

Digger^{leaf}

JANUARY 2025

Raising your retail game

Marketing more effectively

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Becoming a destination

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Ornamental grasses

PAGE 25

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Linkage and flow

It is always good to get off the farm. Every time I visit a nursery, I come back with new ideas and fresh energy. I'd like to use this column to share some of those ideas and introduce you to the people who inspired them.

It's a blustery morning today in western Oregon. The driving wind brings me to the doorstep of **Garland Nursery** in Corvallis, where I receive a warm welcome from Justin Read, the new owner, and Mitch Goodlove-Pyles, who I've come to meet.

Mitch is a native of Corvallis and has been with Garland for nearly four years as their tree and shrub team lead. As we walk to the improvement he is excited to show me, he tells me about his growing up at Garland and how he would be dropped off at their nursery playground while his mother shopped for flowers. It's clear that he is enthusiastic about passing on his love of gardening to the next generation, including his toddler son.

We walk past off-season benches, cleared and waiting for plants. They'll hold a riot of color and possibility for gardeners next spring. For now, they sit silent, biding their time. We arrive at a handsome wooden gate to what used to be a far corner of the retail nursery.

Mitch explains that this corner would hold some trees and a few shrubs, but it was seldom visited by customers still browsing all the color at the heart of the nursery. It is now home to many of their production greenhouses, which Mitch and his coworker Travis personally moved. Mitch tells me that condensing some of their retail footprint has made for a more creative and approachable space for their customers.

Bringing the production closer to the heart of the garden center has also meant they can respond much more quickly to customer demand. Now, when a shopper asks for a second beautiful hellebore in a matching color, someone doesn't have to



Mitch Goodlove-Pyles and his team's improvements at Garland Nursery have allowed them to bring off-season production tasks closer to the nursery. PHOTO BY EVE MEYERS

travel 15 minutes round-trip to fetch it. When you leave a customer, "You can lose someone mid-list," informs Mitch, "which is no good" — they might decide against a purchase and move on.

Now, Garland's excellent staff can continue to help customers. Production staff are also closer to their teammates. "This is amazing! It's all going to be right here?!" exclaimed Josefa, Garland's production manager.

Mitch and his team's improvements have also allowed them to bring off-season production tasks closer. Now, when they flock Christmas trees for the holiday season, they are able to make them in smaller batches, flocking fresh trees rather than sitting on excess inventory after Christmas. Now that's a Happy New Year!

After a wonderful visit, I'm left thinking about how bringing tasks closer together isn't just about efficiency. Mitch and his coworkers have clearly found that it also benefits their customers and builds stronger teams. Sounds like a worthwhile New Year's resolution to me. ☺



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

FREE FIRST AID/CPR CLASSES AT OAN

Need a first aid and CPR certification renewal for yourself or your employees? For the first time, the Oregon Association of Nurseries is proud to offer first aid/CPR training to members at no charge through OAN's partnership with the State Accident & Insurance Fund (SAIF). The certification is valid for two years and participants receive hands-on first aid and CPR training in small class sizes. The classes are offered in English and Spanish from 8 a.m.-12:30 p.m. The sessions in English are January 15, February 19, March 19, June 17, July 16, September 17, October 15, November 19, December 17 and in Spanish on January 16, February 20, March 20, June 18, July 17, September 18, October 16, November 20 and December 18. Classes are held at the OAN office, 29751 S.W. Town Center Loop West, Wilsonville, Oregon. Register at OAN.org/Page/CPRclass. Download the English and Spanish First Aid/CPR breakroom flyer at OAN.org/2025CPRFlyer.

VARIOUS DATES

SAIF'S AG SAFETY SEMINARS

SAIF is continuing its agricultural safety seminar series. Attend one of the free seminars between now and March in several cities around Oregon. Anyone working in the agricultural industry is welcome. Small employers attending the seminar will meet one of the four requirements that exempt small agricultural operations from random OSHA inspections. The Oregon Landscape Contractors Board has approved the seminar for four hours of continuing education credits. Four producer credits will be available, pending approval from the Oregon Department of Consumer and Business Services. Seminars are held from 9:30 a.m.-2:30 p.m. and include lunch. SAIF is also offering webinars in English on March 17-18 and Spanish on March 19-20. The cities and dates: Bandon, February 24; Central Point, January 27; Clackamas, February 19; Hermiston, January 13; Hillsboro, January 7; Hood River, February 11; Klamath Falls, March 10; Mt. Angel, February 4 and March 13; Salem, February 6, The Dallas, January 22; Wilsonville, February 26. For the address of each seminar location, more information or to register, go to SAIF.com/AgSeminars or call 800-285-8525.

JANUARY 6-8

UTAH GREEN

Presented by the Utah Nursery & Landscape Association, the event will be held at Mountain America Expo Center, 9575 State St., Sandy, Utah. The show features green industry vendors from across the nation. For information or to register, go to UtahGreen.org.

JANUARY 8-10

MID-ATLANTIC NURSERY TRADE SHOW

The Mid-Atlantic Nursery Trade Show will once



PHOTO COURTESY OF CAPITAL PRESS

JANUARY 15-17

NORTHWEST AG SHOW

The 54th Northwest Agricultural Show will take place at the Oregon State Fair and Expo Center, 2330 17th St. N.E., in Salem, Oregon. The annual event focuses on emerging trends in agriculture including small farming, technology, and education. For more information, go to NorthwestAgShow.com.

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. For information or to register, go to MANTS.com.

JANUARY 24

2025 DUNN CARNEY AG SUMMIT

Dunn Carney's Ag Summit returns to the Salem Convention Center 7:30 a.m.-1:30 p.m. Friday, January 24 at the Salem Convention Center, 200 Commercial St. S.E. Enjoy a morning of lively panel discussions and presentations covering recent regulatory developments, legal issues, and best practices in the agriculture industry. Complimentary breakfast and lunch are provided. There is no cost to attend. This year's topics include solar energy, water rights, labor and a legislative update. OAN Executive Director Jeff Stone will give an update on the association's legislative priorities for 2025.

JANUARY 28-30

PROGREEN EXPO

ProGreen EXPO is the only green industry conference in the Rocky Mountain Region of its kind. More than 5,000 green industry professionals gather every year at the Colorado Convention Center, 700 14th St., Denver, Colorado, to gain vital knowledge and skills

to improve business, educate employees and discover the latest information for the upcoming season. For information or to register, go to ProGreenExpo.com.

FEBRUARY 6

NOR CAL LANDSCAPE & NURSERY SHOW

The 2024 Nor Cal Landscape & Nursery Show will take place in the San Mateo Event Center, 1346 Saratoga Drive, San Mateo, California. The show features more than 250 exhibitors and educational seminars. To register, go to NorCalTradeShow.org. For more information, contact Margo Cheuvront, MargoC@Frontiernet.net or 530-458-3190.

FEBRUARY 14

USDA CENSUS OF HORTICULTURE

The deadline to respond to the 2025 USDA Census of Horticulture Specialties is February 14. The census, taken every five years, paints a complete statistical picture of the nursery and greenhouse industry. It helps operators as well as public officials and industry advocates understand the scope and impact of the industry, which in turn can help guide their decision making. All individual responses are kept confidential. Data is published only in aggregate form, ensuring that no individual nursery can be identified in the published results. The census was mailed to more than 2,000 horticultural operations in Oregon and 40,000 nationwide and responses are required by law. ©

OAN honors the industry's best



Award winners pose after the President's Awards Banquet at the OAN convention at the Salishan Coastal Resort in Gleneden Beach. From left: Jeff Stone, Todd Nelson, Ellen Egan, Steve Shropshire, Janet Poot, Tom Brewer, Kyle Fessler, Ken Hector, Bob Terry, Erika Willis, Luke Staehely, Mikaela Eaton, Elizabeth Brentano, Emma Staehely, Skye Cuevas-Arevalo, Henry Golb, Dalton Dunn, Amanda Staehely, Grant Staehely, and Jerry Simnitt.

PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

Several of the nursery and greenhouse industry's finest servants received their deserved recognition at the President's Awards Banquet, which concluded the annual 2024 OAN Convention on Saturday, November 16. The convention took place at Salishan Coastal Resort, Gleneden Beach, Oregon and had more than 200 OAN members in attendance.

The award winners included the following:
Retailer of the Year: Portland Nursery
Emerging Leader of the Year, sponsored by **AgWest Farm Credit**: Farwest Show Committee Chair Mikaela Eaton, **Eschenfelder Farms**

Member Group of the Year: NexGen
Distinguished Member of the Horticultural Allied Trades Award: Scott Renfro, Harrell's

Political Awareness Award: OAN past president Kyle Fessler, Woodburn Nursery & Azaleas

Special Service Award: Ken Hector, The Oregon Garden

Clayton W. Hannon Distinguished Service Award: Janet Poot, Grower's Nursery Supply

Outstanding Service Award: OAN past president Todd Nelson, Bountiful Farms Nursery Inc.

Additionally, four OAN Honorary Life memberships were awarded for lifetime contributions to the industry. They were OAN past president Mike "Mac" McCarter (2004); OAN past president and AmericanHort past chair Bob Terry; Ellen Egan, retired owner of **Egan Gardens**; and longtime OAN legal counsel Steve Shropshire of **Jordan Ramis P.C.**

Finally, outgoing OAN president Amanda Staehely presented her traditional President's Five Star Performance Awards for key contributions to her year as president. They included Tom Brewer, **The HC Companies**; OAN Executive Director Jeff Stone; her father, Jerry Simnitt, **Simnitt Nursery**; and her family, including husband Wayne Staehely and their children Luke, Emma and Grant Staehely.

