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DECEMBER 2024

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December 2024 Vol. 68 No. 12

Digger

The
Nursery
Country
Issue



20



24



28



32

OREGON is Nursery Country

19 Oregon is Nursery Country

Meet four of Oregon's finest wholesale nurseries.

20 Krueger's Tree Farm

Richard "Dick" Krueger is building a legacy of innovation with a eye toward solving tomorrow's problems

24 Gold Family Farms

Steve and Joe Gold are focused on providing value and quality for their customers through efficiencies and scale.

28 Palmer Creek Nursery

Rufino Reyes and his son Jimmy stay nimble to focus on customer needs while maintaining quality.

32 Colony Nursery

Clinton Smay and Travis Burke are taking their nursery to the next level with new plant innovations.

COLUMNS

- 7 President's Message
- 17 What I'm Hearing
- 46 Director's Desk

DEPARTMENTS

- 8 Calendar
- 9 Northwest News
- 37 Classifieds
- 41 Growing Knowledge



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On the cover: Gold Family Farms' Laurel View Farm in Hillsboro, Oregon. PHOTO COURTESY OF GOLD FAMILY FARMS

On this page: Clockwise from top left and from left to right: David West, Matthew Hauth and Richard "Dick" Krueger of Krueger's Tree Farm; brothers Steve and Joe Gold of Gold Family Farms; Rufino Reyes and son Jimmy of Palmer Creek Nursery; Clinton Smay, son Carter, and Travis Burke of Colony Nursery. PHOTOS BY VIC PANICHKUL

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Effective communication

It is always good to get off the farm. Every time I visit a nursery, I always come back with new ideas and fresh energy.



Ben Verhoeven

Over the next year, I'd like to use this column to share some of those ideas and introduce you to the people who inspired them.

My first foray brings me to the doorstep of **Smith Gardens** in Aurora, Oregon to meet with Lauren Brown, an assistant head grower there. Driving past the orderly rows of plants outside, and a soon-to-be-finished glass house expansion, I park in front of the immense loading dock that is also home to their visitor registration and several offices. "Toto, I've a feeling we're not in Kansas anymore."

Lauren greets me with a smile, and we walk to see an improvement she and her team are excited to share. On the way we talk about her two daughters (one an ace softball player, the other a leadership phenom), and a lot about poinsettias.

Lauren is responsible for a team of section growers and their irrigation staff. She supports them in crop walks and coordinates their tasks with the head grower, the site manager and several other teams.

Poinsettias roll by acre by acre, in large blocks of red and white, at an even height as far as the eye can see. This is no accident, Lauren informs me, and part of it is the result of her team's new improvement.

Through a retractable wall inside the greenhouse is a simple whiteboard with



The boards list insect scouting reports, water quality issues, and general crop quality countermeasures. PHOTO BY BEN VERHOEVEN

powerful ramifications. These area boards started as a way for growers to communicate to site management and owners what they were doing in their crop. They list insect scouting reports, water quality issues, and general crop quality countermeasures.

Originally a suggestion from Andrea Avila-Aragon, the site manager, the growers find them to be so helpful that they have expanded their use. They find it valuable to take information out of a computer and display it right at the crop for all to see.

When the horticulture director comes through in the evening, he sees what is being done to address and preempt problems, leaving notes such as, "Steve was here," and "I like your board!" The area boards help Lauren identify standout crops and support her team, especially in the spring rush. She points out that while it is nice to think you can retain reams of information, "We're human, and this is a live product."

It makes me consider the different ways we think about communication. I used to think communication was confined to what Lauren and I are doing, walking and talking, but she and her team have found that there are other and often more effective ways to easily communicate in the work area.

Visible notes, in a consistent fashion, at the point of use are helping her team grow one of the nicest *Poinsettia* crops this side of the Mississippi. Now that's a note worth taking. ©



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*.

VARIOUS DATES IN DECEMBER AND JANUARY OAN TRUCKS TO WINTER TRADE SHOWS

Registration is underway for the OAN Winter Trucks to Trade Shows program, which allows members to ship booth material – conveniently and economically – to several trade shows. Reserve space now for the following shows: MANTS, Baltimore, January 8–10, 2025, \$595/pallet (reservation deadline December 8, 2024); Idaho Horticulture Expo, Boise, January 18–19, 2025, \$290/pallet (13 pallets needed by December 20, 2024); Utah Green, Sandy, Utah, January 7–8, 2025, \$395/pallet (13 pallets needed by December 20, 2024); ProGreen Expo, Denver, January 28–30, 2025, \$480/pallet (13 pallets needed by January 3, 2025). Space on each truck will be reserved on a first-come, first-served basis. In order to reserve space, the OAN needs full payment for each pallet. Go to OAN.org/t2ts to reserve space. Please contact Jamie Moore at JMoore@OAN.org, 503-582-2010 for questions or more information.



PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

DECEMBER 3 OAN MT. HOOD CHAPTER CHRISTMAS PARTY

Make plans to make merry at the OAN Mt. Hood Chapter Christmas Party from 5:30–8:30 p.m. Tuesday, December 3 at the Riverview Restaurant, 29311 S.E. Stark St. in Troutdale, Oregon. Cost is \$55 for adults, free for children aged 12 and younger. Register online at OAN.org/Events. Questions? Contact Vladimir Lomen at VladimirL@jhnsy.com.

DECEMBER 10 WORKER PROTECTION STANDARD — PESTICIDE EMPHASIS

Oregon OSHA will be hosting Protection for Pesticide Handlers and Workers, a virtual training from 8 a.m.–noon. Participants will learn about the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Worker Protection Standard (WPS), along with Oregon OSHA's unique requirements related to the standard. The WPS applies to people who work on farms, in forests, nurseries, greenhouses, or other locations that use pesticides. This class qualifies for 4 "Core" pesticide recertification credits for Oregon Private Pesticide Applicator and Pesticide Apprentices licenses. Individuals who have an Oregon Commercial Pesticide Applicator, Public Pesticide Applicator, and Pesticide Consultant license are welcome to attend and are eligible to accrue 4 "Other" recertification credits. This workshop includes information on what WPS is and its requirements, the difference between pesticide workers and handlers, the pesticide training requirements for both, decontamination requirements, personal protective equipment, elements of the pesticide label as it pertains

DECEMBER 4 OAN OPEN HOUSE AT AL'S GARDEN & HOME IN SHERWOOD

Mark your calendars on December 4 and get into the Christmas spirit with a visit to **Al's Garden & Home** in Sherwood, Oregon and learn about what the Oregon Association of Nurseries has in store for 2025. Learn more about OAN's new leadership and professional groups including NexGen, Human Resources Leadership Professionals and the upcoming Hispanic leadership group and how you can get involved. Learn about terrific member benefits and programs, including Legal Access, health coverage, Guest Worker Services, Trucks to Trade Shows, credit card processing, discounted Farwest Show booths, and OAN advertising. Beverages and light bites will be served. Non-members are also welcome, and members are encouraged to invite them to attend so they can meet OAN members and learn about membership benefits. The event is 3–5 p.m. December 4 and will be hosted by Al's Garden & Home, 16920 S.W. Roy Rogers Road in Sherwood. **RSVP at OAN.org/Events.**

to WPS, and how and where workers and handlers are notified about pesticide applications. For more information or to register, go to TinyURL.com/OROSHAPesticide.

DECEMBER 11 OAN WILLAMETTE CHAPTER WINTER SOCIAL

Join in the holiday cheer at the OAN Willamette Chapter Winter Social from noon–2 p.m. Wednesday, December 11 at **Woodburn Nursery & Azaleas**, 13009 McKee School Road N.E. in Woodburn, Oregon. The event includes lunch and tours. All members are welcome and cost is \$25. The event is being sponsored by Woodburn Nursery & Azaleas, and AgWest Farm Credit. RSVP at OAN.org/Events. For more information or to inquire about sponsorships, contact Cody Plath at 503-348-3706 or Cody.Plath@TargetSpecialty.com.

JANUARY 1, 2025 HORTICULTURAL SCHOLARSHIPS

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 beginning January 1, 2025 for 20 scholarships ranging from \$1,000 to \$3,000 from the Oregon Association of Nurseries Foundation. April 1 is the last day to apply. Go to OAN.org/ONF for more information, or contact OAN Director of Finance Stephanie Collins at 503-582-2001 or Scholarships@OAN.org.

JANUARY 8–10, 2025 MID-ATLANTIC NURSERY TRADE SHOW

The Mid-Atlantic Nursery Trade Show will once again take place at the Baltimore Convention Center, 1 W. Pratt St. in Baltimore, Maryland. MANTS, produced by the state nursery and landscape associations of Maryland, Virginia and West Virginia, is one of the largest private trade shows serving the horticulture industry, with more than 11,000 attendees and 900 exhibitors in 2024. Registration and housing registration is now open. For information or to register, go to MANTS.com. ☺



Agricultural safety seminars

2024–2025



SAIF's agricultural safety seminars are free, comprehensive safety trainings designed specifically for the ag industry. The seminars are held annually from November through March.

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Coexistence with agricultural chemicals revisited
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Webinars

Seminar topics will also be available as webinars. See online registration for details.

For more information, or to register, go to saif.com/agseminars or call **800.285.8525**.



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.



PHOTO COURTESY GREENHOUSE GROWER

Little Prince named Operation of the Year by Greenhouse Grower

Little Prince of

Oregon, a wholesale nursery in Aurora, Oregon, was awarded Greenhouse Grower's 2024 Medal of Excellence for Operation of the Year at Cultivate '24 and featured in the October 2024 issue of *Greenhouse Grower*.

The nursery built a name for itself by offering unique varieties that customers cannot find elsewhere. "We struggled for the first six years as we were trying to find our way," said Ketch de Kanter, founder and CEO. "The nursery industry is pretty daunting when you look at your competition, which is often family-run businesses that have been around for generations. We didn't know what we were up against. Through marketing and relationships, we navigated the marketplace to find our niche."

The nursery has developed 14 niche product lines that include unique, hard-to-find varieties and caters to garden centers, wholesale growers, landscape designers, and botanical gardens across the U.S. Read more at TinyURL.com/PrinceOR.



Oregon State University inducted the Schmidt family and Jack Bigej into the College of Agricultural Science's Hall of Fame. Accepting the award were Sam Barkley (left), grandson of the J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co.'s founders, and Jack Bigej, owner of Al's Garden & Home. PHOTOS COURTESY OF OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

TWO NURSERY PIONEERS HONORED BY OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

The Schmidt family (**J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co.**) and Jack Bigej (**Al's Garden & Home**) were inducted into the Oregon State University College of Agricultural Science's Hall of Fame at a dinner hosted by the dean in October.

