Golden Raindrops® and ‘Royal Raindrops® crabapple — offering multi-season appeal and fruit for birds — and ‘June Snow™ dogwood, which is beloved for its generous canopy, creamy white flowers and elegant branching.

Creating a sanctuary

Kathleen Wolf sees many opportunities for the green industry to increase awareness of the benefits of plants.

Here are some ways to help transform your fields or display gardens into a healing space:

- Help visitors focus on the moment with sensory stimuli and showcase fragrant plants and create displays incorporating the sound of moving water. Create displays incorporating textural detail and include seating areas for respite. Explain and promote the mental benefits of plants to customers, not just their novelty. A children’s display garden can help benefit the youngest visitors and build a strong connection to nature. You can send kids on a scavenger hunt to find a hidden toy or a plant of the month.

- Displays for the elderly or cognitively impaired might feature smooth walking surfaces surrounded by the fragrance of lilacs and roses.

- Explore monthly themes such as mobility, restoration, dementia, sensory awareness, and pollinators.

- Create a trail or stroll garden.
- Hold guided walks.

Other restorative ways visitors can enjoy your space include workshops in planting, painting, flower arranging, writing, mindfulness, or yoga. ☺

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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Up and comers

Trystan Lewis (left) and Elizabeth Brentano founded NexGen to help connect those new to the industry and those who are up and coming in the industry. PHOTO BY VIC PANICKUL

NexGen and its founders seize opportunity to help those new to the industry

BY VIC PANICKUL

THE SCRAMBLE OF BOWLING PINS after being stuck by the ball, the barrage of golf balls flying from three levels of hitting bays at Topgolf — these aren't the usual sight and sounds of a nursery gathering.

But these aren't your run-of-the-mill nursery meetings. They are NexGen events.

Elizabeth Brentano, production and shipping assistant at **Robinson Nursery Inc.** in McMinnville, Oregon, and Trystan Lewis, assistant production manager at **JLPN Inc.** in Salem, Oregon, started NexGen to connect new and up-and-coming people in any role in the nursery industry as well as ancillary industries.

When they were brainstorming names for the group, they were careful about word choice. "We didn't want to connect

with age ... to use the word 'young'... because a lot of people enter the nursery profession later in life," Brentano said. But the person who gets credit for coming up with the name NexGen is Lewis' father, who suggested it in a marathon email brainstorming exchange.

Brentano, 24, daughter of **Brentano's Tree Farm** owners Pete and Wendy Brentano, and Lewis, 20, son of JLPN owners John and Crystal Lewis, met at a Lean conference. Brentano's boss, Josh Robinson, was involved in the Emergent nursery networking group, and John Lewis and Robinson encouraged the duo to start an Oregon group and make it their own.

Both founders grew up in the business. "I loved growing up at the nursery," Brentano said. "A fond memory is getting to sit shotgun in the box truck when my dad drove to pick up an order of trees.

"I started working full time for the family farm and nursery during summer breaks when I was about 12 years old. Back then, it was a lot of suckering and pruning,

and I didn't love the labor. By the time I graduated high school, I decided to attend Oregon State University to get an animal science degree and become a large animal veterinarian," she said. "It took until my junior year at OSU where I finally admitted that I didn't want to be on call for sick animals on Christmas morning, and I would rather be a part of the family business."

Lewis made the same choice. "Growing up at the nursery was the best experience of my youth," he said. "It was my childhood dream to work at the nursery full time and take over the business from my parents. I was never a fan of school growing up, so once I graduated high school, I wanted to pursue my childhood dream."

Meeting a need

Starting out in the industry can be an isolating experience, Brentano found.

"I graduated from OSU [Oregon State University] in 2021. The last one-and-a-half years of it was during Covid-19 so it was Zoom lectures with no personal interaction," Brentano said. "I had trouble >>>

Up and comers



NexGen hosted its third meeting in 2023 at TopGolf in Hillsboro. The group's leaders focused on creating fun and inviting events to get as many people to attend as possible. TOP PHOTO BY ELIZABETH BRENTANO BOTTOM PHOTO BY DALTON DUNN

meeting people my age, or in a similar point in their career as me. I felt like there was a need to let everyone know that there are other people out there like them.”

Lewis had a similar experience. “It’s hard for people to visit a nursery and meet someone and try get to know each other, especially production workers,” he said. “Everyone’s so busy.”