Portland Nursery was honored as Retailer of the Year for its overall industry contributions since its founding in 1907. The nursery was purchased by father and son Bob and Jon Denney in 1980 and they

took it to new levels of success. The nursery recently has transitioned to a new generation of leadership under Jon Denney's daughters, Jill Dunsmuir and Sara Ori, and their husbands, Troy Dunsmuir and Brandon Ori. They follow their family's legacy and new tagline, "We grow gardeners," as their guiding roadmap.

Eaton of Eschenfelder Farms was chosen Emerging Leader of the Year. Involved in the nursery industry since age 15, she moved to Oregon five years ago to manage Serendipity Nursery, where she helped the nursery expand its growth and sales. In 2023 she accepted the position of manager at Eschenfelder Farms. She has served in multiple roles with OAN, including secretary of the Clackamas Chapter (2019) and more recently, chairwoman of the Farwest Show (2024 and 2025).

NexGen was chosen Member Group of the Year. The group began when Elizabeth Brentano (**Brentano's Tree Farm**) and Trystan Lewis (**JLPN Inc.**) wanted to create a group to connect new and up-and-coming people of any age and any industry role, allowing them >>

Convention

grow their networks. The group has held several social and networking events. In December 2023, NexGen became the OAN's first official Nursery Professional and Leadership Group, an arrangement that gives them access to support from the OAN staff and board, while keeping their identity and mission intact.

Renfro of Harrell's was chosen for the Distinguished Member of the Horticultural Allied Trades Award. Renfro's career path began as a production manager for Teufel Nursery and has since taken him to Wilco Agronomy, **Wilbur Ellis** and now Harrell's. He has been an active member of the OAN Research Committee from 2010–present, chairing it from 2013–2016. He served on the Willamette Chapter board in 2012 and the Government Relations Committee from 2016–2018.

Fessler was chosen for the Political Awareness Award for his longtime service as an outstanding advocate for the industry. He served as OAN president in 2020. His past awards received include the 2016 Emerging Leader of the Year Award and the 2020 Outstanding Service Award. His recognition this time is primarily for industry advocacy, and work to help elect nursery-friendly candidates to political office.

Hector was chosen for the Special Service Award for his work in founding and elevating The Oregon Garden. He supported the garden as mayor of Silverton in 1997, when he was present for the groundbreaking, and served on several of its committees during its early years. He was appointed chairman of The Oregon Garden Board in 2020 and has played a key role in repaying the garden's debts from its early years. He has also rekindled the garden's relationship with the Oregon Association of Nurseries, including adding two OAN members to the garden's board. Under his leadership, the garden has added an oversight board which includes a landscape gardener to fine tune the garden and return it to a world class status.

Poot was chosen for the Clayton W. Hannon Distinguished Service Award, which is named for the former executive direc-



Marika Sitz of Jordan Ramis PC points to attorney Steven Shropshire as he shows off his llama tie, a commemoration of his experience handling contractual matters involving the appearance of Caesar the No Drama Llama at the 2023 Farwest Show. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL



J. Frank Schmidt III and his wife Barbara enjoy cocktails at the awards banquet. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

tor of OAN. She has worked for Grower's Nursery Supply since 2003. She joined the Willamette Chapter board in 2011 and served as secretary and then vice president before becoming president in 2017 for an unprecedented six-year stint. She provided continuous leadership to promote chapter activities and events, helping the chapter win Chapter of the Year in 2018.

Nelson, owner of Bountiful Farms

Nursery Inc., was chosen for the Outstanding Service Award. He and his nephew and business partner, Blake Nelson, have led Bountiful Farms to new levels of success. Nelson served as OAN president in 2023, has lobbied in the state and federal capitals, and has chaired the OAN's Revenue Restructuring Task Force the last two years.

McCarter, past OAN president from 2004, was honored with an OAN Honorary Life Membership. He served on several OAN committees including the Yard, Garden and Patio Show committee and more recently has been an advocate for the Greater Idaho movement.

Terry, past OAN president from 2008, was honored with an OAN Honorary Life Membership. Bob has been involved with several businesses throughout his career, including as owner of Fisher Farms. He served as chairman of the American Nursery and Landscape Association as it was becoming AmericanHort, and was elected to serve on the Washington County, Oregon Board of Commissioners. Over the years, Terry received numerous OAN awards, including the Special Service Award in 1998, the Political Awareness Award in 2011, the Pacific Coast Nurseryman Outstanding Service Award in 2009, the Outstanding Stewardship Award in 2011,



Randy Skinner shows off James Bond-themed posters of Jeff Stone and Chris Robinson at the Leonard Adams Insurance hospitality suite at the OAN convention. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

and President's Five-Star Performance Awards in 2006 and 2012. He has served on several OAN committees, including Government Relations, the Oregon Nurseries Political Action Committee, Insurance Committee, Nominating Committee and Finance Committee.

Egan, former owner of Egan Gardens and now retired, was honored with an OAN Honorary Life Membership. Starting in 1982, she worked at Egan Gardens under her father, Bill, and helped transition the nursery from wholesale only to wholesale and retail. She was honored as Young Nursery Person of the year in 1989 and Retailer of the Year in 1993. She took over the nursery in 1994 when Bill passed. She maintained her involvement with various chapters and programs and often partnered with charity groups to help them raise money through plant and poinsettia sales. She retired and sold the business in 2023.

Shropshire, a partner at Jordan Ramis PC and longtime legal counsel for OAN, was honored with an OAN Honorary Life Membership for his decades of advice, support and leadership for the OAN Board of Directors, the OAN Government Relations Committee and OAN members generally through the Legal Access Program. He's been an invaluable guide and friend of the industry on numerous issues, including most prominently the critical issue of water law and water rights.

Brewer (The HC Companies) was honored by outgoing president Staehely with a

President's Five Star Performance Award. She selected him due to his support and encouragement to get involved at the board level, as well as his continued support and guidance as she served in leadership.

Nelson (Bountiful Farms and Nursery Inc.) was also honored with a President's Five Star Performance Award, for his support throughout president Staehely's year.

Stone, OAN executive director, was also honored with a President's Five Star Performance Award for always going the extra mile for the industry and serving as a strong advocate and defender.

Staehely also chose her father, OAN Past President (2012) Jerry Simmitt of Simmitt Nursery, to receive a President's Five Star Performance Award, for providing an upbringing on the farm that she still treasures, and for providing support and guidance for her on her journey as a nursery owner and OAN president in her own right.

Staehely's final Five Star Performance Award went to her husband, Wayne Staehely, and their children, Luke, Emma and Grant Staehely, for their support and encouragement during her year as president. ☺

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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.

Applications open for next HRI Leadership Academy Class

Are you passionate about making a meaningful impact in the horticultural field? Are committed to giving back to the industry, community, or your company? Apply for the Horticultural Research Institute (HRI) Leadership Academy Class of 2026.

The HRI Leadership Academy is designed for professionals at all levels who aspire to take on greater leadership roles. The one-year program teaches participants business strategy, leadership and people management, advocacy, and value chain management skills. Preference is given to applicants with seven years of leadership experience and five years of industry experience. The application period closes February 7, 2025.

Oregon Association of Nursery members who have participated in prior HRI Leadership Academy classes include Crystal Cady (Northwest Nursery Buyers Association), Jonathan Jasinski (**Microplant Nurseries Inc.**) and Kyle Fessler (**Woodburn Nursery & Azaleas**).

For more information or to apply, go to HRILeadershipAcademy.org.



Closeup of thrips feeding. The OAN Research Committee recommended \$26,000 in funding to the Horticultural Research Unit, USDA-AR, for development of a pheromone-based control of thrips for nursery crops. PHOTO COURTESY OF OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

OAN RESEARCH COMMITTEE MAKES FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS

The OAN Research Committee has recommended a slate of nine nursery research projects for 2025, funded by Oregon Department of Agriculture's nursery license research assessment fee paid by all nurseries in the state.

For 2025, available funding for industry research was \$347,558.40, and \$342,947 was awarded, with the difference being carried over for future projects.

The chosen projects will address plant breeding, fumigation, pests, soil, and crop inputs, among other things. Many of the projects funded this year will eventually be written up in *Digger*, published by OAN, so the industry can benefit from the knowledge gained from this research.

"We consistently hear that the state values OAN as a partner to help identify and fill industry needs with this research funding," OAN Executive Director Jeff Stone said. "The resulting research constantly moves the industry forward. It helps us deal with new pest and disease threats, or improve production methods

to help growers operate profitably. We are staunch defenders of the research program and believe it's money well spent."

The OAN Research Committee is a subcommittee of the OAN Government Relations Committee and is comprised of OAN members. By state law, it's their duty to choose projects that reflect nursery industry priorities that will benefit industry members.

In 2024, through an inaugural Research Summit held during the Farwest Show between OAN members, ODA and USDA-ARS, and additional meetings between OAN and ODA, priorities, proposal criteria and funding sources, both federal and local, were further defined.

The funded projects, as recommended by the committee, include the following:

- New cultivars of nursery plants with novel ornamental traits and disease resistance: Ryan Contreras, professor and associate head, Oregon State University Department of Horticulture, \$57,482
- Developing sterile forms of economically important nursery crops: Ryan Contreras, professor and associate head, OSU Department of Horticulture, \$59,322

- Embryo rescue of wide cherry laurel hybrids: Beth Rowan, assistant professor of plant biotechnology, OSU Department of Horticulture, \$20,065

- Developing pulse electricity as a fumigant alternative in nursery seedling beds: Marcelo L. Moretti, associate professor, OSU Department of Horticulture, \$26,678

- Development of bioactive peptides as insecticidal agents for nursery pests: Man-Yeon Choi, research entomologist, Horticultural Crops Research Unit, USDA-ARS, \$29,000

- Development of the pheromone-based control of thrips for nursery crops: Man-Yeon Choi, research entomologist, Horticultural Crops Research Unit, USDA-AR, \$26,000

- Initial assessments of soil

carbon flux in nursery systems: Lloyd Nackley, researcher, associate professor, OSU Nursery Production and Greenhouse Management, \$66,400

- North Willamette Research and Extension Center nursery production internship: Lloyd Nackley, associate professor, OSU Nursery Production and Greenhouse Management, \$9,000

- Continued investigations of light and water needs of high-value nursery plants: Lloyd Nackley, associate professor, OSU Nursery Production and Greenhouse Management, \$24,000

- Additionally, the committee continued OAN's longstanding commitment to contribute to the Horticultural Research Institute, which is AmericanHort's research arm, by allocating \$25,000 for it.