"The Hall of Fame Award is one of the highest honors that the College of Agricultural Sciences bestows," said Staci Simonich, dean of agriculture. "It recognizes those individuals who have made outstanding contributions to agriculture and natural resources."

Bigej took over Al's Fruit Stand in the 1950s and has continually evolved the business, expanding Al's Home & Garden into a renowned multi-location garden center, while advocating for fair industry practices and sharing his passion for plants with future generations. His influence on Oregon horticulture continues to inspire those around him.

J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co. is a global leader in producing premium shade, flowering, and ornamental trees. Founded in 1946, the family-owned business has introduced 115 unique tree cultivars, including favorites like the Red Sunset Maple and Royal Raindrops Crabapple, and now produces over 1.5 million trees annually. Committed to innovation, research, and community service, the Schmidt family has fostered a long-standing partnership with Oregon State University, supporting horticultural research, scholarships, and sustainable practices through their foundation. Accepting the award was Sam



Barkley, grandson of the nursery's founders, Evelyn and J. Frank Schmidt, Jr.

"It was a big night for the nursery industry and the recognition was not lost on those who attended," Executive Director Jeff Stone said. "The OAN is extremely proud of both Al's Garden & Home and J Frank Schmidt & Son."

Watch video interviews of the recipients at TinyURL.com/BigejVid and TinyURL.com/JFSVid.

APHIS EXPECTS *PHYTOPHTHORA AUSTROCEDRI* TO BE LISTED AS NON-QUARANTINE PEST

APHIS hosted two meetings October 18 with each of the two Oregon nurseries with known infestations of *Phytophthora austrocedri* to provide updates concerning the treatment and control, said Michael Martin with AmericanHort and the Horticultural Research Institute. These updates also provide important information for the rest of the Oregon nursery industry about how *P. austrocedri* will be treated moving forward.

"APHIS expects *P. austrocedri* will be listed as a non-quarantine pest in the coming weeks," Martin said. "This change is predominantly based on production and shipping records provided by both facilities. Based on this information, there is a high likelihood that *P. austrocedri* has been in the nursery system for some time. With the expected designation change as a non-quarantine pest, control will fall to the Oregon Department of Agriculture."

At one of the nurseries APHIS and ODA staff

have completed demarcation of a 4 meter buffer zone around each positive plant and plants within that 4-meter zone have been destroyed, said Chris Benemann, director of plant protection and conservation at the Oregon Department of Agriculture. Demarcation activities are ongoing at the second location and plants within buffer zones will be ordered for destruction. ODA does not have a date for when activities at the second nursery will conclude.

P. austrocedri is in the genus *Phytophthora*, a group commonly referred to as water molds. More than 200 species of *Phytophthora* have been described, according to USDA. One of the *Phytophthora* species that has been of greatest concern to nurseries is *P. ramorum*, which causes the diseases known as *ramorum* leaf/twig blight and sudden oak death. *P. austrocedri* attacks conifers of the *Cupressaceae* fam-

ily, including *Austrocedrus*, *Juniperus*, *Thuja*, *Chamaecyparis*, *Cupressus* and potentially others. Like other species in the *Phytophthora* genus, *P. austrocedri* thrives in soggy conditions and standing water.

“This is a perfect example that shows the value of the OAN and our relationship with the regulator community and AmericanHort. Issues happen — it’s how we respond to the challenges that makes our advocacy worthwhile,” said OAN Executive Director Jeff Stone.

RESEARCHERS WORKING TO BLUNT EMERALD ASH BORER’S IMPACT IN OREGON

Researchers from the U.S. Forest Service’s Dorena Genetic Resource Center in Cottage Grove, Oregon, are hoping to identify Oregon ash trees with a genetic

resistance to the emerald ash borer, potentially leading to a breeding and restoration effort that could be an opportunity for the nursery industry, according to a report from *Capital Press*, an agricultural newspaper based in Salem, Oregon.

Seeds collected from hundreds of ash trees will be planted at three test sites in the Willamette Valley next year, allowing researchers to evaluate them for resistance to EAB. Resistance could involve the tree producing chemicals that inhibit the insect’s development or forming a stronger barrier to entry in its bark, among other possible mechanisms. “It’s a little like looking for the needle in the haystack,” said Glenn Howe, director of the Pacific Northwest Tree Improvement Research Cooperative at Oregon State University. However, researchers from OSU and USFS don’t expect to immediately spot traits that confer total immunity — it’s more likely >>

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Northwest News

the initial screening will simply identify trees with potential for further breeding.

OAN GOES ON THE OFFENSE FOR 2025 LEGISLATIVE SESSION

The Oregon Association of Nurseries, through its lobbyist, Bill Perry (Balance Point Strategies), has worked with three state legislators to pre-file three bills for the 2025 Oregon Legislature that were prioritized by the OAN Board of Directors.

OAN's top priority, fixing the agricultural overtime law, was filed by State Rep. Ricki Ruiz (D-Gresham), a member of the House Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) caucus. The law enacts a 48-hour overtime threshold in 2025, and the association is working with the agricultural community on a remedy that would support both the worker and the operator and freeze the 48-hour threshold and enact a 12-week peak season exemption at 55 hours.

The association's priority bill on making water rights transfers more accessible to the industry was filed by State Rep. Mark Owens (R-Crane). With recent rulemaking on groundwater availability, Oregon's nursery industry will need greater flexibility and a streamlined process for moving water on their property. Environmentalists wish to add a "public interest review" on all transfer requests, which OAN opposes. Legal decisions have created some clarity on the Water Resources Department authority over processing water transfers, but this issue needs to be refined. We need a streamlined approach to enact water transfers that act within the confines of the water right (no enlargement of the right or change in the point of diversion) is the stated objective.

Lastly, the OAN's push to exempt all green goods from the Commercial Activities Tax (CAT) was filed by State Rep. E. Werner Reschke (R-Klamath Falls). The proposal would utilize SIC codes to eliminate live green goods from the commercial activities tax entirely. Hard goods would still be subject to the tax and this narrow fix would limit the fiscal impact (which we believe to be mini-



Sedum 'Dark Magic' is among rich-hued plants paired with Behr's Rumors paint color by Terra Nova Nurseries in its Colors of the Year plant selections. PHOTO COURTESY TERRA NOVA

mal) on the school fund.

The OAN's final priority item, providing adequate funding for the Oregon Department of Agriculture's Japanese Beetle program, will be done through the budget process.

To review OAN's legislative agenda, go to OAN.org/LegAgenda24.

INTERNATIONAL PLANT PROPAGATORS' SOCIETY PROPOSES NAME CHANGE

The International Plant Propagators' Society International Board is proposing a name change.

The group proposes to change its name to International Plant Production Society to better reflect IPPS's growth and diversity. "Replacing 'Propagators' with 'Production' in our name would position IPPS as the leading worldwide association addressing all aspects of plant propagation, production processes, industry-wide issues, and employment concerns," the group said on its website.

Paid members can vote one time for or against the name change until 9 p.m. on December 31, 2024 (Pacific) by going to TinyURL.com/IPPCVote.

Announcements

TERRA NOVA UNVEILS 'COLORS OF THE YEAR' PLANTS

Terra Nova Nurseries (Canby, Oregon), a leader in plant breeding, has

released its Colors of the Year plants, a list of 23 plants forecasted for popular landscape, garden and patio applications that pair with the trending colors for 2025 for four North American paint brands.

The pairings:

Sherwin-Williams' Quietude, a softened sage green, lives up to its namesake with coloration that evokes feelings of calmness and serenity. Terra Nova's *Pulmonaria* 'Silver Scimitar' and *Pulmonaria* 'Raspberry Frost' manifest this tranquil effect with their soft green foliage. Quietude's cool undertones also harmonize with *Brunnera* 'Alexandria' and *Brunnera* 'Jack Frost', whose large leaves feature similarly soothing tones, as well as *Centaurea* 'Snowy Owl', *Artemisia* MAKANA™ 'Silver' and Sedum 'Marina'.

Violet from Minwax delivers a unique shade of purple that strikes a balance between classic elegance and modern appeal. Its jewel-tones hues are reflected in Terra Nova's *Veronica* VENTURE™ 'Blue,' *Nepeta* 'Blue Dragon,' *Plectranthus* 'Velvet Elvis' and *Thalictrum* 'Black Stockings.'

Valspar's Encore boasts rich, luxurious deep-blue shades that are both distinctive and incredibly versatile. Similar opulent tones are found in Terra Nova's *Lithodora* 'Gold 'n Sapphires,' *Corydalis* 'Blue Heron' and *Pulmonaria* NOVA® 'Cobalt'.

Behr's Rumors is a rich, ruby red that offers a modern yet warm interpretation of a timeless classic. The color is reflected in the foliage of Terra Nova's *Heuchera* 'Berry Marmalade,' *Heuchera*

NORTHERN EXPOSURE™ ‘Red,’ Begonia T REX® ‘Stardust,’ Coreopsis ‘Ruby Frost,’ Sedum ‘Dark Magic,’ Coreopsis ‘Bengal Tiger,’ Heuchera ‘Fire Alarm,’ Heucherella ‘Redstone Falls,’ and Heucherella ‘Peach Tea’.

See Terra Nova’s online plant catalog at TerraNovaNurseries.com.

BLAINE ANDERSON NAMED GENERAL MANAGER AT GOLD FAMILY FARMS

Gold Family Farms

announced a reorganization and named Blaine Anderson general manager of the company.



Blaine Anderson

The third-generation wholesale nursery in Hillsboro, Oregon, announced on Facebook that owners and presidents Steve and Joe Gold are stepping back from day-to-day operations and transitioning management to a new general manager role for the first time in the company’s history.

With over 17 years of service to Gold Family Farms, Anderson has served in various roles, including sales and marketing leadership and, most recently, spearheading innovation initiatives.

Steve will now concentrate on maximizing shareholder value, and Joe will turn his attention to driving future growth initiatives.

EASON HORTICULTURAL NOW EMPLOYEE-OWNED

Eason Horticultural Resources

(EHR) announced that it has become employee owned through an ESOP structure as of October 1.

“This transition reinforces EHR’s dedication to preserving its long-standing legacy. This new structure promotes a workplace where mutual success is a shared priority and where employees are empowered to actively contribute to its growth, shaping the future of the company as both colleagues and stakeholders,” the company said in



Mike Pezzillo



Tim Lott

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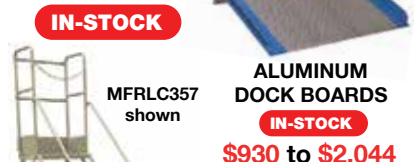
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MFRLC358	8 Step	80"	293	\$940



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Northwest News

the announcement.