Brentano and Lewis started the conversation about starting NexGen in 2022. They spent the winter working on plans to host their first event, a bowling party at Bullwinkles, in Wilsonville, Oregon, in June of 2023. About 25 people attended. The duo planned three more events, a picnic in August at Silver Falls State Park, a gathering in October at Topgolf in Hillsboro and a holiday party at the beginning of December.

“I would say that when we first started having events with the NexGen group, we really wanted to make sure it was simply fun and inviting, so that we could get as many people out as possible” and let them make connections, Brentano said.

That approach proved fruitful for the fledgling group.

Creating a social network

“I wanted to connect with people of

my own age in the industry,” said Henry Golb, 23, a horticultural sales consultant at **Marion**

Ag Services, Inc.

in St. Paul, Oregon. “I see myself being in this industry for a long time and I want to have friends in the place that I call home.”

Golb has been to three events looking to meet people and make friends. “It’s hard when you go to a nursery where a friend works and they’re busy and I’m busy and we don’t have time to connect. But the NexGen events give you the opportunity to do that,” he said.

Skye Cuevas-Arevalo, 24, a production coordinator at **Kraemer’s Nursery** in Mt. Angel, Oregon, was also drawn to NexGen for the same reason. “I realized early on that this industry is predominantly older, so pretty soon those folks will be retiring and we’re the next ones in line. I thought it would be great to start



Henry Golb

meeting people and building connections early on. I didn’t know people in the industry in Oregon because I moved here from California.”

Cooper Tucker, 23, who works at **John Holmlund Nursery**, in Boring,

Oregon, is the grandson of founder John Holmlund, and is working to learn the family business.

“You’re hanging out with people in similar situations to what you’re in, hear their stories, make friends over time. You get to build relationships friendships, learn what’s going on in other people’s worlds, learn about their jobs.”



Cooper Tucker

Advancing career, gaining knowledge

To many who join NexGen, there’s also an opportunity to build their career and knowledge at the same time.

Erika Willis, 35, is a



Skye Cuevas-Arevalo



NexGen hosted a picnic at Silver Falls State Park in August of 2023, right before FarWest. PHOTO BY ELIZABETH BRENTANO

nursery sales agronomist —for **Wilbur-Ellis** in Woodburn, Oregon. Her parents own **KG Farms, Inc.** in Woodburn, Oregon.

“The role I’m in now is customer support and sales so I go around helping people with their crops and get to know them. I feel like I’ve been fortunate to get to know a lot of people, but there’s so many people and so many nurseries that I don’t know.”



Erika Willis

Willis noted that Next Gen is really for anyone newer to the industry.

“So many people hear ‘NexGen’ and think that it’s not for them,” she said. “But my question is this: Do you have a full generation ahead of you in the workplace? Do you have less than 10 years in your current role? If your answer to either of these questions is yes, NexGen has a place for you.”

Willis has found that the diversity of nursery businesses, in terms of how they operate, makes networking more important as well as more useful.

“I think nurseries are interesting because there’s no single blueprint,” she said. “Every nursery has found organic ways to solve their own problems. We’re all different and we have different experiences, so everyone has their own way to solve their own problems. They all have the same goal: sell healthy plant material. I’m in an interesting position of hearing people’s problems and trying to figure out

ways to help them find a solution to their problem. There’s no cookie cutter solution. It makes it a challenge, but I enjoy the variety of it.”

Of course, meeting people can help lead to sales.

“If people need an agronomist and they have a relationship with me, it could be a natural path for them to want to work with me,” Willis said. “That’s the benefit for me.”

Nicholas Michels, 33, is an IPM coordinator at **North American Plants** in McMinnville, Oregon, was drawn to NexGen for personal growth and to help others. “I hope to learn a lot from the group and take my experience and help others do better at their job,” he said.



Nicholas Michels

“I work with pesticides, but I also enjoy keeping the environment safe,” Michels said. “So I’m happy if there’s any way I can help someone get rid of their pest or plant health problem in a way that’s also good to the environment. I also want to learn as much as I can because I want to help produce the healthiest plants possible. I want to continue my education as well as help other people.”

What’s next?

Brentano and Lewis see an opportunity to connect NexGen with ag students at OSU. “It would be great outreach for college students who are interested in hor-

ticulture,” Lewis said.

“I was inspired at the OAN Convention during the Fireside Chat at lunch on Saturday,” Brentano said. “Jonathan Jasinski from **Microplant Nursery** talked a lot about college students, saying there is a disconnect between college students’ and employers’ expectations about entry-level jobs and career paths. We want to connect with college students and let them know what it’s like to work in the industry so they’re ready when they graduate.”