Announcements

WURDINGER UNVEILS NEW COMPACT SOIL MIXER

Wurdinger Manufacturing Inc.

(Silverton Oregon) has introduced a new CMS Compact Mixing System that is a starting point for nurseries looking to integrate an automated potting system.

The CMS Compact Mixing System can produce 10 to 60 yards of soil per hour, 400 plus yards a day, "significantly enhancing production capacity while ensuring consistency and control over soil quality," said Aage Wurdinger. "One of the great advantages of this system is its expandability. Customers can always add one or more components to an existing system, providing an excellent opportunity for the system to grow alongside the business."

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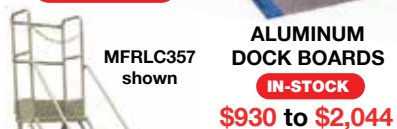
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Northwest News



Bret Cromly

MONROVIA ANNOUNCES LEADERSHIP CHANGES AT NURSERIES

Monrovia has made leadership changes at its flagship Oregon nursery as well as its nursery in Georgia and corporate offices.

Brett Cromly is now the general manager of the Dayton, Oregon nursery, Monrovia's largest. Brett previously led the company's Georgia location as general manager and will be bringing key learnings from his role there to Monrovia's flagship nursery. Cromly began working for Monrovia in 2017, first as an inside sales representative. He was quickly promoted to regional sales manager at the Georgia nursery, and then he became the general manager of the nursery in 2021.

Greg Rusow, the most recent general manager of the Oregon nursery, will be moving into a new role as vice president of production practices across all nurseries.



Greg Rusow

During his long tenure with

Monrovia, Rusow has previously served as general manager at all three Monrovia nurseries. Although still based in Oregon, Rusow will be traveling frequently to the other nurseries to advise on best practices in growing techniques.

Scott Andrews is returning to Monrovia as the general manager of the Georgia Nursery. With nearly 14 years of experience at that location, Scott's methodical approach to production and deep leadership experience at the nursery will help him continue expanding the nursery's plant selection to meet market demands.

Toni Bielli will be moving back to Monrovia's California nursery as its new regional sales Manager. Toni was previously an inside sales representative in the California region, and in recent years served as the nursery's national senior account manager for its Lowe's business.

Naturally native



A Pacific Northwest native rose, *Rosa nutkana* (Nootka rose), is a thicket-forming shrub and can grow in sun to part shade. PHOTO BY ROBERT L. CARR, OREGON FLORA

T*oxicodendron diversilobum* is a native plant found throughout much of the Pacific Northwest. It is easy to grow and will thrive in a variety of different environments. It does not seem to have a particularly favorite environment because it can grow in wetlands, stream banks, evergreen forests, and hillsides.

It can grow as a shrub, a vine on a tree, or a vine running on the ground. The berries tend to linger on the stems and are a source of food for birds in the winter and deer often browse on the leaves. In the fall, the foliage can turn a brilliant red.

It is part of our natural environment, but is it a plant for the home gardener? No, I think not — because it is poison oak!

Certainly gardeners are not passionate about growing most harmful plants. It is always important to remember the well known rhyme that reminds us that; “Leaves of three, let it be. If it’s hairy, it’s a berry. If it’s shiny, watch your hiney.”

Now that you are smiling about native plants, let’s get a bit more serious about the discussion.

The above example is just an extreme example of how confusing it can be to gardeners, especially novice gardeners, when they hear all the benefits of native plants. The words “native plant garden”

convey a “feel good” buzz. For gardeners, these words conjure up thoughts of helping the environment, providing a good source of food for wildlife (birds, bees, and some small mammals), and gardening with plants that are drought tolerant and perhaps need no extra water in the summer months.

Reflecting on native plants, perhaps we need to try to define just what a native plant is.

When Oregon and Washington became states, boundaries were drawn between them as well as the borders of California and in Canada, British Columbia. Plants were probably not considered when state lines were drawn.

So, when we consider planting native plants, are we referring to those plants that are only native to Oregon, or only to Washington, and maybe southern British Columbia and northern California? Does the Columbia River really divide what plants we can call natives plants to Oregon and not Washington? With birds dropping seeds throughout this region, if a plant can grow and thrive, is it a native?

The answer to that last question is a resounding no. Consider *Hedera helix* (English ivy), which was imported from England, as an example. It is not only not native but is on noxious weed lists in both



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.

Oregon and Washington. It thrives in our environment, especially in the western parts of both states, and many gardeners consider it native because of its pervasive habit.

So, whether a plant is native or not can create confusion for the gardener and this is where an independent garden center can shine with knowledge to share. The garden center staff can expound on the many reasons, especially environmentally, to plant native plants in home landscapes. They can also assist gardeners in selecting the right plants for their needs. We are very fortunate to have such a wide palette of plants to choose from here in the Pacific Northwest.

The location for planting native trees and shrubs can be critical. Think of walking through a natural wooded area and notice the many ferns. Many of these will grow equally well in a home garden setting with the right conditions. Observe where the ferns are growing. Is it a sunny location, shady, or a mix of sun/shade? Often the labels on native plants do not give enough information for a novice gardener.

Once again, this is a perfect place for the garden center staff to shine. They can assist the gardener in selecting appropriate plants such as those discussed next. The list presented here is nowhere near the actual number of native plants that are available. These plants are only mentioned as a starting point for gardeners wanting native plants in their landscape.

There are many *Arctostaphylos* (manzanita) plants native to our region. These can make superb landscape plants. Most have small urn-shaped white or pink flowers in late winter or early spring. Some have very attractive and colorful fruits. ➤

What I'm Hearing

However, their best-known quality is the stem and trunk color which varies from brilliant copper to brown and shades in between. Often the bark is peeling which is another appealing attribute to this plant.

There are shrub-like forms that can get quite tall and other selections that are ground covers and hug the ground. They need excellent drainage but can usually grow well in what would often be considered as poor soil. For someone beginning with native plants, this would be a good starter plant for a sunny location.

Ceanothus is another shrub that would be a good starter plant for a native landscape area. While most are native to California, there are some native to Oregon and if a plant is just across the California/Oregon border, can't we call it a native?

Our own native rose, *Rosa nutkana* (Nootka rose), is a thicket-forming shrub and can grow in sun to part shade. The



An easy to grow native plant for a beginning gardener is snowberry, (*Symphoricarpos albus* var. *laevigatus*). This is a deciduous shrub with small white flowers in spring followed by white berries that persist into the fall and winter. PHOTO COURTESY OF MIKE DARCY

plant will fill a large space with single, usually pink, flowers in the spring and beautiful bright red hips in the fall.

An easy to grow native plant for a beginning gardener is snowberry, (*Symphoricarpos albus* var. *laevigatus*). This is a deciduous shrub with small white flowers in spring followed by white berries that persist into the fall and winter.

Native plants have been good sellers

in many garden centers and the category is growing. There is a huge potential for continued growth as gardeners search for plants that are naturally found in our region. Garden center employees can assist in expanding this growth by providing the needed advice and encouragement that will result in a successful experience with native plantings. ☺

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Expanding their reach

Retail nurseries are using a multi-pronged approach to reach their customers

Al's Garden & Home is working with a marketing firm to identify brand perception and customer profiles to discover what message resonates with each most effectively. PHOTO COURTESY OF ALS GARDEN & HOME

BY ERICA BROWNE GRIVAS

Marketing in the retail nursery industry hinges on connecting with customers and addressing their diverse needs. But it's not a one-size-fits-all approach. New gardeners may need basic education and reliable plants to stay engaged, while experienced gardeners may crave rare plants and deeper information.

Preferences are shaped by factors like climate and lifestyle, making effective marketing and communication an art worth honing. Let's see how nurseries and gardening groups are striking this balance.

But first, let's look at the big picture.

The national outlook

Surveying 1,400 U.S. homeowners with above-average income, **Monrovia's** 2025 Design Trend report shows gardeners are getting more ambitious and spending more. Along with monthly studies of 100,000 email subscribers on plant types, colors and gardening style, the national grower identified three key gardening personas:

- **"Wellness Gardeners,"** typically women 55+ in age, show moderate spending at both home stores and independent garden centers (IGCs), remains stable at 29% of the market.

- **"Easy Seekers,"** an all-age, all-gender group that spends the least, usually at home stores, is down 5% since last year to 33%.

- **"Ambitious Gardeners,"** 25-54 years old and skewing male, comprising 38% of the market, are up 7%, with an annual spending of \$593 per person in 2024.

What motivates these gardeners? Of respondents, 58% said their main motivation in gardening is the feeling of accomplishment they get when a plant grows well. This has been the primary motivator for several years. Other motivations gaining momentum include: gardening for wellness and self-care, nostalgia gardening, natural gardening, and pollinator gardening.

Breaking down the results:

- 39% say "gardening is my 'me time'" (up 8% since last year).
- 36% say "gardening reminds me of

simpler times and makes me feel nostalgic" (up 4%).

- 28% say "I like to have my garden have a natural look" (up 6%); and

- 26% say "I am gardening for pollinators" (up 6%).