The executive management team includes Mike Pezzillo, president and COO; Melanie Byrne, senior vice president of operations and plant



Melanie Byrne

product manager; and Tim Iott, senior vice president and CFO. Jim Eason will serve as chairman of the board and head of special projects. Sonney Mosley continues as greenhouse products specialist.

EHR is a National Horticultural Broker based in Ft. Wright, Kentucky. Founded in 1993, EHR serves as a consultant and broker to retail garden center growers, wholesale greenhouse growers, nurseries, and landscapers.

WAFLA CHANGES NAME TO WORKER AND FARM LABOR ASSOCIATION

WAFLA, an organization that has long served the agricultural community by addressing labor needs, has changed its name to Worker and Farmer Labor Association, the *Capital Press* agricultural newspaper (Salem, Oregon) reported.

This name change reflects the organization's ongoing mission to support both employers and workers within the agricultural industry, while fostering a stronger sense of community and collaboration.

BAILEY TEAM RECOGNIZED AT 2024 GARDENCOMM

Gretchen McNaughton, **Bailey**

Nurseries (St. Paul, Minnesota) communications and content strategist, received the Emergent Communicator Award at 2024 GardenComm Conference.



Gretchen McNaughton

McNaughton joined Bailey in 2021, managing social media and consumer content creation before moving into her current role where she leads the team responsible for those efforts. The Bailey Marketing team also received honors for their marketing materials.

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**MARION AG SERVICE HIRES
NEW DIRECTOR OF SALES**

Dan Dumler has joined Marion Ag Service (St. Paul, Oregon) as director of sales and distribution.



Dan Dumler

Dumler brings 30 years of experience across agriculture, turf, and ornamental markets, the company stated in a press release.

Dumler is a native Oregonian and a graduate of Oregon State University. He will work in Colorado, which will assist Marion Ag's geographic expansion.

**OSU NAMES DIRECTOR OF
AG RESEARCH CENTER**

Oregon State University has named Steve Culman as the new director of OSU's Central Oregon Agricultural Research and Extension Center in Madras.

Most recently an endowed chair of soil health in potato cropping systems at Washington State University, his research focuses on improving soil health



Steve Culman

through management practices that enrich nutrient cycling to enhance crop production and environmental outcomes.

**CORTEVA APPOINTS JUDD
O'CONNOR AS EXECUTIVE VICE
PRESIDENT OF SEED UNIT**

Judd O'Connor has been appointed executive vice president of Corteva Agriscience's seed unit effective Dec. 1. He has been at Corteva for 25 years. >>



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Northwest News

In memoriam

RAK PARK

The Oregon Association of Nurseries is saddened to report that Rak “Rockie” Soon Park, cofounder of **Park’s Nursery**, passed away peacefully on September 24, 2024, at the age of 96, in Gresham, Oregon. She is deeply missed by her children, Rod Park and his wife Joy, Joyce Park, Doug Park, and Tom Park and his wife Rae Ellen; her beloved grandson, Chase Park; her sister, Chungchi Lee; and her nephew, Sinmo Lee.

Rockie was born on Aug. 31, 1928, in Gangneung, Gangwon Province, Korea. She graduated from Seoul National University of Education and moved to the United States

in 1949 as an international nursing student. It was here in Oregon that she met Harry Park, and they married on May 5, 1951.



Rak Park

Together, they built a life in Gresham where they farmed and raised their four children.

Rockie and her husband were founding members of the Korean Society of Oregon, where she served as president in the 1970’s, and which later led to the formation of the Oregon Korea Foundation. Her dedication earned her recognition by the Congress of Korea. In addition, she was actively involved in the Gresham Sister City program with Sokcho, South Korea, fostering a bond between the two communities.

Rockie was laid to rest alongside her husband, Harry Park in a private service at Forest Lawn Cemetery in Gresham on Oct. 3, 2024. ©

Emphasizing fall planting for color



Mike Darcy

Head “plant nerd,” longtime speaker, host of gardening shows on radio and TV, and author of the *In the Garden* email newsletter. You can reach Mike, or subscribe to his newsletter, at ITGMikeDarcy@Comcast.net.



Acer palmatum ‘Bloodgood’ has early spring growth that is red and matures to purple. But in the fall, the entire tree is a blaze of bright red. PHOTO BY MIKE DARCY

Walking through my neighborhood this fall has given me pause to stop, look and marvel at the superb fall colors on many of our trees and shrubs. Driving in other neighborhoods gives me the same sensation. The fall color season is glorious.

Perhaps I think it is this way every year, but this season seems especially outstanding, and I fail to see how anyone cannot marvel at what nature has provided us. The question that I have is, how does a garden center capture this kaleidoscope of colors that many trees and shrubs have and turn it into potential sales?

Visiting a private garden in the late fall some years ago, I saw my first *Euonymus europaeus* ‘Aldenhamensis’.

Here was a deciduous tree with no leaves, and yet the branches were covered with clusters of pink berries that opened to reveal a bright orange seed capsule. Against the blue sky on a clear winter day, it was stunning. Why have I never seen this plant for sale?


A visit to a garden center gave me the answer. The salesperson agreed with me that the clusters of fruits were indeed magnificent. However, the salesperson continued, “When we have most of our customers in the spring and early summer, the tree is very ordinary looking, and the clusters of white flowers are not particularly attractive. Basically, in the spring, the tree would not attract attention. In the fall, when the tree reveals its glorious

colored fruit, customers are few, and the tree is not well known nor often planted in local gardens.”

‘Fall is for planting’

“Fall is for planting” is a phrase that we’ve often heard over the years. Upon first hearing it, I thought to myself that it was a very good idea to promote fall planting. As a slogan, it is very truthful because fall is an excellent time to plant many trees and shrubs. With the summer heat dissipating and cooler days arriving, there is less chance of transplant shock when compared to summer planting. Fall rains have probably arrived and the soil is moist and yet still warm. It can be almost a perfect environment for new trees and shrubs.

Regardless of the slogan, the spring season still reigns supreme as the major time to plant for gardeners and garden centers. A warm, sunny spring day will bring throngs of customers to garden centers. Fall color, whether from leaves, fruits, or berries is probably not what most of these spring garden customers are thinking about. The challenge is not to diminish spring sales, but to at least “plant the seed” about planting for fall color.

Perhaps a special section with signage, TREES FOR FALL COLOR, might at least intrigue customers to look at what is available. To compliment this section, there would need to be photos showing the color to expect in the fall. Plant tags can be another way to introduce customers into thinking of fall color. Usually, the most colorful plant tags will have a photo of what the flower looks like but rarely is fall color mentioned. 

What I'm hearing

Think about a peony and the tag that is probably attached. It will be a photo of the flower, but no mention of any other attributes of the plant. Yet, peonies can provide some wonderful color in the fall with not only with their foliage but if the flowers are left on, a seed pod will develop and when it splits open, there are often bright red seeds that are wonderful for an indoor arrangement.

Another example is *Acer palmatum* 'Bloodgood.' This is an easy one to give an example of because the early spring growth is red leaves that mature to purple. In the fall, the entire tree is a blaze of bright red. Do customers know that in the fall, the 'Bloodgood' maple has spectacular color? We have a 'Bloodgood' maple in a pot in front of our house and it amazes me how many walkers stop and ask what kind of a tree it is.

If, in fact, a garden center is going

to try some of these suggestions, in the TREES FOR FALL COLOR section, a special display of smaller trees, perhaps those that grow less than 20 feet should be added. With many homes being built on smaller lots, customers may be hesitant to purchase what they think might become a large tree. It would be a good idea to also incorporate larger type shrubs for additional choices. Having good picture tags with not only the plant as it looks in the summer, but also the fall or winter color, could result in additional sales.

It is not an easy task to get this idea of showcasing plants for fall color because it is just not the time many customers are visiting garden centers especially looking for trees and shrubs. With some effort, it can be done.

The attraction might start off slowly, but when the fall season arrives, it presents a perfect opportunity to capitalize on the



Euonymus europaeus 'Aldenhamensis' is a deciduous tree and in the winter, it drops its leaves and the branches are covered with clusters of pink berries that open to reveal a bright orange seed capsule. PHOTO BY MIKE DARCY

idea of planting for fall color. This marketing approach could even utilize the upcoming holiday sales to increase the attraction and nurture the seed of planting for fall color. It could become a brand-new category to market at garden centers. ©



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Palmer Creek Nursery



Colony Nursery

Clockwise from top left and from left to right: David West, Matthew Hauth and Richard "Dick" Krueger; brothers Steve and Joe Gold; Rufino Reyes and son Jimmy; and Clinton Smay, son Carter, and Travis Burke. PHOTOS BY VIC PANICKUL

Year after year, Oregon's family-owned nurseries continue to build on their green successes and innovate with an eye towards the future.

Brothers Joe and Steven Gold are steering their family nursery, Gold Family Farms, into the third generation of success, with a focus on production efficiency and value with an ear tuned to changing customer preferences and demand.

Richard "Dick" Krueger is building a legacy at Krueger's Tree Farm to pass on to his daughter and son-in-law and grandchildren. Together as a team, they are pushing the nursery to the cutting edge in using mechanization and technology to improve operations and quality, and developing plants that will provide future solutions to pests and climate change.

Rufino Reyes is working with his son, Jimmy, to smartly grow Palmer Creek Nursery and stay nimble in order to adapt to meet their customers' needs while maintaining a keen eye towards quality and

sustainability.

Clinton Smay and Travis Burke purchased an existing nursery in 2020 and are taking Colony Nursery to the next level with a focus on quality and innovation, with its latest development, Skinny Skip[®] cherry laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus* 'Skinny Skip'), an extra-narrow cherry laurel.

With \$1.2 billion in sales in 2022, Oregon's nursery industry continues to be the state's agricultural powerhouse. Oregon produces more conifers, shade trees, flowering trees and Christmas trees than any other state in the nation. It's also among the top growers of woody shrubs, annuals, perennials, houseplants and other material as well.

Turn the page. Meet the passionate families behind four of Oregon's finest wholesale nurseries. Learn how they have found opportunity and are pursuing their dreams to give you the best and show you why Oregon is Nursery Country! ©

OREGON is Nursery Country



The management team at Krueger's Tree Farm includes (from right): Owner Richard "Dick" Krueger, Vice President Matthew Hauth and Assistant Manager David West. PHOTO BY VIC PANICKUL

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KRUEGER'S TREE FARM

BY EMILY HOARD

Among 40,000 potted deciduous shade trees, a 5-year-old named Howie points to one and says, "That is an oak tree." He and his twin sister Maggie are already learning how to identify trees, having grown up around them on the family farm in Cornelius, Oregon, owned by their grandfather, Richard "Dick" Krueger.

Krueger's Tree Farm is known for growing and selling hardy shade trees and shrubs that are shipped all across the U.S. and Canada.