“My expectation was that after a couple of events, people would be asking for the group to organize tours or speakers, something more professional. But the feedback has consistently remained that people are so grateful to have this opportunity simply to get out and meet people, make friends, and build a personal network within the industry,” Brentano said. “It seems as though the professional stuff may come later naturally, but even if we organize a tour at some point in the future, we will still allot time for networking so that people can catch up with one another, both on business and personal happenings.”

The group is also working to organize more formally. “We’ve talked about organizational structure, officers and elections,” Brentano said.

Recognition and structure

The OAN Board of Directors voted in December to authorize Nursery Professionals and Leadership Groups, with NexGen being the first group approved. OAN Executive Director Jeff Stone is a big supporter.

“We’re very excited that the



Up and comers

NexGen

If you would like to connect with, support, or join NexGen, you can reach them at NexGenHort@gmail.com and follow them on Instagram [@NexGenHort](https://www.instagram.com/NexGenHort) or go to [OAN.org/Page/LeadershipGroups](https://www.OAN.org/Page/LeadershipGroups).



NexGen's first event was at Bullwinkles, in Wilsonville. PHOTO BY ELIZABETH BRENTANO

OAN Board of Directors has approved the creation of Nursey Professionals and Leadership Groups and recognized NexGen as one of these groups," he said. "This has been a goal of our President Amanda Staehely to make sure that the organization is continually evolving and changing to meet the needs of its members and those who work in the industry. We look forward to working with Elizabeth Brentano and Trystan Lewis and NexGen."

The plan calls for creation of a Human Resources Professionals group, Hispanic Leadership Group and Grower Segments groups later this year.

Staehely has been a main driver behind the new leadership groups. "It's been one of my priorities as OAN President to make sure that the organization is responsive to the changing needs of the industry and those who work in it, and to also find ways to increase the engagement of current members and engage potential members," she said. "Recognizing nursery professional and leadership groups like NexGen is an important step in that direction. Engaging NexGen will help us expand the pipeline of industry professionals and help develop the future leaders in our industry."

With recognition from the OAN, NexGen and its leaders, including Brentano, are excited about what's next.

"I feel very excited to be officially joining the OAN in this capacity," she said. "It means a lot to us that we have the support of the OAN staff and board and the industry as a whole. I am very thankful for the financial stability that it will provide us with, which encourages me to know that this group will be around for years to come."

Lewis sees working with the OAN as a positive development as well.

"The OAN will increase the awareness of NexGen through advertising, which will help us grow," he said. "The freedom OAN gives NexGen allows us to stay committed to our desire for freedom. The funding from OAN will help with hosting better quality events, which will attract more people."

According to Brentano, the group knew it could have stayed fully independent of OAN and talked it over.

"We consulted very closely with the active members of our group before making the decision to move forward with joining the OAN," she said. "We decided, as a group, that our number one priority is to make sure we create a space that is inviting to everyone in the industry, regardless of whether they had heard of the OAN before. Our main concern was that we didn't want to exclude anyone from membership in NexGen if they were not an OAN member. The OAN has reassured us that we are our own group, and we can keep our identity and our mission intact, so with that promise the group was unanimously in favor of becoming the first Nursery Professionals Group. I think everyone is curious but overall excited. Both the OAN and us realize that we will be mutually beneficial to one another."

The group continues to build excitement and membership, and plan events. "We have an e-mail list of 60 subscribers and we've had four events so far," Brentano said. "I would say the feedback is very positive and word is still spreading."

"We just want to keep this momentum up! Keep holding fun and interesting

events and keep growing our audience. We sent out a google poll to get official data from the group on where they see us going, and it looks like we will still focus primarily on activity-oriented events, but we are looking forward to sprinkling an industry tour or two in there as well."

Lewis said the future is bright. "The ultimate goal is to continue to grow our group by making more people aware of NexGen," he said. "We feel that the quality of our events will spread the word to new people. Sharing relationships will help our members identify future opportunities. Supporting our member's needs is as important as our desire to grow."

Brentano and Lewis acknowledge that without key support, the group would not have gotten off the ground.

"This group would not have started without the encouragement of the Robinsons and John Lewis," Brentano said. "But it also would not have made it past our first event without the continued support of other individuals and companies, especially thanks to Kraemer's Nursery, **Means Nursery**, KG Farms, and Wilbur-Ellis.