"We've seen a surge of more young men 35-45 being into gardening as a hobby, not just mowing the lawn and taking care of their landscape, but really being interested in plants which we in the industry think is just fascinating because it represents a new audience with maybe new motivations and challenges we haven't thought about in the past," said Monrovia's Chief Marketing Officer Katie Tamony in a recent webinar. Monrovia is a California-based wholesale nursery that operates its largest farm in Dayton, Oregon.

Targeting Oregon gardeners

At **Al's Garden & Home**, co-owner Mark Bigej emphasizes understanding customer segments to optimize marketing. Al's is working with a marketing firm ➤

Expanding their reach

to identify brand perception and customer profiles to discover what message resonates with each most effectively.

Al's operates four locations in Oregon (Sherwood, Woodburn, Wilsonville and Gresham), each with unique demographics, relying on sales data and customer feedback to fine-tune product selections. "It's a mix. We have to gauge for each store the products we are selling," he said. "Customers tell us if something isn't working — it doesn't move."

Typically, Al's customers are female, aged 35–65, but the company is actively working to engage male shoppers. The in-house marketing team, including a director managing social media and a graphic designer, adjusts strategies to reach different sectors. Instagram is used for younger audiences, while Facebook targets more mature ones.

"Email remains very strong for us," Bigej said. After trying a twice-weekly schedule, Al's is back to sending the newsletter three times weekly due to popular demand.

Bigej notes that success can be tracked through coupons, loyalty programs, social media response and email open rates, but the impact on their sales is the truest barometer. "Ultimately what we are going to measure is our average number of customers who walk into the door," he said. "How many transactions we get — that'll be where the rubber meets the road."

Al's Garden Rewards loyalty program is responsible for a whopping 85% of sales, said Bigej. "It's been one of our biggest and best long-term investments." Rewards members receive perks like rebates and discounts during exclusive Garden Rewards events, while "Color Dollars," rebate dollars earned with purchases, entice non-members to return. Al's also offers QR codes and printed plant information for customers less inclined toward technology.

Creative marketing successes include work done by Bigej's niece, Annie Cantonwine, an assistant visual merchandise manager who attends product shows and keeps tabs on social media trends. "Last year she identified a disco theme for our Christmas displays and hit it out of the park," said Bigej. A customer fell in



Al's mines product shows and social media trends to inform its creative marketing and displays. Last year, the visual merchandise manager identified a disco theme for Christmas displays that proved a huge hit. PHOTO COURTESY OF ALS GARDEN & HOME

love with the themed decorated trees and said, "I want everything on that 10-foot tree — and I want three of them."

"It was a huge order, and she had to pull stock from all of our stores," Bigej said.

"Whether you are big or small, that's always a challenge, trying to put your marketing dollars to their highest use," said Bigej. "You've just got to try things and measure the results."

Dan Heims, owner of **Terra Nova Nurseries** (Canby, Oregon) said his wholesale nursery aims to support both pull-through and push marketing by creating plants that are easy for all audiences to enjoy. "We make as it easy as possible for them," he says.

Heims said by making better performing plants, he improves the experience of everyone from the growers to retailers, designers, landscapers and home gardeners. An example is *Coleus*. Once notorious for needing constant pinching to fill out,

now thanks to Terra Nova's breeding of self-branching cultivars, "a grower can root a cutting in a pot and never have to touch it."

When it comes to identifying trends, Heims watches trend reports like that of Garden Media Group and follows industry magazines like *Digger*, *Grower Talks*, and *Fine Gardening*. In addition to listening to feedback about requests for new plants, he does his own research, too. "I go to garden centers and see what people are throwing in their carts."

Terra Nova finds creative ways to capitalize on wider trends, too, like annually promoting plants that go with Pantone's Color of the Year, which often signals color choices in décor — inside and out. Thus, customers can find on-trend patio cushions and candles and a heuchera to match.

Heims cites Terra Nova initiatives like including CDs of information in catalogs back in the day and more recently,



For Portland Nursery, casual backyard gardeners form the core of its clientele. PHOTO COURTESY OF PORTLAND NURSERY

creating upside-down reverse-side plant tags with icons. Terra Nova employs a marketing firm, Eberly & Collard Public Relations. Now, while the information offered is videos rather than CDs, Heims said, “We provide all the materials so any nursery owner can download bed tags and add their name to it.”

Heims sees Gen Z as the next frontier. “They will be bigger than the Boomers. It’s just too huge a generation to ignore. People buying homes drive the market, and Gen Z is just starting. They are breaking out of the mold of houseplants to try perennials.”

At **Portland Nursery** owner Sara Ori said the customers are a blend, but “casual backyard gardeners” form the core of its clientele.

“Being closer into the city, we get everyone from people buying a houseplant for their first apartment to serious hobbyists and professional landscapers,” she said.

She keeps on top of customer needs through “trade shows, gardening magazines, hot topics at our information desk/social media.” She has seen greater numbers of young people, including families with kids, and “an uptick in in people wanting native plants and environmentally conscious choices.”

However, she notes, while they may spotlight a trending plant on social media or the newsletter, “I wouldn’t say our marketing strategies change too much with the emerging trends. We do always focus on key ingredients to our offerings: quality plant material, diverse selection and gardening education.”

In communication, she doesn’t differentiate among experience levels. “I think

the most effective way to balance reaching new gardeners with more experienced gardeners is to talk with them in-store,” she said.

“Ask them about their projects, always assume they are just starting out and get them the resources they need to be successful. When you can go above and beyond, people share that with their friends. Word of mouth is still our best form of advertising and how we get new gardeners in the door.”

Amy Coulter, executive director of Hardy Plant Society of Oregon said, “Our members are as varied as the plants at any nursery It’s impossible to put them all in one box.”

The organization, celebrating its 40th year, reaches a wide expanse of plant lovers through private garden open days, plant sales, educational offerings, and nursery tours. Open garden hosts can include nursery owners, ecologists, landscape designers and architects, among others, while gardener members run the gamut of experience, style, and location.

She said 42% of the 3000 active members joined after 2020, indicating that the pandemic-era gardeners are still going strong.

Climate-aware gardening has become central to HPSO’s education. For example, Swedish researcher Henrik Sjöman recently spoke to a packed house about *Dendro futura*, the “trees of the future,” a species suited for climate change. The popularity of such events highlights the hunger for climate-resilient gardening knowledge.

HPSO events like nursery tours and garden tours help bridge experience levels, >>

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“We partner with nurseries for members to visit, shop, snack, socialize, and learn about the nursery’s business,” said Coulter. “This draws out every level of gardener at HPSO — the curious beginner to the advanced plant shopaholic”

At the members-only Open Garden days, “An extremely skilled gardener opening their garden may have novice gardeners visit, and vice-versa,” she said. “The sense of community across skill levels and demographics and the potential knowledge transfer at this grass-roots level are exceptional.”

Who will tomorrow’s gardeners and garden-center customers be? All of our experts stay close to their audience, find creative ways to connect with them, respond to feedback and offer quality information to set them up for success, ensuring a thriving garden market and culture for years to come. ☺

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



Portland Nursery focuses on on key ingredients: quality plant material, diverse selection and gardening education. PHOTO COURTESY OF PORTLAND NURSERY



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The place to be

Destination nurseries offer customers a different kind of gardening goodness

One of French Prairie's biggest events is a fall festival with a pumpkin patch, pig races, tractor rides, slides, a corn maze and more. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

BY JON BELL

Beautiful, bucolic scenery. Colorful fields of flowers. Bounce-house castles, ice-cold beer and pigs that race their way around the track.

Many of Oregon's nurseries have found creative ways to invite customers to come and stay a little longer, enjoy a day out in the country and, of course, spend a little money. These destination nurseries are usually part wholesale nursery, part farmstand, part garden center and part food, beverage, art and music hotspot. It's not a model that works for every nursery, but for some, it's been key to prosperity and longevity.

Owners of four well-known destination nurseries discuss how and why they do it, and what's behind their success.

Garland Nursery

Justin Read's life in the horticulture industry came full circle this past summer when he became the owner of **Garland Nursery**, a retail nursery in Corvallis, Oregon. His first job while studying horticulture at Oregon State University had been at Garland, and 12 years later, after working first in San Diego, California, and then Lake Oswego, Oregon, he got the opportunity to acquire the nursery from the family



Beyond the practicality, beautiful displays, special events and tasty snacks and drinks at Garland Nursery encourage visitors to stick around, owner Justin Read said. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

who'd owned it for 87 years.

"It's not really a takeover," Read said. "This place is incredible and there's an amazing legacy that lives here. I want to continue that."

What Read also wants to continue is Garland's reputation as a lovely place to visit.

"I don't know what it is, but Garland is naturally a destination," he said. "It's big, it's beautiful, there's not a whole lot

around us and so it's something to do."

The centerpiece of Garland is a historic red barn that serves as a garden center and gift shop amidst six acres of trees, shrubs, flowers and other plants. Read said the nursery earned a reputation over the years for having everything that a home gardener would need. Beyond the practicality, beautiful displays and tasty snacks and drinks encourage visitors to >>

The place to be

stick around. Read said Garland's level of customer service is also a reason people travel from afar.

"I think Garland has always been known for our service. We want people to bring their problems to us," he said. "We take the time to talk to people. It's not a one-word answer, and I think when you engage with someone, you make their experience better and they take something away with them."

Events have also helped Garland attract customers. Workshops throughout the year offer instruction on seasonal projects — such as wreath-making, succulent pumpkin design, and holiday tablescapes — and the annual Wine and Art in the Garden event features 40 art vendors, food carts, live music and more every summer.

"Overall, all of that stuff is really, really good," Read said. "But it's definitely more work. I mean, I'll start planning for Wine and Art in the Garden January 1 and the event's not until July. But it's worth it."