The farm covers 75 acres, bustling with life. "Our farm is around 70% full, with trees and shrubs growing in 22 greenhouses and two propagation houses equipped with hydronic floor heat and ambient temperature controls," Krueger said.

In addition to the 40,000 container-

ized trees, the farm is growing about one million containerized plants. The shrubs, grasses and groundcovers are grown in pots in gravel can yards, while the trees are grown in pots along 9.5 miles of trellises to keep them upright. The current irrigation system includes over 120 irrigation zones which are controlled wirelessly and via their two-wire system.

"The trees are all on individual spray stakes and can be injected with fertilizer or other biologicals as needed," Krueger said, adding they use UpTake Pro/KleenGrow to keep the spray stakes and drip lines free from debris.

Matthew Hauth, Krueger's son-in-law and the father of Howie and Maggie, is the vice president of the business. Krueger's buys the trees in bareroot and



One of the hallmarks of Krueger's Tree Farm is the use of technology to save labor. Here, Dick Krueger drives a heavy-duty forklift from Wurdinger equipped with a special fork that allows for lifting of more pots. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

large liner form and pots the trees up on their potting system before growing them up to desired calipers for their customers.

Hauth said the Willamette Valley is optimal for growing trees and plants. "We harden our trees so they excel even in harsh conditions. That's the beauty of ordering from us," he added.

Recently, Krueger's expanded its product offerings to include shrubs, grasses, and groundcovers, helping customers optimize truck space by shipping both trees and plant materials together — a move that saves both time and money, Hauth said.

Assistant Manager David West is optimistic about the farm's future, noting its recent technological upgrades and preparations for further growth. "We're expanding vertically and investing in new technology that keeps labor costs down while improving product quality and consistency," he said.

The farm's meticulous care for each tree is the work of a skilled three-person team who focus on training and prun- ➤



From left: Maggie, Stacie, Howie and Matthew Hauth, and Debbie and Dick Krueger at Krueger's Tree Farm. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

Krueger's Tree Farm

ing, ensuring every tree has a strong, dominant leader.

How it began

Krueger was raised on a farm and was responsible for the family garden as a kid and grew into being responsible for the farm. In 1972, he started his own landscaping business, Krueger's Associated Landscape & Supply. "I grew evergreen trees at my grandparents' property and eventually bought my own land to support my landscaping business," Krueger said.

By 1977, he had moved to a three-acre plot in Beaverton, then in 1980 to a 20-acre shade tree farm in Newberg, growing both a reputation and customer base along the way. His landscaping business grew to 72 employees, tackling commercial work across Oregon.

Through the years, Krueger shifted from field-grown trees to a pot-in-pot operation, eventually securing contracts with high-end clients like the Bellagio Hotel & Casino in Las Vegas, Nevada. A particularly memorable project began when Krueger and his wife, Debbie, attended a trade show together, where they first connected with the Bellagio team. Following that introduction, Krueger set out to meet the hotel's unique request for January-blooming trees, using temperature-controlled greenhouses to force blooms and transporting the trees in refrigerated trucks to preserve the blossoms. This notable achievement won Krueger's Tree Farm a multi-year contract with the Bellagio, supplying trees for their renowned conservatory botanical garden.

In 2020, Krueger purchased a 75-acre, gravel-covered site on Cornelius Schefflin Road. Choosing an above-ground pot system, he installed a new irrigation system, trellis infrastructure, and a Wurdinger soil mixing line to support the potting of bare-root stock. The site has since expanded to include shrubs, grasses, and groundcovers.

While Krueger was growing the nursery, Hauth started dating his daughter, Stacie, in 2002 and began working with Krueger on designing and building his website in 2003 and collaborated with



Matthew Hauth observes as Miriam Barnabe (left) and Juana Cid as they prepare to propagate *Vinca minor* into air-pruning Pioneer Pots (below). PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

him on different projects over the years. During their wedding, Dick humorously recalled the first time he met Hauth, saying, "Man, this guy's hands are soft; he doesn't seem to work very hard."

But over time, Hauth has proven himself to Krueger. In 2022, Krueger asked Hauth to join the nursery team. With his background in technology and manufacturing, Hauth has introduced innovations and efficiencies that continue to propel the farm forward.

The nursery hired West as the assistant manager in the winter of 2023. With nearly three decades of experience in the landscaping industry, West stepped back from the daily operations of his own landscaping company, ultimately transitioning to helping manage the nursery.

"At Krueger's we have been inventing and creating new systems, implementing new planting techniques, and planning for the up and coming products in the green industry," West said.

Hauth called 2024 a year of firsts, marked by significant changes including adding a new irrigation controller for the now 120-plus zones on the property, changing bark, pots, fertilizer, and chemical suppliers, implementing a new inventory and sales order system, and adding new equipment including a potting machine and soil mixer.



Planning for the future

The team has some upcoming projects they're looking forward to, including adding more automation machinery: the Ellepot H102 and the Ellepot H302, which create biodegradable pots of varying sizes and fills them with growing material. They're planning a solar array installation in 2025 and are constantly working with the USDA on water conservation practices.

"Dick has invested in high-quality equipment and is open to new ideas that drive innovation" Hauth said. "We're not aiming to cut labor; we're reallocating it for higher productivity and a better product."

West said the addition of a new potting machine has allowed them to complete a potting work order in one day instead of four, and the soil mixing machinery allows the crew to custom-make the right mixes for the specifications of each plant.

Krueger's is looking toward the future when the emerald ash borer is expected to wipe out ash trees. The farm is in the beginning phases of developing production of nine to 13 types of trees that can replace ash trees.

Climate resilience is a top priority. The farm has started cultivating cold-tolerant crepe myrtles in response to the region's hotter summers, ensuring they can offer heat- and drought-resistant trees to their customers. By 2027, Krueger's Tree Farm plans to have hundreds of specimen crepe myrtles ready for the landscape market.

West reflected on the rewards of

growing trees, saying, "There are trees I planted in my twenties that are now 100 feet tall, and it's so cool to see something you've done with your own hands is still there today and will outlive you."

In 2019, Matthew and Stacie Hawth had their twins Howie and Maggie. Matthew said he thinks that changed Krueger and his approach. "With Howie and Maggie here, you can tell, he wants to build a legacy that they can be proud of."

Hauth said Howie is already expressing interest in the farm at five years old.

"Howie loves everything about being outdoors, working with tools, or riding on a tractor," Hauth said. "He'll walk through the farm or forest, asking questions about different tree species. Or, as we drive to Astoria, he'll point out, 'look at all those evergreen trees,' which is pretty hilarious coming from a five-year-old."

At 70 years old, Krueger said he's still

working at the farm every day starting at 6 a.m. and he's looking forward to stepping back.

"My goal is to hand off the farm eventually to Matt, Stacie and my grandchildren and have them involved in the farm significantly so it would enable me to step back a little bit," Krueger said. "I try to think of it as a generational opportunity for my family should they choose and it gives them a great opportunity to hopefully enhance their lifestyle as well."

As Krueger's Tree Farm continues to grow, the legacy of hard work, family, and innovation takes root for generations to come. ☺

Emily Hoard is an Oregon-based freelance journalist covering business, environmental and agricultural news. She has a background in community reporting and a master's degree in multimedia journalism. You can reach her at hoarde123@gmail.com



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Brothers Steve (left) and Joe Gold now run the third-generation family-owned Gold Family Farms in Hillsboro, Oregon. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

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GOLD FAMILY FARMS

BY MITCH LIES

There was a time, not too long ago in fact, when Gold Family Farms regularly shipped 15-, 20- and 25-gallon containers. “We don’t do a lot of those anymore,” said Steve Gold, co-owner and operator of the nursery. “They just take too long.”

Gold Family Farms, a wholesale grower in Hillsboro, today is focused on producing plants it can turn over in five years. The strategy is driven by changing consumer buying habits and the desire to keep down production costs.

The nursery also has dramatically scaled back the number of varieties it grows, going from the hundreds of varieties the nursery produced at the turn of the century to about 100 today.

“We have made some drastic changes over the years,” said Joe Gold, co-owner and operator. “When my father was running the business, they had upwards of 500 different varieties — from indoor plants, to annuals, to perennials to topiaries, to everything in between.

“And then when our generation took over from our parents, the very first thing we did was cut out a lot of the plants that we weren’t good at growing,” Joe said. “And then when Steve and I took full ownership, we reduced that some more.”

About 40 percent of the nursery’s output today is in three varieties, with boxwoods making up about 20 percent of that. Emerald Green arborvitae and Alberta spruce make up the remainder.



The farm's footprint has increased from about 80 acres in the late 1960s to the 400 acres it operates today, with most of that expansion occurring since the turn of the century. PHOTO COURTESY OF GOLD FAMILY FARMS

Changing strategy

Several factors have shaped the Golds' evolving strategy over the years, Joe said, including a change in consumer buying habits that started during the Great Recession. Buyers, Joe said, just aren't buying expensive plants like they once did.

"And also a new generation was coming in that wasn't really into taking care of plants," Joe said. "They just wanted something to plant and leave it. And so, we saw the signs on the wall, and we decided to greatly reduce our topiaries and some of the more expensive plants, and we changed our mentality into being cost effective."

The Golds also decided to focus on what they were good at growing, plants the family had produced for decades that had stood the test of time. And, when Steve and Joe bought out their siblings over a two-year period beginning in 2017, they further reduced their varietal output and focused on plants they could turn

over in five years or less.

"We've had to just in the last three-four years cut about 25 to 30 different varieties of plants off the list, because we weren't able to produce them in five years," Joe said.

In addition to providing more consistent sales opportunities, smaller plants are also less expensive to ship, another factor that helped drive their decision to scale back on big plants, particularly as shipping rates rose.

"We also determined that freight costs had been going up, particularly during COVID, and we realized that you could get more small plants on a truck, and so that was another deterrent to growing larger plants," Joe said.


The strategy has led to refined production practices and has had a big part in the farm's dramatic increase in plant production over the past several years. Just in the last year, Gold Family Farms increased

production of its larger sizes from 5,500 to 11,000 per day and increased production of its one-gallon plants from 18,000 to 20,000 per day to 25,000.

Efficiency with mechanization

The increase in plant production also can be traced to new machinery that the farm has developed and implemented, including an automated loading trailer the farm now uses for much of its production.

Developing new pieces of equipment is, in fact, another signature of this family farm. The farm keeps a fulltime engineer on staff, and Steve Gold, who holds a degree in engineering from Brigham Young University, worked as an engineer at Boeing before coming back to the family farm in 2008, giving them considerable expertise in the field.

And the farm works closely with employees when developing and implementing the equipment. 