"And we owe another thanks to the OAN staff and board members who have given advice, helped share our events with a wide audience, and who will hopefully help us chart our path forward to keep the group going strong for years to come," Brentano said. ☺

Vic Panichkul is Publications Manager at the Oregon Association of Nurseries and Managing Editor and Art Director for Digger Magazine. Contact him at 503-582-2009 or VPanichkul@OAN.org



While injuries from motor vehicles are less common than the others, they tend to be among the most severe (second only to falls from elevation).

PHOTO COURTESY SAIF

Preventing nursery injuries

Read SAIF's tips for staying safe on the job

BY CHRISTINA DYKES

AS A SENIOR SAFETY management consultant at SAIF, a not-for profit workers' compensation insurance company in Oregon, I work with policyholders every day to assess their workplace safety and offer guidance on how to make workers safer on the job.

I get to spend a lot of time with nurseries in the Willamette Valley and know how risky the work can be. The good news is, high-risk injuries can be prevented.

We looked at claims data from the past five years to uncover the five most dangerous workplace injuries in nurseries. We analyzed the most expensive claims, as a high cost is generally associated with a longer recovery period and more time-loss days, indicating more severe injuries.

Sprains and strains

The most common claim SAIF received for nurseries was for sprains or strains, with more than 800 claims. These

injuries are often caused by lifting equipment, plant materials, moving containers in the fields, or lifting products into racking systems.

To prevent these injuries, bring items up to elbow height and use mechanical tools such as forklifts where possible. When mechanical tools are not available it's critical that your employees use safe lifting techniques. This includes keeping their elbows in close when they lift and bending with their knees.

When you're in a hurry, it's easy to just lean over to grab things in a poor posture, but that can easily cause an injury. It's important that you teach your employees how to lift heavy items safely.

Slips, trips, and falls

SAIF received more than 500 claims related to slips, trips, or falls, costing \$8.5 million. The most severe of these are falls from an elevation of four feet or more. Typically, this includes ladders but, for some nurseries, it also includes loading docks.

To prevent falls, make sure your loading dock is chained and guarded. When a

vehicle comes up to the dock, make sure the sides are protected so people can't fall off.

It's important to look for, and correct, work surfaces that may increase the likelihood of a slip or fall. It's important to address standing water, uneven ground that can be leveled, and traction on footwear.

Keep hoses and other trip hazards out of walkways where possible. There are many methods for avoiding hoses in walkways, such as installing and using hose reels, raising hoses above walking surfaces, or investing in automatic systems that reduce the need for hoses.

If your employees work with ladders, make sure they know the right ladder to use for each job and have that ladder available and close by. Not all ladders are created equal for all tasks and a variety of ladder types may be needed. Always use three points of contact to maximize stability, by using two hands and one foot or two feet and one hand on the ladder. We have several resources at [SAIF.com/Ladders](https://www.saif.com/Ladders) to help with talking points like ladder selection, set-up, storage, and maintenance.



Preventing nursery injuries

Being struck

Another common incident in a nursery is getting struck by something during work. This could be from tools in the workspace, moving equipment, or another employee moving things nearby. While there is a lot happening at any given time, it's important to take time to analyze hazard potential and keep the workspace as clear as possible. The heavier the equipment, the higher potential for a more serious injury.

Motor vehicles

From tractors to ATVs, golf carts to forklifts, nurseries use many motor vehicles. While injuries from motor vehicles are less common than the others we've looked at, they tend to be among the most severe (second only to falls from elevation).

When you're working with a motor vehicle, pay attention to blind corners where co-workers may be entering the

path. Take special care when crossing or traveling on busy roads and take time to drive at safe speeds, especially over uneven surfaces and hillsides. Make sure your employees are trained on proper tractor and forklift use and consider additional training and accountability for all drivers.

Cuts and punctures

With pruning scissors and shears, cuts and punctures are a common nursery injury. Plants can be sharp, too!

Employees should know when, where and why proper personal protective equipment (PPE) like gloves and eyewear are required. Strategies like offering variety in type and choice of design can help PPE use become consistent along with support and modeling of the PPE by leadership.

Care is needed when new tools such as electric or automated pruners are introduced, as new tools can also introduce new hazards. Review where additional guarding, training or PPE may be needed anytime new equipment is added.

Well-being

It's important to think about your employees' well-being as part of your safety program. For example, as people get into production mode, it's even more important to pay attention to things like fatigue and ensuring your employees are getting good sleep.