His advice for a nursery looking to branch out and try something new to bring more customers in? Just do it.

"I would say if they've been thinking of trying something new, an event or something, just try it," Read said. "It's silly not to. It may end up being the next big thing."

French Prairie Gardens

Stacy Bunke's brother started a small fruit stand on his family's farm in St. Paul, Oregon, for an FFA project in 1987. Thirty-seven years later, **French Prairie Gardens** has grown into a fun farming destination that attracts close to 25,000 people a year. And part of what made it such a great escape? COVID-19.

"We have always been a destination, but we saw such an increase during COVID," Bunke said. "That fall, we were the only thing that was open."

The things that have kept people traveling to French Prairie Gardens includes a unique garden center packed with hand-planted hanging baskets [they do 3,500 each year], fresh produce, cold beer and cider and an array of events aimed at



Grace Yinger tidies a plant bench at Blooming Junction. Owner Grace Dinsdale says one of the ways the nursery attracts visitors is through education, with a range of classes and seminars on everything from food preservation to rose care and infused vinegars. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

entertaining folks for a day on the farm. Events have included a sunflower festival, an adult egg hunt, and a tulip and flower fest. French Prairie also hosts a fall pumpkin patch with pig races, tractor rides, slides, a corn maze and more.

"In the fall, we probably have anywhere from 10,000 to 15,000 people come out," Bunke said. "That's grown significantly."

She said the business has always been open to trying new ideas. Those that work stick around; those that don't get pulled.

"We keep thinking up new ideas and always trying new things," Bunke said. "There have been a few events that might not have been in our customers' wheelhouse, but others have turned out to be popular. It's just nice to be able to share something — our farm — that is so close to our hearts with other people, something that we might take for granted but for them it is awe inspiring."

Blooming Junction

Grace Dinsdale's **Blooming Nursery** grows an impressive number of plant species: more than 2,200. But for years, it wasn't easy to showcase all of those species at the nursery.

A wholesale operation, Blooming Nursery wasn't intended to be a place where landscapers could stroll around and see what was on offer. For insurance reasons, customers and other visitors weren't

allowed to walk around the nursery, and trucks were often blocking the road.

"It always bothered me because we didn't have anywhere that really carried everything that we had," said Dinsdale, who started Blooming Nursery in 1982. "I always wanted to have a storefront that has everything we grow."

In 2008, Dinsdale's wish came true when she purchased a 50-acre farm just 10 minutes up the road and turned it into the retail nursery she always wanted. It had towering pine trees and a classic red barn — the perfect place to showcase Blooming Nursery's yield. She opened it as **Blooming Junction** in 2013, and though Dinsdale said it's still evolving, it's become quite the destination for folks looking for plants, fresh fruit and vegetables, bulbs, and local and artisan goods. All that, and a bucolic escape from the everyday world.

"The whole atmosphere is very peaceful and very farm-like," Dinsdale said. "People continually comment on how nice they feel here."

What also gets them to Blooming Junction is the wide variety of plants available. Dinsdale said people have come from as far away as Bellingham, Washington, for her perennials.

"I think the main pull for us is the product itself," she said. "Having a complete palate, an excellent selection and the quality of our plants is really what people

are looking for.”

Another way Dinsdale attracts visitors is through education. Blooming Junction hosts a wide range of classes and seminars on everything from food preservation and sourdough basics to rose care and infused vinegars. The farm also has regular events with artists and food trucks and is working on an event area as a result of repeated requests from visitors.

“It was clear from the start that we did not want to be a carnival,” Dinsdale said, “but we want people to come here primarily for the plants, the food and the ambiance.”

Bauman’s Farm & Garden

It started as a small, quiet farm that grew fruits and veggies to sell to folks who would drive up and announce their presence with the honk of a horn.

That was 129 years and five generations ago.

Today, **Bauman’s Farm & Garden** is a bustling farm and nursery with a bakery, deli, coffee shop, a garden center and an outdoor event space near Gervais, Oregon. They create 30,000 hanging baskets every year, and also offer fruits, vegetables, trees and nursery stock.

Then, each fall, more than 100,000 people visit Bauman’s for their classic Harvest Festival, complete with an apple cannon, hayrides, corn mazes, a bug train and plenty more.

“When we started the retail side of the business, we realized how important it was to have year-round appeal,” said Brian Bauman, general manager of Bauman’s. “We had been growing pumpkins for seed, and we’d bring out my class from my school to get pumpkins. Then my dad built a straw bale maze and a few other classes came out. Now we have 100,000 people a year at the pumpkin patch. We just started small and built on it from there.”

Indeed, Bauman’s has been built into a popular destination nursery, but it’s not something that happened over night. Instead, the Bauman family grew the operation slowly, adding new crops, attractions and appeal as a way to draw visitors out to the farm. »

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The place to be

“I like to tell people that our location is our biggest detriment,” Bauman said. “We are on the way to nothing. It’s just farmland and a busy highway with people driving by. We knew that to draw people, we needed to create events and give families a reason to come and spend the whole day here.”

The Harvest Festival certainly does that. But there’s more to Bauman’s than pumpkins and hay mazes. For the past few years, the farm has also been part of a now two-day gardening extravaganza called GardenPalooza. The event goes further back, but Bauman’s took it over and moved it to their farm. It offers plants for sale, garden art, tools, education and other attractions to get people excited about the upcoming gardening season.

Bauman’s has U-cut Christmas trees in the winter, an animal barn and petting zoo, and its bakery, deli and coffee shop give visitors a reason to linger on the farm



Each fall, more than 100,000 people visit Bauman’s for their classic Harvest Festival, complete with an apple cannon, hayrides, corn mazes, a bug train and plenty more. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

and enjoy a rural escape.

On top of all that, one of Brian Bauman’s cousins, Christine Walter, started making hard cider at the farm about eight years ago, honoring the legacy of their great-grandfather, who did the same on the farm in the early 1900s. Guests drank up Walter’s cider — including a unique loganberry version — so much that

she needed to find a place to expand. That led to Bauman’s On Oak, a tap house and production facility located in Portland’s Central Eastside neighborhood.

Bauman said diversification has been key to their success, but it’s also what adds the biggest challenge to the business.

“Diversification is wonderful, but it’s a whole other level,” he said.

The company hires more than 100 people for six weeks just for the Harvest Festival. Greenhouses that are used for growing the hanging baskets must be converted into attractions for fall, then cleaned up after that. There’s parking and traffic and so many other concerns, but Bauman’s has figured out how to make it all work. A big piece of the puzzle, Bauman said, is to start small and stick with what works. And don’t make people wait in lines.

“Don’t bite off more than you can chew,” he said. “Start with something one weekend, and if it goes well, then maybe do two. Build it out from there. And I always say the easiest way to ruin an event is people having to wait in lines. You need to be able to handle the crowds. It takes time and practice and infrastructure, so just start small and build from there.”

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

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Fondness for grasses

**Increasing popularity is fueling
a drive for new varieties, innovations**

BY DEBBIE TEASHON

The increasing popularity of ornamental grasses in the home landscape is fueling a drive for new cultivars and innovation at many nurseries in Oregon.

Ornamental grasses are easy-care plants with low water usage. They're sustainable and provide wildlife habitat, plus they're deer-resistant.

"Grasses provide a unique textural quality to the landscape that few other ornamentals can," said Mary Monney, sales team member for **Eshraghi Nursery** in Hillsboro, Oregon. "Their range of height, dramatic sprays, dancing plumes, and color through the season create an interest that can stand alone or help boost the beauty of their garden companions. Some are even evergreen! From modern to cottage garden and shade to sun, they have the propensity to fill numerous niches in any design."

Grasses are great additions to the garden as specimens, mass-planted, functional tall hedges or grown in meadows. With new introductions, garden centers keep the excitement alive with new offerings every year.

The beauty and versatility of ornamental grasses serve as a muse for garden designers and landscapers, inspiring them to craft unique and captivating landscapes. >>

***Hakonechloa macra* 'HakBri2' Lime Zest™** PHOTO
COURTESY OF BRIGGS NURSERY

Fondness for grasses

“Whether gardeners are looking to create a modern meadow design — a top trend we’re watching for 2025 — or just want to add unique visual interest to the garden, we have so many stunning grasses to offer,” said Katie Tamony, chief marketing officer and trend spotter at **Monrovia**, a California-based wholesale nursery with its largest farm in Dayton, Oregon. “Ornamental grasses provide captivating texture and color all while being a low maintenance choice.”

New varieties of Japanese forest grass

Every year, new Japanese forest grass introductions join the old standbys. Most of these grasses shine in the shade and offer another textural style not often available for the shadier side of the garden. The grasses’ waterfall effect is attractive in a border edged with them, spilling down a container, or used as an accent.

Briggs Nursery, a wholesale nursery in Elma, Washington, is at the forefront of the ornamental grass trend with its *Hakonechloa* introductions. The *Hakonechloa macra* ‘HakBri2’ Lime Zest™, a sport from *H. macra* ‘Aureola’, was honored with a 2024 Farwest Show New Varieties Showcase Award of Merit, while the *Hakonechloa macra* ‘Hakbri1’ Lemon Zest™, a sport from *H. macra* ‘All Gold’, received a 2023 Farwest Show New Varieties Showcase Award of Merit. These introductions are a testament to the beauty and appeal of these grasses.

Dan Meier, product development and efficiency manager for Briggs, believes Lime Zest™ will be a game changer and a top seller this year. “Already, there is excitement overseas over this plant,” he said.