Gold Family Farms



Mariela Ignacio packs down potting material as the pots come off the potting machine at Gold Family Farm's Laurel View Farm in Hillboro, Oregon. PHOTO BY VIC PANICKUL

Steve refers to their philosophy as “bottom up” versus “top down.” “When management from the top down tells them we’re going to use this machine, there can be pushback because they don’t know how it works. So, working alongside the employees is the difference between building something inhouse versus trying to find something similar out in the industry that you can bring into the process. When you do that, a lot of times, they don’t know how to make it work.

“It’s not just developing the equipment,” Steve said. “It’s being able to effectively use the equipment and then having employees find ways to improve their productivity with the equipment.”

Farm’s history

Gold Family Farms traces its roots to the 1965 when the Gold family arrived in Oregon from Utah and established a plant nursery in Forest Grove. After Steve’s and Joe’s uncle, Paul Gold, died in a tragic farm accident that occurred while the family was preparing the land for nursery stock, the family decided to relocate to their current farm near Hillsboro.

As the farm grew over the years, so too did the surrounding cities.



Jesus Gomez loads potting mixture into the hopper for the potting machine at the Laurel View Farm. PHOTO BY VIC PANICKUL

“Hillsboro had a population of about 6,000 when the farm was started,” Joe said. “Forest Grove had like 1,000 and Cornelius had like 1,450 people. Hillsboro is now over 107,000, Forest Grove is like 27,000 and Cornelius is about 15,000. So the towns around us have definitely grown exponentially.”

The farm’s footprint, meanwhile, has

increased from about 80 acres in the late 1960s to the 400 acres it operates today, with most of that expansion occurring since the turn of the century.

“We’ve doubled in the last 10 years,” Joe said.

The farm was run by Steve’s and Joe’s aunt Sally and their father, Gene, for many years before the next generation, which



Steve (right) and Joe Gold talk with Willian Gomez as he takes a break from feeding the potting machine at the Laurel View Farm at Gold Family Farms in Hillsboro, Oregon. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

included Steve's and Joe's siblings Clarka Hill and Matt Gold, took over in the early 2000s. Joe joined the farm in 2003 while completing a degree in business management from Brigham Young University and completing his Latter-day Saints mission. Beginning in 2017, Clarka and Matt opted to exit the company and Steve and Joe took over full ownership.

Most of the farm's output today is in woody ornamentals that it sells primarily to wholesalers or growers, with some going to garden centers. About 85 percent of its sales is in containers.

Make it affordable

The farm's emphasis on keeping production costs down permeates nearly every aspect of the operation, down to plant starts. "We create most of our plants," Steve said. "We don't bring in a lot of plants. So, again, that's how come we are able to specialize, because we can produce our plants at birth versus bringing in other companies' plants."

"Our forte is to make it affordable," Joe said. "We really cater to the numbers."

The company also strives to understand what it costs to produce a plant, Steve said.

"We are trying to understand our costs," Steve said. "It's been our experience that a lot of nurseries sell at market without knowing how much it is actually costing them. And that can be hard to determine, because you're growing it over four to six years, so how do you know how much that one plant costs? But that is something we feel is important to understand."

The farm employs 90 workers full-time and has an employee package that includes competitive wages, a healthcare program that pays 100 percent of healthcare costs, a 401K that employees can be fully vested in after one year and it offers scholarships for school and sports.

And the farm is working on developing good, affordable housing for its employees, a benefit they believe can be invaluable in their area in the future.

"In Washington County, there's limited inventory for housing, and definitely limited affordable housing," Joe said. "And it doesn't help us if they are spending most of their wages on housing and getting stressed about it, because that can mean that they're not doing well, and that can carry over into the workplace. So, we've got nine units approved and they will be nice, comfortable homes that are affordable.

"We are trying to have a sustainable farm where we are helping our employees with housing and food production, because the cost of living has gone up," Joe added. "So, we are trying to go a different route than say, just paying them more, because you pay them more and guess what, their rents will go up, too. So, if you can control the rent market, then you can help your employees feel secure, and we found that when you can take away some of those stresses, they tend to produce more effectively for us." ☺

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

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Rufino Reyes (left) and his son Jimmy say that the size of their business allows them to be hands-on in the day-to-day operations of the nursery and maintain a high quality for their plant material. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

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PALMER CREEK NURSERY

BY VIC PANICHKUL

The idea for **Palmer Creek Nursery** sprouted in Rufino Reyes' suburban back yard, literally.

He was working at the time at Scalvini Nursery in Dayton, Oregon and purchased a house in McMinnville in 1997. "I started doing a little bit of back-yard growing in 1998," Rufino said. "I built a very small greenhouse in my back yard, and I started producing cuttings of boxwoods and also grafting material."

Next thing he knew, he had his first sale, to Patterson Nursery Sales. "They took a look at my grafting material and liked

what they saw and placed a big order," Rufino said. "They sent a big flatbed truck to pick it up and I looked out the window and they filled the driveway and blocked the street. We had to quickly load it in order to get the truck out of the street."

From that beginning, Palmer Creek has evolved into a grower specializing in field-grown and potted conifers, evergreens, maples and deciduous ornamentals. Its customer base includes growers, retail garden centers, brokers and wholesalers. The nursery ships its plants nationwide, however the majority of its



Palmer Creek Nursery began in the backyard of a suburban home with one greenhouse and has grown into a 36-acre nursery today that includes two farms. PHOTO BY VIC PANICKUL

customers are on the East Coast, Midwest and West Coast.

The early years

Rufino quickly outgrew his backyard greenhouse and in 1999 he rented a little property of about 3,000 square feet at Janzen Farm in Dayton. He put up two greenhouses on that land, but there was no access to water, so he had to truck the water there.

The situation became impractical so he found another site off Highway 18 in Dayton with 5 acres and plenty of access to water. He leased it for a few years but discovered the site had its own problem, flooding. “One year I had bad flooding and the plants were underwater and I lost a lot of baby plants,” Rufino said.

But in 2001, an opportunity came his way that seemed ideal at first, but almost undid him.

The original owner of the 16-acre property in Dayton where the nursery is now located donated the land to a church and the church approached him with an offer to lease the land. They asked him if he was interested in purchasing it, but Rufino told

them he didn’t have the funds to do so.

“They came back to me and said they’d give me a private contract and I can make payments 10 years and then make a balloon payment to purchase the land,” Rufino said. “I thought about it and finally I decided to do it. When we wrote the contract, he gave me 7.5% interest rate. The terms were for 10 years. If after 10 years, I can’t make the balloon payment then he can take everything. I took the papers to a real estate agency, and they said there was no way to win.”

Rufino bought the property for \$294,000. He had to make \$1,000 a year payments and then make the balloon payment in 10 years. The real estate agent said it was impossible to finance the purchase and pay it off so it was a losing proposition.

Rufino found a good Realtor who could help him find financing, but nobody local would touch it. “But finally they found a bank back East to give me a loan to pay off this property,” Rufino said.

“There were a lot of challenges for my dad in the beginning,” said Jimmy Reyes, Rufino’s son who grew up on the nursery helping his dad. “And keep in

mind he was still working full time during all of this, too.”

Flying the white flag

Things finally seemed to be on the upswing until the Great Recession hit.

“My main market was grafted conifers and maples until 2008 when the economy crashed,” Rufino said.

“We used to graft 30,000 maples and conifers for Evergreen Nursery. They told me they needed to cancel their order. They said there was nothing they could do,” Rufino said. He ended up having to sell them cheaply. Some went to a friend; others went to another nursery for \$1 each.

He hung on, but in 2012, he had to finally raise the white flag.

“I put everything up for sale. I couldn’t make the mortgage payments,” Rufino said. A lot of customers cancelled their orders and he had three other loans to pay, including one loan he took out to build greenhouses.

“Back then, all he did was grafts,” Jimmy said. “People knew my dad as a grafter, so we really didn’t have much field or container-grown material. We couldn’t find

Palmer Creek Nursery



Palmer Creek Nursery specializes in field-grown and containerized conifers, maples, evergreens and deciduous ornamentals. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

a buyer so we threw away a lot of plants.”

To survive, Rufino put his home in McMinnville up for sale. He made a little money, enough to pay the loans and still have a little operating money left over.

At about the same time, Evergreen was in the same situation and had a fire sale. “I paid them \$300 and took out 2,000 arborvitae from their fields,” Rufino said. “They said ‘take what you can’ so we took what we could and planted them here.”

That action probably ended up saving Palmer Creek in the long run.

“That’s what really got us going as a field-grown supplier of arborvitae and also boxwoods and maples,” Jimmy said.

During all of this turmoil, Rufino was still working a full-time job.

Then in 2015 he got laid off from Fisher Farms. “Now what do I do?” Rufino thought. “Well, I had a little trailer so I put up a sign and did landscaping.”

“I don’t know what kept my dad going,” Jimmy said.

Thankfully that didn’t last long. He ended up finding a job in Silverton at **Rare Tree Nursery**. During that time, things finally started picking up for Palmer Creek.



Lorena Reyes trims Japanese Maple liners in one of the propagation houses. Palmer Creek propagates all of its own maples, conifers and evergreens. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

Focusing on the nursery

“Mom was concerned about Dad’s commute to Silverton,” Jimmy said. The roads are windy and narrow and don’t have shoulders in some spots.

“One night he nearly ran off the road. Mom said he needed to give up the job and focus on the nursery.” So he did.

In Jimmy’s last year of high school, he remembers things were really picking up. “I remember skipping school to help us load trucks. That was a great time.”

“Beginning in 2017 everything picked up and we’ve been in an upswing,” Jimmy said. “We’ve been very lucky. We just bought another 31 acres in Dayton to give



Jimmy Reyes examines Japanese Maple liners in one of the propagation houses. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

us more room to grow,” Jimmy said.

“My nursery’s not like a lot of others with capital and a business plan. I just try something and if it doesn’t work, we just deal with it and learn from it,” Rufino said.

“I was never thinking that we would be this big. I just think we be a few greenhouses and grafting for people. And now we have all of this and we have a lot of customers to support.”

“The demand is there for our products and we’re very customer-focused,” Jimmy said. “Now we’re still grafting our own plants, but we specialize in field-grown material and pots. We try to do 50,000 grafts a year of conifers and maples for our own use.”

“People know us for our Japanese maples and arborvitae,” Jimmy said. “We sell a lot of 1-gallon maples and conifers. That’s the plan. We plan every year to be able to supply our customers who want 1-gallon material, which is about 35 percent of our business. The rest is bigger material.”

Looking to the future

“It’s a lot bigger now than it was in the beginning, and I have more responsibilities now, a lot more work,” said Jimmy, a graduate of OSU and a recipient of the Oregon Nursery Foundation scholarships.