In addition, nurseries require a lot of detailed work, so it's important for workers to take micro-breaks. Even doing something different for 30-60 seconds will give the muscles and mind some time to recover.

You can find more information about workplace safety and health, including talking points for your safety committees, free posters, and trainings, at SAIF.com.

A five-step approach to worker well-being

The well-being of employees is a crucial part of a successful business, but achieving worker well-being is more complicated. What if we could boil it down to five easy steps?

SAIF, in collaboration with the Center

for Work, Health, and Well-being at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health, has created a simple five-step approach that merges safety, health, and well-being through organizational, environmental, and individual perspectives resulting in an integrated set of solutions.

The process is designed to be useful to all types and sizes of businesses. Begin the process with an exploration of your own business and to engage workers by asking questions.

Then you can hit the ground running:

1. Identify: Build a strong team with clear direction and leadership support to positively impact workplace well-being.

2. Engage: Engage your workforce and provide opportunities to share experiences, perspectives, and ideas for improvement of their working conditions.

3. Design: What are you going to do, how will you do it, and what will success look like?

4. Action: Do the things you've planned. What has worked well in the past? What are possible barriers that have not been addressed? Start small, stay focused, and make sure to track your progress.

5. Review: Review your work and the lessons you've learned so you can continue to improve.

You can learn all about the five steps, watch trainings and videos, and download materials at SAIF.com/5EasySteps. The resources are also available in Spanish at TinyURL.com/SAIF5StepsSpanish. ©

Christina Dykes has worked as a safety management consultant with SAIF for over 14 years. She has a degree in exercise science and previous experience as a personal trainer. Some of her areas of specialty include agriculture, strain/sprain prevention, total worker health, young worker safety, and most recently a leadership role in SAIF's development of serious injury and fatality resources. She is passionate about her work with businesses to prevent injuries and enjoys working with business owners to make safety engaging and fun.



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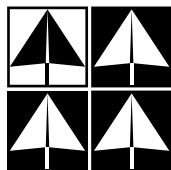
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GROWING KNOWLEDGE

Series content is coordinated by Dr. Lloyd Nackley, associate professor of nursery production and greenhouse management at Oregon State University in Corvallis, Oregon.



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What's in the pot?

Comparison of plant growth in side-by-side pots using stratified and traditional homogeneous substrates. While homogeneous substrates on the left produced slightly larger plants, the stratified mix showed superior root development in the lower half of the pot, along with enhanced water retention at the same growth stage. PHOTO COURTESY OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

Exploring stratified substrates and soil hydraulics in agricultural science

BY LLOYD NACKLEY AND JEB FIELDS

TRADITIONALLY, THE NURSERY FIELD has focused on creating homogeneous potting mixes that maintain structure while offering suitable hydraulic properties.

Classic blends are often comprised of bark, coir, peat, perlite, vermiculite, and pumice. However, a recent shift in focus has led scientists to explore how layering media can simulate natural

soil hydraulics — an approach known as stratified substrates.

Stratified substrates involve arranging potting media of varying textures in layers within a single container. This structured layering entails placing coarser-textured substrates at the bottom and finer-textured ones on top, mimicking natural soil layers.

This allows growers to “defy gravity,” so to speak, by keeping moisture uniform throughout the container as opposed to wetter on the bottom and drier on the top. Maintaining balanced air and water proportions throughout the container, this technique aims to influence water movement, nutrient distribution, and hydraulic behavior within the confines of a container. ➤

Growing Knowledge

By borrowing from the stratification seen in the ground, stratified substrates strive to optimize resource efficiency, plant growth, and root development in controlled settings like potted plants. Some may draw parallels between stratified substrates and the practice of placing rocks or gravel at the bottom of larger plant pots.

While both concepts involve layering materials, there are distinctions.