What sets Lime Zest™ apart is its unique lime-colored foliage with white variegation that turns cream later in the season, without any gold or yellow tones in the leaves. The plum-colored new shoots in spring add to its allure. Lemon Zest™, with its vibrant chartreuse, lemon, and cream variegation, is the brightest of all *Hakonechloa* cultivars, adding a pop of color to any shaded area. Despite being smaller than others in the genus, it is an excellent addition to the shade plant offerings. Another 2024 introduction, *Hakonechloa* ‘Stripe It Rich’ PP19259, emerged from **Terra Nova Nurseries** as a tissue culture mutant. Golden leaves and a bright white variegation make the grass a compelling choice for the shade.

“This is a beautiful cultivar that has a bright white stripe in the center of its golden leaves. It is a beautiful shade-tolerant grass,” said Georgia Clay, plant selections manager for Monrovia Nursery.

Eye-catching blue fescues

Besides Japanese forest grass, blue fescues have long been used in the landscape and nurseries have improved on them over the years. Cultivars that improve on the blue hue include *Festuca x* ‘Cool as Ice’. This one emerges from the ground a light green hue and in the summer it turns blue, leaving a two-toned effect with the green, said Eshraghi Nursery’s Monney.

This is also one fescue that will not die from the heat and humidity in areas with hot and humid summers.

Colorful sedges



Miscanthus sinensis ‘Fire Dragon’ Mystal™ PHOTO COURTESY OF PLANTHAVEN



Carex comans ‘Amazon Mist’ PHOTO COURTESY OF MONROVIA



Schizachyrium scoparium ‘Smoke Signal’ PHOTO COURTESY OF MONROVIA



Festuca x 'Cool as Ice' PHOTO COURTESY OF INTRINSIC INTRODUCTIONS



Andropogon gerardii 'Red October' PHOTO COURTESY OF INTRINSIC INTRODUCTIONS



Hakonechloa macra 'All Gold' PHOTO BY DEBBIE TEASHON

The Colorgrass® series, which includes the arching, evergreen sedge, *Carex comans* 'Amazon Mist', is known for its vibrant and unique color variations. This feature makes it a popular choice among landscapers and gardeners.

"Amazon Mist sedge is a beautiful finely textured *Carex* that we love for its twisting tips and silvery undersides," Clay said. "It brings a lot of texture and movement to the garden or containers while being easy to care for and maintaining good heat tolerance. This has quickly become one of my favorite container plants."

Kip Nordstrom, owner of Kip Nordstrom Design in Lake Oswego, Oregon, uses *Carex* in her landscape designs. She chooses companion plants that enhance the sedges.

"I have a stand of dwarf Joe Pye weed (*Eupatorium* 'Little Joe Pye') at the right height to be interesting and never floppy. At the base lies a meandering *Carex* 'Everillo', a yellow-green edging grass. The Little Joe is now a tawny, brown, golden, and tan mix, which pairs beautifully with the sharp yellow-green *Carex* on the ground.

"Before autumn, the seed heads of 'Little Joe Pye' are pink, and they, too, look lovely with the *Carex*. I'm always fond of the combination," Nordstrom said. "It's one of my favorite fall looks."

Nordstrom uses sedges to enhance various areas. "One of my favorite grasses, *Carex* 'Bowles Golden', I placed next to a water feature. This grass is versatile and can be planted in different ways. Whether as a stand-alone plant, in containers, or for mass-planting, it's a great example of how one plant can serve multiple purposes in a landscape."

Other ornamental grasses

One of Nordstrom's favorite grass plantings at a local Lake Oswego church has inspired some of her designs. In a raised bed full of paperbark maples (*Acer griseum*), the trees are underplanted with a dwarf fountain grass (*Pennisetum alopecuroides* 'Hameln').

"I always liked the elegant look," Nordstrom said. "The gorgeous trees with their peeling bark are underplanted with >>>

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Fondness for grasses

this one grass. I've used the same grass as a shorter hedge under trees."

Nordstrom believes the grass works well in containers, as a stand-alone plant, and for mass planting.

"For some small spaces, I've used another *Pennisetum* 'Little Bunny,' that is smaller than *P.* 'Hameln'."

A Walters Gardens (Zeeland, Michigan) introduction, *Schizachyrium scoparium* 'Smoke Signal', is a columnar grass with strong foliage that remains upright throughout the season without flopping over. It also has fantastic blue-green foliage that takes on deep purple and scarlet tones in late summer and fall.

A terrific grass for a meadow garden, it looks beautiful planted in mass with other sun-loving perennials mixed in or as a single accent.

A brand new grass Monrovia will be growing for the upcoming 2025 season is *Schizachyrium* 'Little Red Fox'. This is from Intrinsic Introductions (Hebron, Illinois) and has lovely red foliage in the mid to late summer, deepening in color throughout the fall. The selection also stays relatively short, only about 24–30 inches tall. It has sturdy, solid foliage and holds itself upright without flopping.

Blonde Ambition Blue Grama Grass (*Bouteloua* 'Blonde Ambition') is a North American native species selected from *Bouteloua gracilis*. The cold-hardy grass features blue-green foliage and gold summer flowers resembling tiny little brushes on top of sturdy stems. The tough seed heads last through winter, giving the plant

four seasons of interest.

Designing a meadow with Blonde Ambition and other native grasses and wildflowers creates a habitat for wildlife.

With trends towards using native plants and developing meadows, the appreciation of grass species and their cultivars is widening. Ornamental grasses are becoming an essential plant in the landscape.

Out of Germany came an open-pollinated seedling, *Miscanthus sinensis* 'Fire Dragon' Mystal™. Anybody viewing the grass in October knows the name 'Fire Dragon', is appropriate — especially when they stand in front of the grass backlit by a low-in-the-sky autumnal sun. The exceptional plumes glow, and the grass blades almost look like someone lit a bonfire in October.

"A truly amazing season for many types of grass is fall when the plumes and seed heads are fully mature and cool weather draws out new hues that transform gardens everywhere," said Monney. "*Andropogon gerardii* 'Red October' and *Miscanthus* 'Fire Dragon' are particularly noteworthy for these features.

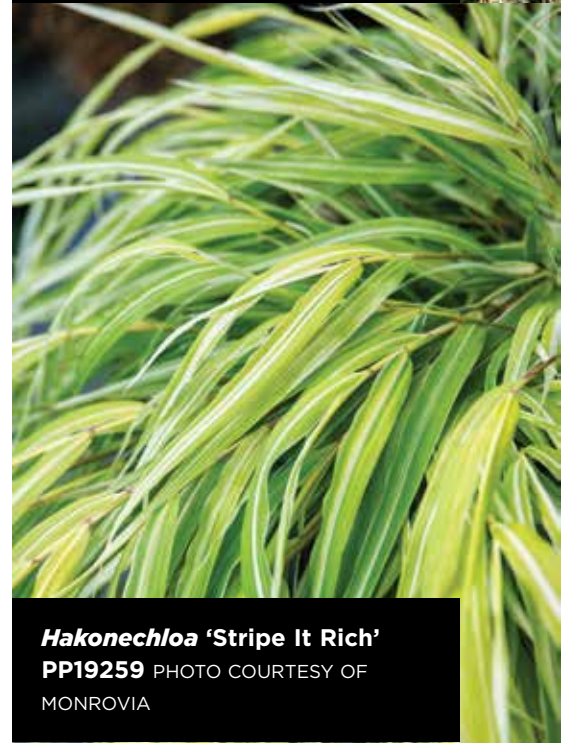
Red October Big Bluestem is dramatic enough, with dark green foliage and red tips for most of the year. However, the growing season finale steals the show.

Monney described it best: "*Andropogon* 'Red October' has red blooms above steel blue blades in late summer that morph into scarlet red with the first freeze."

Use with fall-flowering perennials; the tall grass is excellent as a scarlet-red accent. When mass-planted in a meadow, the grass



Pennisetum alopecuroides
'Hameln' PHOTO BY KIP NORDSTROM



Hakonechloa 'Stripe It Rich'
PP19259 PHOTO COURTESY OF
MONROVIA

turns a field into a sea of red.

Meier of Briggs Nursery said North American grasses are the most popular. "These days, if it's native, it's hot!"

The species and cultivars of our North American native big bluestem grasses may be proving him right. ☺

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



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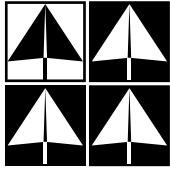
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Focus on silicon

Researchers study using silicon-calcium supplementation on rhododendrons to reduce herbivores