Now, Jimmy is primarily focused on customers and inventory, he’s the external face of the nursery. He’s always working the booth at Farwest and MANTS in Baltimore, Maryland.

“My dad will always be here ... be involved. But I think he wants to take a step back and let me run it when the time is right,” Jimmy said.

“In five years, I want to be a 150-200 acre farm,” he said. “That way I can have a rotation of crops. I’m a strong believer of taking care of our soil so I want to plant cover crops and leave the soil to rest so we can grow nice plants faster. I want to take care of the soil so takes care of us for our lifetime and beyond.”

“Our customers come to us because of the quality of our plants,” Rufino said. “But we don’t want to grow so big because the labor issues will mean the quality goes down. We like to stay in a sweet spot so we can grow quality plants for our customers.”

“At our size, we can be involved with production and we can make sure our plants are nice,” Jimmy said. “Quality is our priority.”

“It’s amazing to look at all of this,” Jimmy said. “My dad, he really started from nothing.”

“It’s been a real challenge,” Rufino said. “All my life, I’ve worked for nurseries. I never thought I’d have a nursery.” ©

Vic Panichkul is publications manager at the Oregon Association of Nurseries and managing editor and art director for Digger. Contact him at 503-582-2009 or VPanichkul@OAN.org



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Clinton Smay (left), son Carter, and Travis Burke are greeted most clear mornings with a view of Mount Hood in the backdrop of Colony Nursery.

PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

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COLONY NURSERY

BY ERICA BROWNE GRIVAS

In famously fertile Canby, Oregon — surrounded by growers in every direction — a grove of oak trees shelters **Colony Nursery**. Clinton Smay wakes up, peeks out the window to see what kind of a day is shaping up for the plants. Smay lives right in the middle of the grounds with his wife Kyra and their three children and co-owns the nursery with Travis Burke.

The couple's 7-year-old son Carter takes his role seriously as the official customer greeter. Once during a tour, when Smay's van got caught in the mud, Carter finished the tour solo, earning a \$10 tip.

"We have unobstructed views to Mt.

Hood which is super sweet, and I get to see the sunrise from my window when I get out of bed in the morning," said Smay.

You can't beat the commute, but living where you work means your career and home lives are knitted like a graft join.

"Sunup to sundown, we're out there checking our plants."

Years of tradition

The nursery — started by brothers Bill, Bob, and Dan Knopp — has been a fixture in the Willamette Valley since 1968, with a focus on conifers, evergreen and deciduous shrubs, broadleaf ever-



Luis Duran moves B&B boxwood plants from the field to pallets to prepare them for shipping. PHOTO BY VIC PANICKUL

greens and bamboo. All the material is sold as either B&B or container.

Smay says twin brothers Bill and Bob learned about conifer propagation when they were young while working at John Mitsch's nursery. Smay said the brothers started building their collection while their father grew some strawberries, "and it's 60 years later and we still use the same propagation methods to produce 95% of our stock in-house from cutting and grafts, buying the balance from friends in the [Willamette] Valley."

Longtime employees Burke and Smay took over the nursery in 2020. Burke's wife, Kayla, is Dan Knopp's daughter. Officially, Burke is the secretary, and Smay the president — so Burke likes to call him "President Clinton."

Burke was ready for a change from the tire industry when he joined Colony as a general laborer in 2006 and began working his way up the ranks.

"I came to the nursery and never left," he said. Courses in propagation, plant identification and Spanish rounded out his on-the-job training. Burke had known Smay

since high school in Canby. Smay, who said he's "been growing plants since he was 18," had his own 10-acre nursery and worked at **Wilbur-Ellis** after college.

Whiplash weather

The new partnership faced a roller-coaster of challenges right from the start.

First the pandemic almost shut them down, with countless shipping orders on dug plants cancelled. "I remember both of us having tears in our eyes, saying, 'Well, that was a great run,'" said Burke. Of course, the situation reversed quickly once agriculture was allowed to stay open. "I don't think we stopped shipping the whole year after that."

Then the Santiam Fire swept through from August–December 2020.

"During those fires we had a bunch of bareroot plants to get in," Smay said.

"I just pleaded with my guys to please come in. We were out at eight in the morning planting with our faces covered and it was black as midnight. It was like something you'd never seen."

The ice storm of February 2021 was

next. "It was apocalyptic," said Smay. "We were without power for 11 days. There were power lines down across all the entrances. He estimated the two weeks of cleanup with a crew of 20 and the broken roof repairs cost about \$50,000 after owning the nursery a year.

After all of that, "we joke that we'd like to see some 'precedented years,'" Burke said.

Business today

The wholesale nursery comprises about 200 acres, on a mix of owned and leased land. When the pair started, most of the customers were on the East Coast, so they've worked to diversify by adding outlets in the Midwest and West Coast.

"When we took over, we did zero dollars in the Pacific Northwest and California, and now the West is a piece of the puzzle," Smay said.

The company sells to brokers, garden centers and landscapers — but not to big box stores. "I don't think it's good for IGC's [independent garden centers]," said Burke, "and they're our





Co-owner Travis Burke (left) talks to Gustavo Romero Orozco in one of the fields at Colony Nursery. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

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bread-and-butter.”

“Since Clinton and I took over, on the same land we’ve probably grown sales 40–50%.” He puts that down to using space more efficiently, “trying some new things and listening to customers to offer a better mix of things that sell a little better.”

Boxwood, in myriad sizes and forms, from cones and balls to spirals and obelisks, is a long-standing top-seller.

“People freak out about boxwood blight, but with good cultural and weather conditions you can still grow a good crop,” said Smay.

Colony focuses on growing larger-sized plants for the landscape and re-wholesale markets, Smay said.

“The quick flip is not our game. We do tried-and-true proven varieties, and we’ll let other people experiment and we’ll run with the good stuff. It’s not a get-rich-quick scheme but there’s always going to be a demand for big, nice plants.”

Smay said they focus on quality over quantity. “We’ll let the plants speak for themselves. We don’t want to ship out anything we wouldn’t put in our own yard. We say to our workers, ‘If you wouldn’t put it in the boss’ yard, why would you put it on the truck?’”

Judging from customer feedback on Google, the focus on quality is being noticed. At the same time, the pair can’t resist a few outliers. “Clinton and I we like little weirdo plants,” said Burke. “We will trial pretty much anything that makes sense for our lineup, and that’s worked out well. They added Itoh peonies, which can be fussy and expensive to grow, and are trialing larger size rose of Sharon (*Hibiscus syriacus* hybrids).

The star of the lineup is Colony’s exclusive ‘Skinny Skip® cherry laurel (*Prunus laurocerasus* ‘Skinny Skip’). “We introduced the plant to market and partnered with **Woodburn Nursery & Azaleas** to make sure we have good availability,” Smay said. “We have licensed Jason Karam with **C&J Nursery** to sell liners to other interested growers and he should have availability Spring/Summer 2025.”

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Colony Nursery

wide, making it perfect for tight spaces and urban gardens. It's a darker green than the typical form and a half-zone hardier, Burke said.

'Skinny Skip' took home a Retailer's Choice Award at the pair's debut appearance at the Farwest show this year.

Burke sees this fitting in with the high demand for columnar plants, including junipers and 'Dee Runk' boxwood, noting, "anything skinny and narrow has been very popular."

The nursery has about 15–25 employees that shifts seasonally, but Burke said, "We try to give our employees the opportunity to work year-round, and we buy them lunch and dinner as much as possible."

Smay points out they have a very low turnover rate. Several of the staff have been there for decades. His "number one guy" started about the time he was born, 39 years ago. "It's kind of humbling to be

their boss," he said.

For Burke, the relationships with the staff at the nursery and the industry are the best part of his new life. "It's the people at my nursery. I've become very close with a lot of our guys. I also want to say how friendly and willing to help other wholesale nurseries are. You can pick the biggest nursery you can think of, and the owner will sit down with you to answer questions and maybe give you a tour."

What's next?

Focused for decades on B&B plants, Colony is trialing a new pot-in-pot field. Burke said it can avoid some of the frost-related crop loss and root disturbance you see with B&B, and you can harvest in the summer.

He said they are also eyeing more mechanization. "We have a couple of digging machines which is helpful as our digging crew ages, and a potting line now,

which has been a lot of fun."

"Our hope is to invest in some more equipment to let them work with us as long as possible," Smay said, even if an excavator may cost \$100,000 – which means, "you gotta sell a lot of shrubbery."

When asked about Colony's vision for the next decade, Smay said "I'm not interested in 10 years — I'm interested in 50. It takes too long to grow these plants. I just planted a bunch of spruces that I won't harvest until my kids are out of college. In 50 years, I see Colony being owned by the Burke and Smay families, still putting out top-quality specimen material. Just being outside, growing plants and taking care of people is what we want to be doing." ©

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

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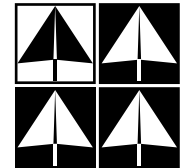
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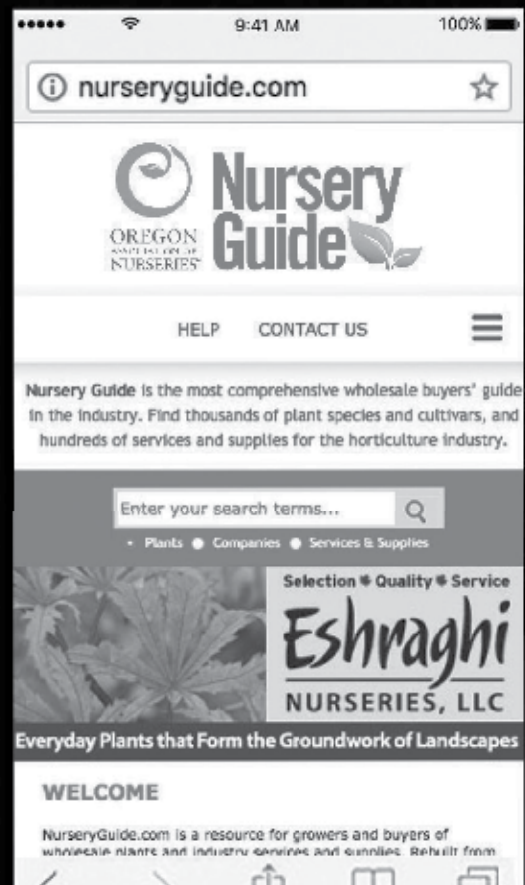
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GROWING KNOWLEDGE

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



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

North-facing



South-facing



Figure 1. The north- and south-facing sides of a red osier dogwood (*Cornus sericea* 'SMNCSBD' Arctic Fire® Yellow) grown in a black, plastic container for 10 weeks in full sun in McMinnville, Tennessee. PHOTO COURTESY OF OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

Benefits beyond branding

USDA research shows plant container color can prevent root damage from high temperatures

BY JAKE SHRECKHISE AND JIM OWEN

Roots of temperate woody plants are adapted to the cushy, below-ground climate, where temperature extremes are buffered by soil. In conventional above-ground, container-

based nursery production, the limited volume of a poorly insulated and highly porous substrate does little for root-zone climate control.