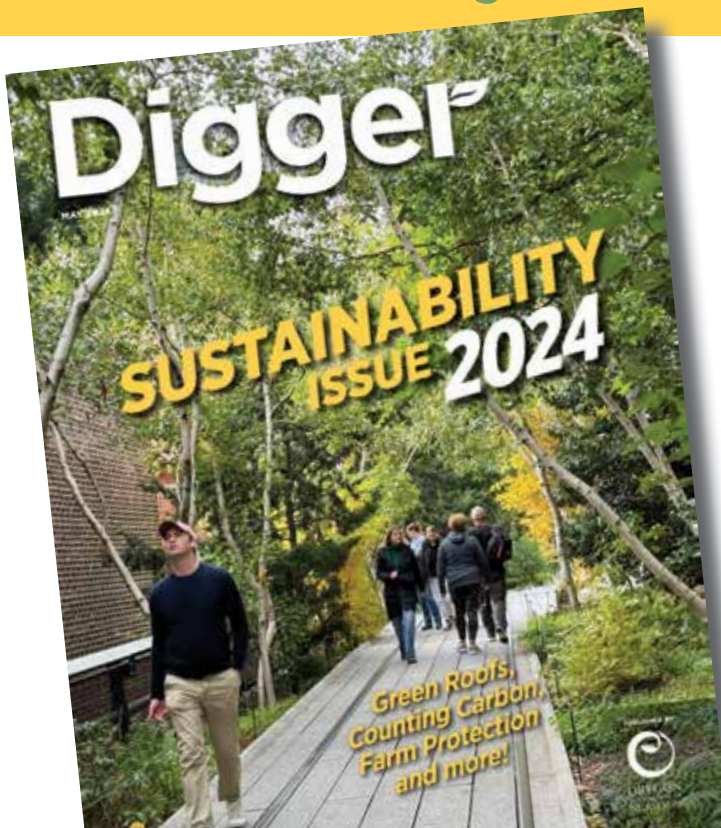
The practice of adding gravel or rocks to enhance drainage in larger pots shares a kinship with stratified substrates. However, it doesn't replicate the comprehensive layering dynamics seen in stratified substrates. Both adding gravel to the bottom and stratifying substrates reduce the overall height of the substrate within the container, which, in turn, increases the proportion of water that is held within that substrate.

With gravel at the bottom, there is



Close-up of a pot filled with stratified substrates. The top half contains a blend of fine substrate with CRF, while the bottom half features a layered coarser mix, showcasing the stratified structure. PHOTO COURTESY OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

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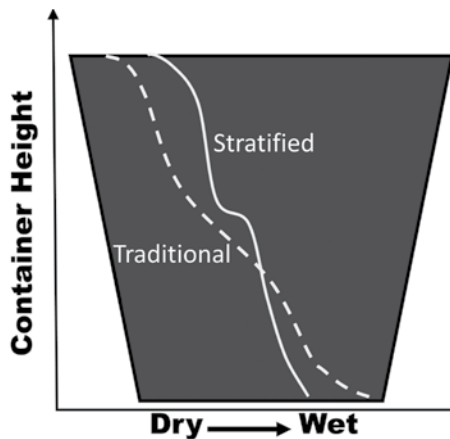
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Graphical representation illustrating the moisture profile difference between stratified and traditional homogeneous substrates. Traditional mixes exhibit a proportional relationship between container height and substrate moisture, while the stratified mix displays two distinct profiles: consistently dry at the top and uniformly moist in the bottom half. COURTESY OF OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

such a large difference in particle size (bark to gravel) that water transfer is greatly reduced, and thus you create a “perched water table” which results in more water holding overall.

In stratified systems, there is less difference in particle size between the layers, resulting in a “transient water table.” The difference is subtle, but a perched water table is constant and prevents the water from spreading throughout the container, while a transient water table is temporary and only exists while the container is being irrigated, thus allowing water to distribute throughout the container.

Dr. Jeb Fields at Louisiana State University has been at the forefront of investigating stratified substrates in containerized plant growth. His research delves into how layering different potting media textures can enhance water retention, nutrient availability, and overall plant performance.

The studies highlight promising outcomes, such as heightened root productivity, improved growth, and enhanced quality under stratified conditions compared to conventional substrates. This technique holds potential for bolstering sustainable crop cultivation within controlled environments.

In the past couple of years, Fields has released a series of articles that showed that stratifying pine bark can serve as a substitute for peat-based media in floriculture and bark-based woody plant production. Through layering premium floriculture media over cost-effective >>

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pine bark within containers, they reduced reliance on peat. In their study focused on *Petunia* hybrid ‘Supertunia Honey’, the stratified substrates yielded crops of comparable size and quality, along with enhanced root productivity. Their work also showed superior performance of bark:coir queried Lloyd substrates in a stratified setup, even when subjected to reduced irrigation when producing *Loropetalum chinense* ‘Ruby’ liners. Positive microbial communities in stratified systems further aided in mitigating water stress.

He has observed improved drought resistance in stratified-grown crops, likely a result of increased water access due to more balanced water to air conditions. Furthermore, Red Drift® rose plants grown in stratified substrates exhibited equal or superior crop growth despite receiving 20% less controlled-release fertilizer. This suggests potential for reducing fertilizer and irrigation rates while upholding crop quality, offering a sustainable avenue for containerized crops.