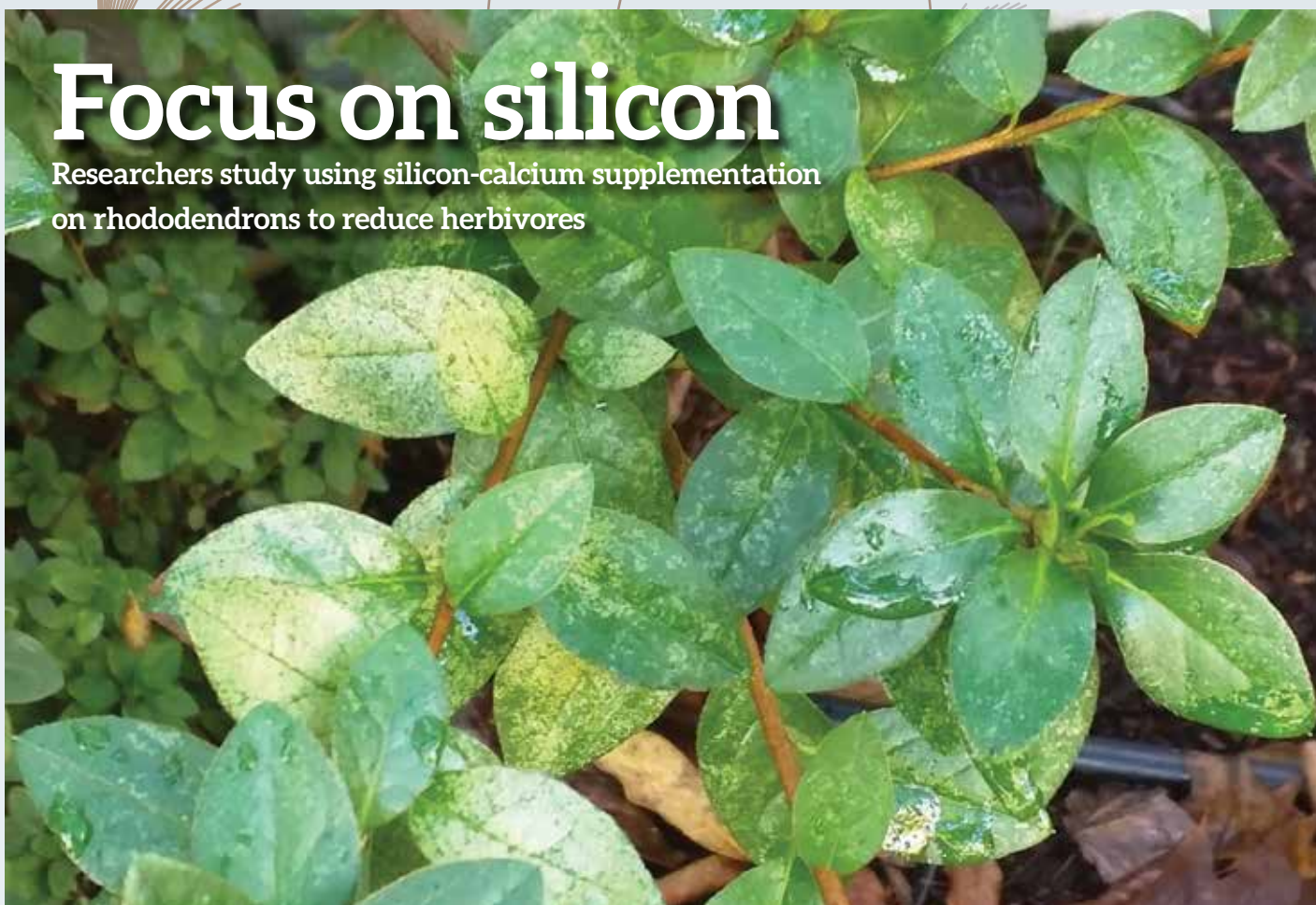


Figure 2a. As lace bugs drink up chlorophyll in the sap of rhododendrons, it causes unattractive white-yellowish stippling on the top side of leaves. This stippling makes potted plants unmarketable. PHOTO COURTESY OF OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

BY JANA LEE, KATERINA VELASCO GRAHAM, ERIC JANASOV, RYAN PAUL, CAROLYN SCAGEL

Silicon is a convenient management tool to apply during fertigation to help plants maintain water and nutrient balance. Silicon can also protect plants from fungal pathogens and heavy metal toxicity.

Effectiveness of silicon

Applying silicon to plants has been shown to increase plant resistance to weevils in sweet potatoes, leaf miners in chrysanthemums and aphids in zinnias. Alternating between foliar sprays and soil drenches

of silicon has reduced thrips damage and increased marketable yield of orchids.

Silicon supplementation can help protect plants against pests in several ways. First, it may result in deposits in the plant tissue. These can strengthen the cell wall, wear out the insect's mouthparts, or physically damage the insect's digestive system when the insect ingests plant tissue.

Second, silicon can change the plant's chemistry, thereby reducing the nutritional quality or digestibility of the plant.

Third, silicon may cause plants to emit odors when pests feed on them and attract more predators and parasitoids into the area.

Uses for rhododendrons and azaleas

Rhododendrons and azaleas are a staple of Pacific Northwest landscapes. Unfortunately, these plants are affected by the pretty and dainty azalea lace bug, *Stephanitis pyrioides*.

Originally from Asia, this pest has been present in the eastern United States for over a century and has been in Oregon for approximately 15 years.

Lace bugs have a straw-like mouthpart to drink plant sap from the underside of leaves (Figure 1, Page 36). As they drink up chlorophyll in the sap, it causes unattractive white-yellowish stippling on the top side of leaves (Figure 2a, above). This stippling makes potted plants unmarketable. ➤

Growing Knowledge



Figure 2b. The lace bugs leave black spots on the underside of the rhododendron leaves. PHOTO COURTESY OF OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

The underside of leaves become covered with black frass, or defecation spots (Figure 2b, above). Severe infestation on bushes in the landscape can also lead to plant death.

Oftentimes, azalea lace bugs are managed through the use of neonicotinoids and pyrethroids. However, there is concern about using these insecticides during bloom, because they may affect pollinators.

Biological control methods can help, such as releasing predatory lacewings. So can mechanical controls, such as using pressurized water sprays to knock off the

delicate bugs on the leaves. Some cultivars are more resistant, such as the ones with more indumentum (fuzzy hairs) on the underside of leaves. While these alternatives have helped reduce lace bugs, they have not replaced insecticides.

Additional alternative controls are needed, and we tested whether silicon supplementation would be beneficial for lace bug control.

In a three-year study, we tested both foliar spray and drench application of silicon on potted rhododendrons. We

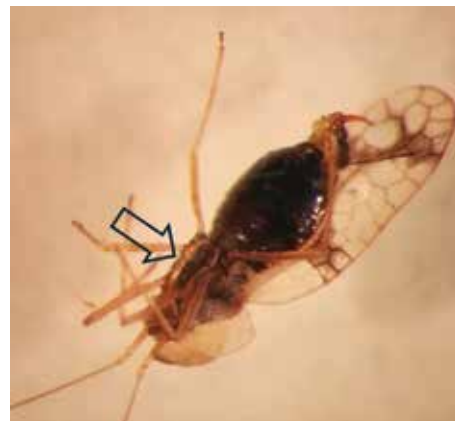


Figure 1. Lace bugs have a straw-like mouthpart to drink plant sap from the underside of leaves. PHOTO COURTESY OF OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

examined whether treatments reduced lace bug feeding and egg laying under the leaf epidermis. The commercial silicon product already has calcium in the formulation, so both the silicon product and calcium-only applications were tested for impact (referred to as Si and Ca thereon). Solutions for ‘Si foliar’ and ‘Si soil’ were made by mixing 20 ml calcium silicate (22% SiO₂, 10% Ca%, Mainstay Si, Redox Chemicals) per 7.57 liter of water, and the calcium only treatments of ‘Ca foliar’, and ‘Ca soil’ mixed 10 ml calcium carbonate (Ca 20%, Mainstay Ca, Redox Chemicals) per 7.57 liter of water. As the products were fertigated, the solution was agitated to prevent precipitation. Four or eight weekly applications were made as rhododendrons flushed out new growth.

Our studies used rhododendron plugs transplanted into pots, or 1-year old plants. We tested on cultivars known to be susceptible to this pest: ‘Boule de Nieve’, ‘Cunningham White’, ‘Florence Parks’, and ‘Nova Zembla’. Study 1 took leaves from variously treated rhododendron plants, immersed leaves in water cups, and placed them into cages. Adult lace bugs were released and allowed to choose between various leaves and feed for a week. Study 2 and 3 placed the entire potted rhododendron in large cages, released adult lace bugs, and allowed bugs a choice to move between plants for 3–4 weeks. At the end, leaves were taken to count the number of adults settled, frass spots (defecation), and eggs. Leaf area measured to standardize counts by leaf area.

Application of silicon/calcium some-



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times reduced the number of settling adults at the end of the trial. Application more consistently reduced the number of frass spots and eggs laid on plants by 25-75% compared to the untreated control within the same cage (Figure 4a, Page 36). Fewer frass spots indicate less feeding on the leaves. No one treatment stood out as better, as improvement was seen with silicon applied via foliar spray or drench, and calcium-only applied via foliar spray or drench.

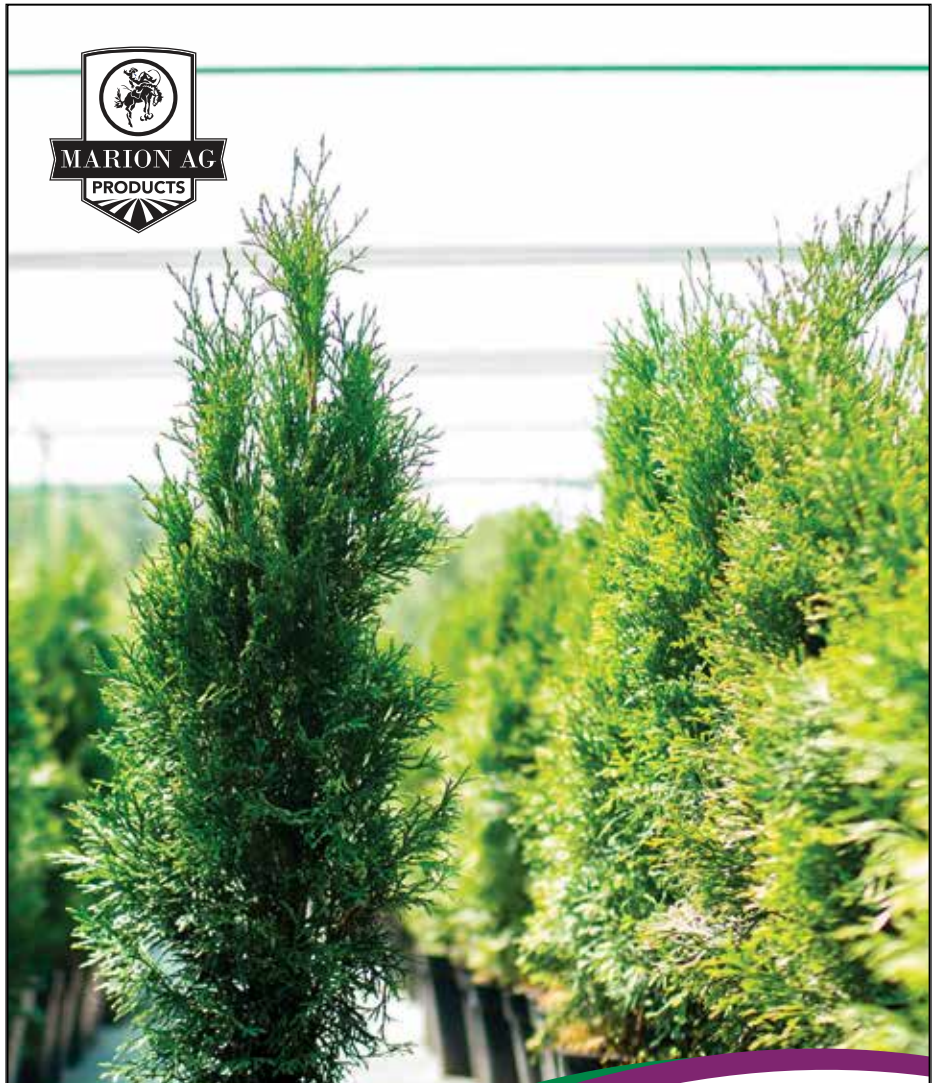
A final choice trial, Study 6, was done by allowing lace bugs to freely move between variously potted plants placed on greenhouse benches for 14 weeks. Stippling on the leaves was quantified to see if Si or Ca reduced visible damage. Though differences were not statistically different, fewer frass spots and stippling damage was seen on leaves, and fewer eggs were laid when plants were treated with silicon or calcium (Study 6, Figure 4a). Leaves that contained more frass spots had more eggs. As expected, if lace bugs feed more on the plant, they will reproduce more.