Encapsulate this soilless system in a black container exposed to 12 or more hours of direct sunlight and you get root-zone temperatures (RZTs) exceeding 120 F, even in the Willamette Valley. For roots, this can be a recipe for disaster!

In regions where winter temperatures periodically dip below freezing, nurseries have a standard operating procedure for

protecting container plants, specifically the roots, from cold injury (e.g., moving plants into overwintering houses, jamming containers, wrapping blocks with insulating fabric, etc.).

In contrast, strategies for protecting plant roots from the summer heat have been less unanimously adopted. This is likely because root-zone heat stress, especially in milder climates (like Oregon), is often a slow bleed, manifesting in container plants as stunted growth, increased susceptibility to diseases, impaired





Figure 2. Root-zone heat stress symptoms exhibited by flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida* 'Appalachian Snow'; left) and panicle hydrangea (*Hydrangea paniculata* 'SMHPLQF' Little Quick Fire®; right) when grown in spaced, black, 2-gallon containers in McMinnville, Tennessee.

PHOTO COURTESY OF OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

nutrient uptake, and other indirect consequences that can go unnoticed without a non-stressed “standard” plant for comparison.

Even when the RZT is high enough to kill roots directly, the brown, mushy roots are hidden by the container and the downstream effects on the shoots are not always immediately obvious. Nonetheless, as will be demonstrated later, the season-long cumulative effects of implementing strategies that reduce summer RZT may dramatically affect crop finishing times, plant quality, and even fertilizer longevity.

Critical temperature thresholds

The negative effects of high RZTs take on two different forms: direct injury and indirect injury.

Direct injury occurs when roots are exposed to a critically high temperature for just 20–35 minutes, and results in dead roots. The temperature threshold for direct injury of woody plant roots can range from 113–130 F, depending on the plant species, cultivar, and whether the roots were previously subjected to an acclimation period of relatively high, yet

sublethal, temperatures.

Roots that are the most susceptible to direct injury are in the south- and west-facing sides of above-ground containers, where peak temperatures are highest. Plants can develop a one-sided root system (Figure 1, Page 41) when they are grown in dark-colored containers that aren't protected from direct solar radiation in the summer.

Indirect injury occurs when the RZT remains above a lower threshold (≈ 104 F) than that required for direct injury but for a longer duration (≈ 5 –6 hours). Compared to direct injury, indirect injury is more subtle; root and shoot growth ceases, hormone signaling may be impaired, nutrient uptake is inhibited, and susceptibility to root rot and canker diseases increases.

In addition to stunted growth, woody plants with heat-stressed roots may have smaller-than-usual leaves that appear cupped or curled despite having sufficient water (Figure 2, above). If the heat-stress continues, common symptoms are brown leaf tips, general leaf chlorosis (yellowing), and ultimately, early leaf-drop.

Excessive heat in the container sub-

strate can also impact the life of your controlled-release fertilizer (CRF).

All leading polymer- and resin-coated CRFs used for container-based nursery production in the U.S. are highly influenced by temperature, with the nutrient release rate increasing with increasing temperature. As such, CRF manufacturers include on each label an estimated effective longevity based on the average substrate temperature (e.g., 7 months at 70 F, 6 months at 80 F, 5 months at 90 F).

When substrate temperatures exceed ≈ 104 F — a common occurrence in nurseries throughout the U.S. — CRFs “dump” nutrients into the substrate. This surplus of available mineral nutrients comes at a time when plant nutrient uptake is impaired due to heat stress. Thus, most of these nutrients will be leached from the container and enjoyed by the algae in your retention reservoir.

Managing root-zone heat

Despite being the industry standard nursery container for over 50 years, black plastic pots are terrible for root-zone heat management. Dark colors absorb solar

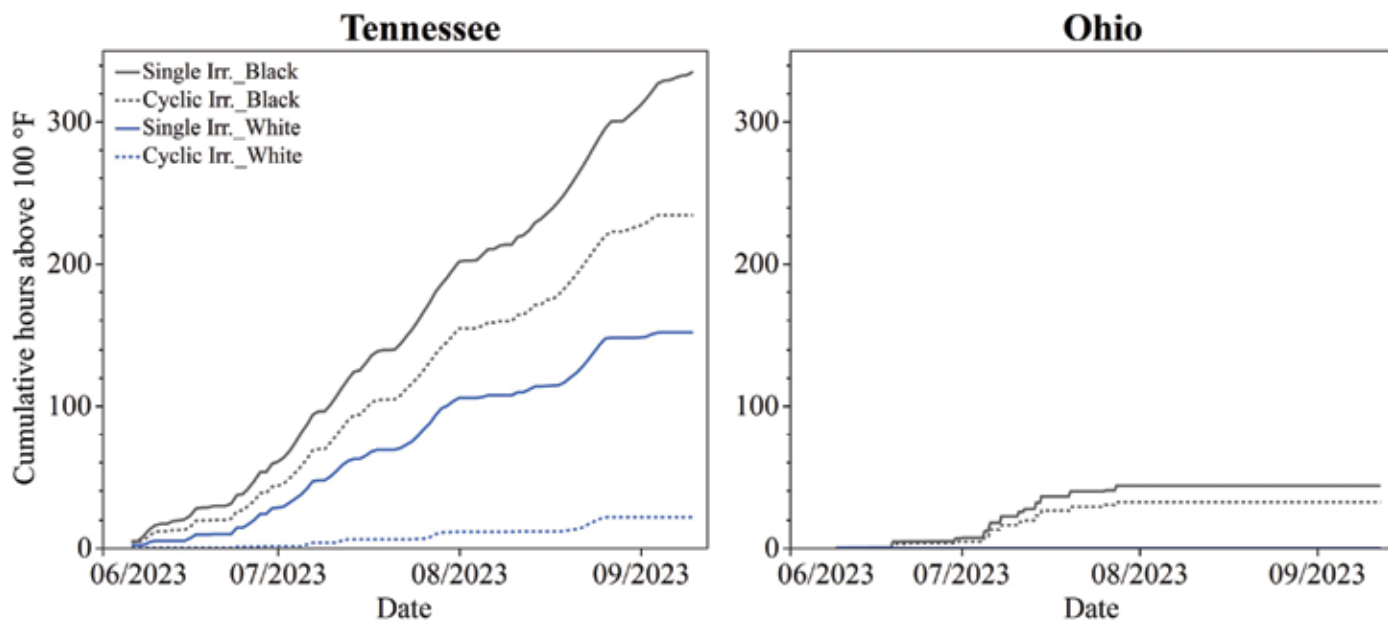


Figure 3. Cumulative time the root-zone temperature of shrub rose grown in McMinnville, Tennessee (left) or Wooster, Ohio (right) exceeded the lower threshold for indirect injury (100 F) in 2 gallon black or white containers irrigated once-daily at 7 a.m. (Single Irr.) or three times daily at 12, 3, and 6 p.m. (Cyclic Irr.). Temperature was recorded every 10 min in the western quadrant, 2" from the container wall, of three plants per treatment.

PHOTO COURTESY OF OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

radiation, effectively converting it to heat. Therefore, on a hot, sunny day, the substrate temperature in a black plastic container can be 30 F higher than the ambient air temperature, with peaks as high as 133 F in McMinnville, Tennessee.

Lighter-colored (optimally, white) containers reflect more and absorb less solar radiation, resulting in lower maximum daily RZTs compared to black containers.

Historically, the limited availability or high expense of light-colored containers was a serious barrier to their adoption by commercial nurseries. Nursery container manufacturers have since streamlined the production of affordable, white, plastic containers (5 gallon or less in size) that have an opaque, black interior wall to block sunlight from reaching the roots. These non-branded, white pots typically cost about 10-20% more than the equivalent black pots, which is a relatively small price to pay for the heat-stress protection they can provide to roots.

Over the past three growing seasons, USDA-ARS researchers Jake Shreckhise and Jim Owen have been conducting experiments concurrently replicated in McMinnville, Tennessee and Wooster, Ohio to explore how container color (black vs. white plastic) and irrigation schedule (once daily at 7 a.m. vs. three

times daily at 12, 3, and 6 p.m.; matched total daily irrigation) affect RZT and the resulting plant growth, CRF nutrient release rate, and nutrient leaching in two disparate climates. Below are some of the key takeaways from this research.

Tennessee site takeaways

After logging temperature every 10 minutes in the west-facing quadrant of fully exposed shrub rose (*Rosa* × ‘ChewPatout’ Oso Easy® Urban Legend®) root balls for 14 weeks, the cumulative time RZTs exceeded the lower threshold for indirect injury was 332 hours, 234 hours, 152 hours, and 22 hours for the once-daily irrigated black containers, cyclic irrigated black containers, once-daily irrigated white containers, and cyclic irrigated white containers, respectively (Figure 3).

Thus, in Tennessee, white containers had a stronger heat-mitigating effect than cyclic irrigation; however, the combination of these two practices, by far, provided the greatest protection from temperatures associated with root-zone heat stress.

The effect of container color on root and shoot growth varied depending on the species. Compared to black containers, white containers had little effect on crapemyrtle (*Lagerstroemia* × ‘Natchez’)

but dramatically improved growth and quality of all other evaluated species, including flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida* ‘Appalachian Snow’), red osier dogwood (*C. sericea* cultivars), eastern redbud (*Cercis canadensis* ‘Forest Pansy’), shrub rose, panicle hydrangea (*Hydrangea paniculata* cultivars), and smooth hydrangea (*H. arborescens* ‘NCHA3’ Invincibelle® Ruby).

In many of these species, including the heat-tolerant shrub rose, plants in white containers were up to twice the size as those in black containers when plants received once-daily overhead irrigation at 7 a.m. However, when plants were grown using cyclic afternoon irrigation, growth differences between the white and black containers were less dramatic.

To shed light onto container color effects on controlled-release fertilizer longevity, granules of a 6-month (80 F) CRF that had been incorporated into a pine bark substrate at pot-up were picked from the substrate after 14 weeks of outdoor production.

Analyzing the partially released CRF for nutrients revealed that the prills from the white containers had 18-35% more nitrogen, 14-18% more phosphorus, and 18-25% more potassium than those from black containers. Cyclic irrigation also conserved fertilizer nutrients, with CRF granules containing 8-15% more nitrogen, >>>

Growing Knowledge

phosphorus, and potassium than those collected from once-daily irrigated plants.