Beyond the resource efficiency that is presented by substrate stratification, the Fields lab has also shown improved root productivity for crops grown in stratified substrates. Fields’ current Ph.D. student, Kristopher Criscione, who has been working with Fields for nearly four years on substrate stratification, has focused his research on the root system.

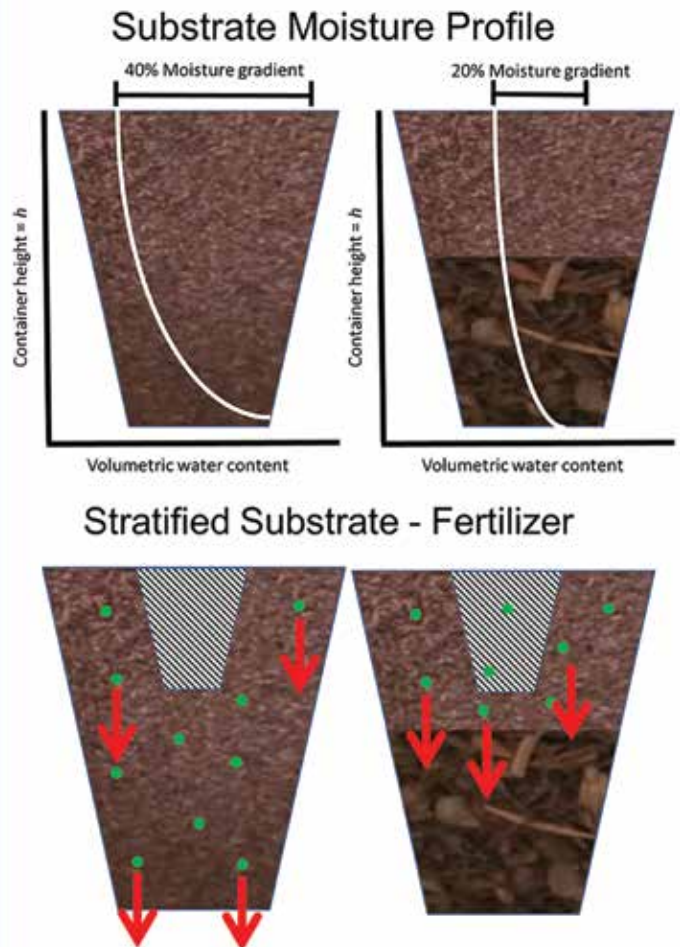
In many instances, they have found that stratification can lead to 400% more root mass. The balance of air and water throughout the profile allows for healthier and more rapid root growth. This improved rooting also changes how roots grow, a topic that Criscione and Fields are currently pursuing.

Instead of rooting to the bottom of the container and filling in, plants in stratified systems tend to fill the volume of the container as they move down, somewhat like a piston moving down the profile of the container. This results in more root mass upon crop completion. With a faster finishing root mass, growers could adjust parameters to finish crops quicker. Aside from improving the health of the crop, this improved rooting can support more successful transplanting, something that customers greatly appreciate.

Nevertheless, it’s crucial to acknowledge that findings from studies conducted in one geographic region — such as the Southeast — may not seamlessly extrapolate to other areas with distinct climates and environmental conditions, like the Pacific Northwest. Climate, temperature, humidity, and other factors can significantly influence plant growth and water dynamics. Given this variation, research in regions like the Pacific Northwest, such as Oregon, is crucial.

The unique environmental factors here, including cooler temperatures and higher rainfall, can affect water movement, nutrient availability, and plant response to stratified substrates. Bark-based substrates, common in some areas, may behave differently in terms of water retention and drainage in regions with distinct soil compositions.

To address this, the Nackley lab initiated a collaboration with Dr. Fields and others in 2022, planning to explore the impacts and benefits of stratifying substrates in nursery production. The first



Four-square graphical representation highlighting moisture gradients in traditional (top left) and stratified (top right) containers. The bottom figures depict CRF placement with green circles, demonstrating how CRF in a fully blended mix leaches more quickly from the bottom. In the stratified mix, where CRF is only blended in the finer upper half, it has the potential for slower leaching and greater nutrient absorption in the coarser blend. COURTESY OF OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

stratified substrate experiment was launched in 2023 at Oregon State University North Willamette Research and Extension Center (NWREC), aiming to reduce resource demand and provide insights into the effectiveness of stratified substrates in that context, contributing to more informed decision-making for nursery production and horticulture practices in the region. ©

Dr. Lloyd Nackley is a plant physiological ecologist at the Oregon State University North Willamette Research and Extension Center (NWREC) in Aurora, Oregon. He can be reached at Lloyd.Nackley@OregonState.edu. Dr. Jeb Fields is Assistant Professor of and Extension Specialist at the Hammond Research Station, at Louisiana State University in Hammond, Louisiana. He can be reached at JFields@AgCenter.LSU.edu.