Periodically analyzing nutrients in the leachate draining from the containers showed consistently higher nitrogen and phosphorus concentrations from the black, once-daily irrigated containers compared to the other treatments.

To summarize, at the Tennessee site (AHS Heat Zone 7), using white containers alone and especially in combination with cyclic afternoon irrigation produced larger, higher-quality plants while conserving CRF and limiting the amount of wasted nitrogen and phosphorus leaving the container through the drainage holes.

Ohio site take-aways

Between June 6 and September 10 in Wooster, Ohio (AHS Heat Zone 4), the cumulative time RZTs in the western-facing quadrant of shrub rose root balls exceeded the lower threshold for indirect injury was 44 hours for once-daily irrigated black containers and 32 hours for cyclic irrigated black containers (Figure 3, Page 43).

In white containers, regardless of irrigation schedule, RZTs never exceeded 100 F. Despite these differences, white containers did not notably improve shoot or root growth in shrub rose, crape myrtle, flowering dogwood, panicle hydrangea, or smooth hydrangea.

One noteworthy exception was when red osier dogwood liners were unintentionally exposed to *Botryosphaeria* canker a few days after transplanting into white or black containers; those in black containers were noticeably more severely infected than those in white containers. Instead of terminating the study, we managed the disease as a grower would — pruning out infected stems and applying fungicide — and then continued evaluating the plants.

At 10 weeks after transplanting, shoots of the red osier dogwoods in white containers were approximately 50% larger than those in black containers, regardless of irrigation schedule (Figure 4, above). Cyclic afternoon irrigation, compared to once-daily morning irrigation, also

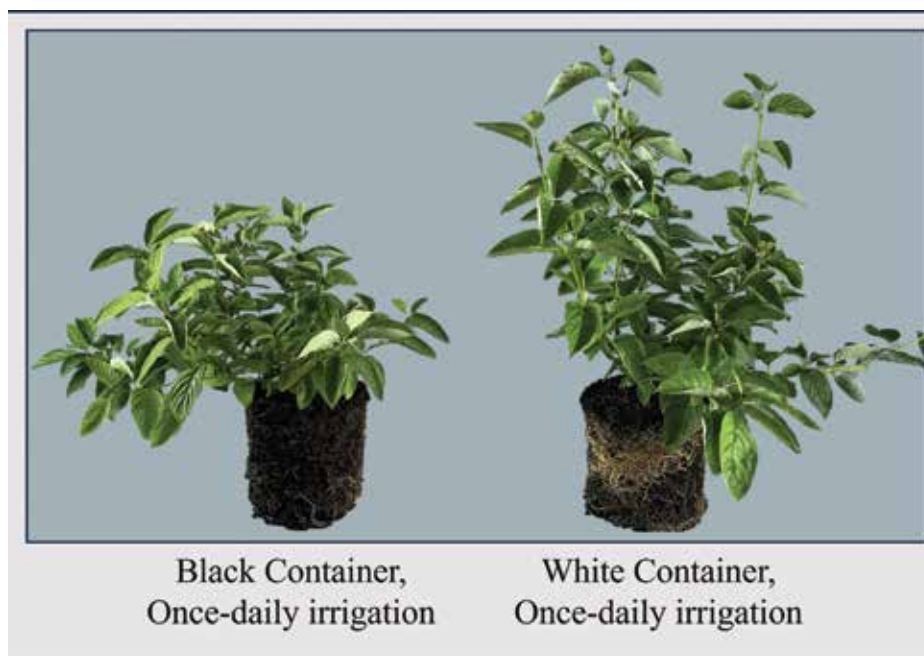


Figure 4. Red osier dogwood (*Cornus sericea* 'SMNCSBD' Arctic Fire® Yellow) after being grown in Wooster, Ohio for 10 weeks in black or white plastic 2-gallon containers under once-daily overhead irrigation. The south-facing side of the root balls were oriented toward the camera. Photo courtesy of Oregon State University

improved shoot and root growth, but to a lesser degree than white containers. When the experiment was repeated a year later using a different red osier dogwood cultivar and preventing canker with preemptive fungicide sprays, plant growth and quality was essentially the same across container color and irrigation treatments.

Controlled-release fertilizer granules collected from the substrate in white containers 10–14 weeks after transplanting, depending on the year, had 7–12% more nitrogen, phosphorus, and potassium compared to those gathered from black containers, whereas irrigation treatment had no effect on CRF release. While leachate nutrient concentrations trended higher from black vs. white containers, a consistent statistically significant difference was not detected.

A frequently asked question regarding container color choice, particularly in the northern U.S., is whether the warmer temperatures in black containers in the spring give plants a “head start.”

To investigate this, black and white 1-gallon panicle hydrangeas and 2-gallon red osier dogwoods were removed from the overwintering house in early April, placed on an outdoor gravel pad, and monitored weekly for flushing and stem

elongation. No differences were detected between container colors in the aerial portions of the plants in either Tennessee or Ohio, although early-spring root growth should be compared in future studies before making definitive conclusions.

Are white pots right for you?

In the south and regions with high solar radiation during the summer months, using a root-zone heat mitigation strategy appears to be a *necessity* for maximizing quality and minimizing finishing time of most container-grown woody landscape plant species.

Cyclic afternoon irrigation and using white or light-colored containers are just two tools in the toolbox. Overhead shade cloth, jamming plants together until their canopies can provide shade, using porous-walled containers (e.g., air-pruning plastic, fabric, or fiber pots), or adopting a pot-in-pot systems are all improvements — with varying degrees of efficacy — over solid-walled, black plastic in full sun.

Keep in mind that a plant produced in black containers can lose the south-facing half of its root system after less than a day of exposure to full sun. In McMinnville, we found that when plants in white or black containers were faced

with this scenario due to trimming or removing the shade-providing neighboring plants on a hot July day, those in white containers had substantially less root death than those in black containers. The same would likely be true when setting plants outside the shade house for a customer pickup. Thus, relying on shade, alone, could be risky as plants get shuffled around the nursery.

In higher latitudes, like our Ohio trial site or the Pacific Northwest, the use of white containers and other practices for managing root-zone heat are similar to an insurance policy. They may not provide noticeable benefits for every species every year, but when the next “heat dome” or disease outbreak comes around, you’ll be glad you had them.

To determine whether using white containers would be beneficial under your current production system, consider purchasing a pallet of 1- or 2-gallon white containers and doing an on-site, side-by-side comparison in some of your “problem species.” There is little to lose and, potentially, much to gain. ☺

Drs. Jake Shreckhise (Jacob.Shreckhise@USDA.gov) and Jim Owen (Jim.Owen@USDA.gov) are USDA-ARS Research Horticulturists located at the Floral and Nursery Plants Research Unit in McMinnville, Tennessee and Application Technology Research Unit in Wooster, Ohio, respectively. This research was funded in part by the Floriculture and Nursery Research Initiative in a collaborative project with Drs. Jeb Fields (Louisiana State University) and Lloyd Nackley (Oregon State University) titled, ‘A Revolution in the Pot: Establishing Next-Generation Management Criteria for Container Crop Production’.



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A year to take stock and be grateful



Jeff Stone
OAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

It is an understatement that 2024 has been a year full of anxiety.

There's been a contentious election season, uncertain economic conditions, and the emergence of challenges for nurseries specifically. These range from pest and diseases brought about by climate conditions, to the ever-rising cost of doing business.

We should also not lose sight of the positives that our great industry is experiencing. High-value, quality green goods continue to dominate the national plant landscape, and there's been exciting innovation in production. Our industry, despite all challenges, remains strong.

The annual christmas photo

Christmas in the Stone house is a joyous occasion. Having a full house — with my grown daughters around the table slinging comments — makes my heart full. The year-to-year growth and progress of the family is measured in our family photos.

The same can be said of our industry. Every holiday season is a time to take the family photo. We can celebrate being part of something special, mourn those who we have lost over the past year, and look forward to the year ahead with optimism and the promise of a better future.

A year like no other

You all know that I am a political nerd. I cannot help it, but what happens in the political ecosystem impacts the industry more than one might think. Both at the state and federal level, elected officials will be buoyed by victory and the agendas of the majority.

But I have to caution you that very few elected officials understand what agriculture does or how they do it — never mind the economics of production agriculture. This is why we and AmericanHort work to educate urban legislators, bring them to see rural farming operations, and

build relationships.

This year, OAN has been hyper-focused on narrowing the knowledge gaps that exist at the state and federal levels. We have trained our members to wield influence in any setting they may find themselves in. Some particular members deserve praise for opening up their operations for legislator tours. This is not a closed loop. I welcome any member who wishes to show off their operation, to raise your hand. It's your chance to directly tell elected officials what keeps you up at night. You are our best spokesperson.

When a problem emerges that impacts the industry, such as we have seen on pests and diseases this year, nobody attacks the issue harder than the OAN and its leadership. Oregon's growers have a well-deserved reputation for clean plants, and state/federal regulators need to know it, so the trust is there when a new issue arises.

Just know that the OAN is the first in and the last out when advocating on your behalf — no matter where that discussion needs to happen in the country.

A razor focus on you — the member

I often hear from our board members that until they became more involved, they had no idea about the sheer number of programs and services the association provides to members. It is true we provide enormous benefits that are tailored to small, medium and large operations. It is intentional.

We look at what will make your business life easier. We ask what we can provide at a lower cost than you can get on your own, thanks to economies of scale. I will admit — sometimes we do not tell the association's story well enough. My personality is not one to jump up and down and shout out the commitment to service your OAN staff provides day in and day out. Our world is where YOU are, not in the office in Wilsonville.

This year was a big year of planning and implementation for the OAN. We launched the HR Professional Leadership

Group on the heels of the self-generated NexGen leadership group being launched at the end of 2023.

We are taking our marketing approach down to the proverbial studs. We elevated Beth Farmer, our longest serving staff member, as director of marketing. We have given her the resources to be responsive to your marketing needs and our core mission of making Oregon the preferred option for horticultural products in the country.

Most exciting is our upcoming innovation with **NurseryGuide.com**. The site will be getting a total makeover to help turbocharge growers' and buyers' ability to find each other.

One industry, a big family, and the promise ahead in 2025

This industry is incredible, innovative and makes our planet better. I am so excited to see the next generation of leaders taking the reigns and making the industry better. We have great promise and opportunity in the new year, and I am fully committed to do everything in my ability to push for your success.

As we gather for the holiday season, take a good look around at your family, the people you work with, and the community you are a part of. It is special. I have been at OAN for 19 years and I do not hide my adoration and love for the industry and the members. You are the ones who make this industry special and be all that it is. It is the family picture that is in my mind that I treasure. Have a wonderful holiday season. ☺

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