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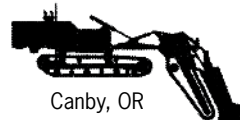
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Meet Luisa Santamaria, extension plant pathologist

Last month, Oregon State University's North Willamette Research and Extension Center (NWREC) held a nursery science summit. Industry leaders heard from a plethora of researchers and extension professionals. Their focus? Us.

NWREC is a fantastic facility that conducts impactful research. The focus is on solving problems of the industry. The Oregon Department of Agriculture and the Oregon Association of Nurseries collaborate and support NWREC's research.

One of my favorite researchers happened to be sitting next to me at the summit: Dr. Luisa Sanatamaria. For the last 10 years, she has offered more than 100 workshops serving more than 1,800 participants. They have been trained in integrated pest management (IPM), emerging diseases, the systems approach to disease prevention, and best management practices (BMP).

What is even more impactful is that 80% of the trainees represent frontline workers who speak Spanish.

Santamaria heads a four-part educational program on plant health. It includes education needs assessment; personalized nursery visits and training; science-based information on plant disease management; and finally, improved BMPs to reduce the transmission of plant diseases.

A hands-on approach to learning is critical. It has led to additional educational programs, such as a certification program in disease diagnosis and prevention; scout-

ing workshops (focused today on boxwood blight); and a labor-centric webinar called "Happy Plants, Happy People."

Dr. Santamaria's work is but a part of a larger effort being made by Oregon State University and NWREC, but everyone realizes that more needs to be done.

Building the bench

The OAN Board of Directors has been purposeful in building a relationship with our four-year land grant university (Oregon State University) and community colleges that are producing horticulturists.

Over the past year, the OAN board has taken its regular meetings on the road to OSU, Chemeketa Community College and Clackamas Community College. This month, we'll continue this outreach by visiting the landscape program at Portland Community College Rock Creek, which is an important resource for the grower community.

The OAN's political arm supports not only the ODA, the ODA nursery program, OSU Extension and Research Statewide programs, but also strong funding for higher education. Building a strong bench — that being an educated and passionate workforce — is in the best interest of the nursery and greenhouse industry.

The long game with workforce

Whenever we talk to people about workforce, our message is consistent, with a hint of alarm. There is a labor crisis in agriculture. We rely on our workers to make Oregon's healthy plants thrive. No amount of mechanization will replace our workers.

We are producing more plants with fewer workers than ever before. Agricultural work is rewarding, but it is hard. Unless you are born into agriculture, it's not appealing to the iPhone generation.

Workforce development is critical, but it is hard for any state employment agency to understand what kind of profile a potential worker must have to be successful at a growing operation. Even those who are going through the horticultural programs in the state have an uneven progression into the nursery workforce.

This is perplexing. That's why OAN is working with educators to rectify the situation. Many growers have internship



Jeff Stone

programs up and running. Those are a conduit worth cultivating. We need to own the trades. We need to constantly add talent at all levels of the workforce.

A growing voice in the industry

Our industry is seeing a tangible growth of Latino ownership. By offering bilingual support and opportunity at the worker level, we will only accelerate this paradigm.

Reducing the language barrier is a stated goal of the association in 2024. We simply do not offer much in this regard outside of seminars at the Farwest Show and First Aid classes. I intend to do better.

The OAN is creating a new initiative in 2024 called Professional and Leadership Groups. The first one, NexGen, was recognized in December, and it's covered in this issue.

In late spring, we will launch a Human Resources Leadership Group to assist our members with the ever-changing regulations facing our operations. Then, in the summer, I am excited about developing a Latino/Spanish Speaking Professional and Leadership Group. The goal is to help this important segment of our industry and upgrade what the association does for our Spanish speaking constituency.

Many steps, not a single leap

All the efforts in this column are connected. It is not just one thing or step that will begin to make a difference, it is many. I am excited to engage members in something new that is bigger than ourselves. ☺

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