Silicone and calcium accumulation in plants

To investigate whether extra silicon/calcium accumulated in plants, rhododendron leaf samples were taken before and after the supplementation period. Neither silicon nor calcium content were observed to increase in leaves as expected. Though supplementation can benefit the plant, it did not lead to discernible accumulation in plant leaves to make the tissue tougher for herbivores. This suggests that supplementation somehow improved plant defense or made plants less attractive to lace bugs.

Regardless of treatments, Si and Ca levels increased at the end of the season. Our results also suggest that rhododendrons passively accumulate Si and Ca from root uptake. The ability of rhododendron leaves to absorb Si or Ca on leaves with the rates that were applied was not supported in our experiment.

Unfortunately, when lace bugs were confined in small cages with only one kind of treated plant in a no-choice test >>



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Study 4 and 5, they laid more eggs on silicon-treated rhododendrons compared to untreated rhododendrons (Figure 4a). Insects may do this if they perceive low quality resources and overcompensate. In the nursery or landscape, the lace bug adult could fly to another plant. Potentially, an untreated plant can be used as a 'trap plant' that gets more lace bugs and then treated with insecticide.

During or after trials, the rhododendron plants were kept uncaged and in mixed arrangements on the greenhouse bench. Serendipitously, rhododendron aphids, *Illinoia lambersi*, colonized the plants. This aphid is from North America and is an occasional pest of rhododendrons and azaleas. After noticing the aphids, we recorded how many new rosettes or leaves were infested with aphids. A reduction in aphid colonization occurred 1 to 2 months after the last

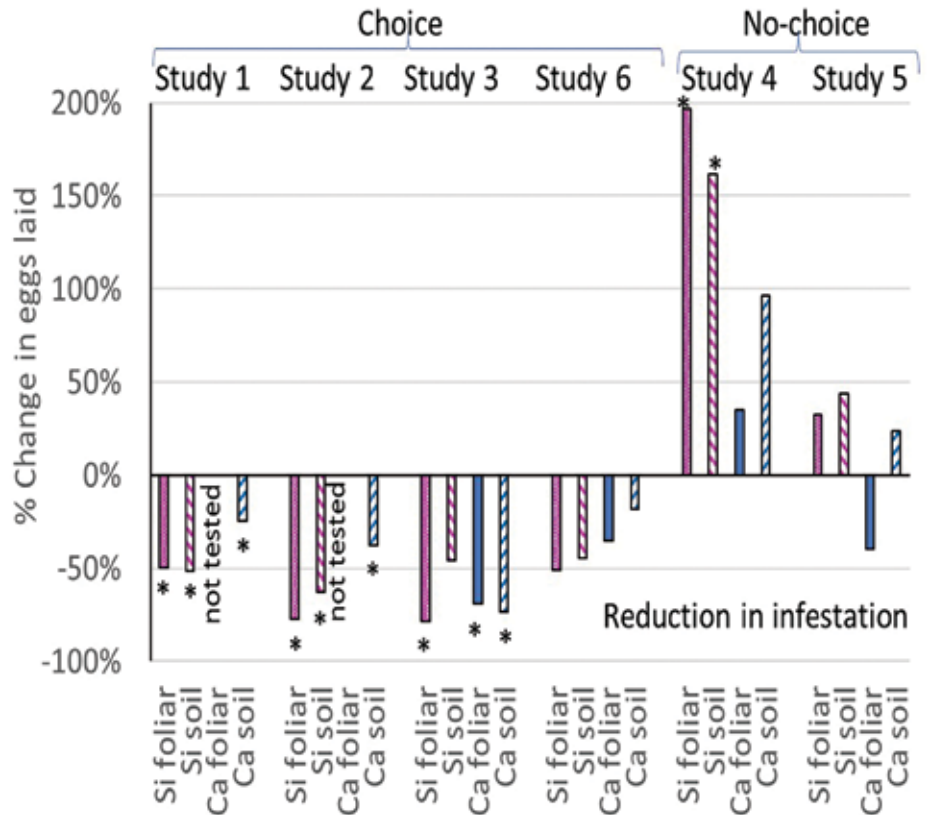


Figure 4a. Application more consistently reduced the number of frass spots and eggs laid on plants by 25-75% compared to the untreated control within the same cage. PHOTO COURTESY OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY



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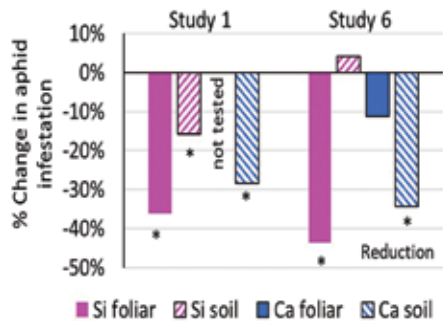


Figure 4b. About 16-37% fewer rosettes were infested with aphids compared to controls in the first case, and 34-44% fewer leaves were infested with aphids in the second case. PHOTO COURTESY OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

application. About 16-37% fewer rosettes were infested with aphids compared to controls in the first case, and 34-44% fewer leaves were infested with aphids in the second case (Figure 4b).

Additional evaluation is needed to test how supplementation affects landscape plants. Given the benefits of silicon-calcium application to improve general plant health, enhanced pest resistance can be an added bonus.

Further information can be found in Graham KV, Janasov EG, Paul RL, Scagel CF, Lee JC. 2024. Silicon supplementation can reduce infestation by azalea lace bug. *Journal of Economic Entomology* 117(5): 1948-1958. DOI.org/10.1093/Jee/Toae164 ©

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Buckle up for a testy political year

I recognize that this column focuses quite a bit on the political world that surrounds the industry. OAN and AmericanHort are your warriors on policy.

This is important, because elected officials can make the industry buckle as quick as a pen signs a piece of paper. We have you covered at the state and federal level.

As the saying goes, “Either we are at the table or on the menu.” The new year has both promise and storm clouds. But we have drawn up a game plan to defend the industry.

Oregon’s legislature faces significant challenges

Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek has proposed a nearly \$138 billion budget during the next two years. This is a 10% increase. Many factors will play into what the association is able to accomplish by passing bills this year and which issues we will have to defend against.

The governor, who is eligible to run for re-election in 2026, will push for quantum budget increases and policy flexibility for housing and homelessness. Her priorities include mental health, substance abuse treatment, early childhood education, and K-12 education.

Will she get her full wish list? Oregon Capital Chronicle said it the best: Kotek’s budget is carved in soap, not stone. The one certainty is the 2025 Legislature will fiddle with it. After Kotek presented her budget at a press conference,

The bathtub with two drains

I have heard this metaphor for the state’s budget, and it speaks to me. We can have all the plans for policy, but this year will be dominated by the 476-page budget proposal. The big issues that will dwarf all other issues will include paying for Medicaid; finding a way to finance Oregon’s transportation system (which faces a huge shortfall), and meeting public sector unions’ expectations to get pay

increases that have been deferred.

So word to the wise: if you want to pass something, it better not cost too much money.

OAN is focused and will push hard

Over 3,000 bills will be introduced in the 2025 legislative session. Around 350 would typically pass. At the top of OAN’s agenda is passing a fix for agricultural overtime. I am optimistic, but I’m not under any illusions. It will be an uphill climb.

Water transfers is another critical issue we need to make progress on, and a bill has been drafted to allow agriculture to be able to move water around the operation.

Another priority is addressing Oregon’s commercial activities tax. It taxes income, not profits, and as such is regressive, especially for low margin industries like ours. The OAN Board of Directors wants to engage in a conversation to exempt green goods from the tax. It is likely that this engagement will take 2–4 years to accomplish.

The 2025 legislative session could get ugly

Oregon’s urban-rural divide is growing. Land use planning, transportation fairness, and the business climate are all critical issues facing the industry. The general election in 2024 handed Democrats a legislative supermajority in both chambers, but by the slimmest of margins in each. It means that if the majority sticks together, they can approve new taxes without winning any Republican support.

The OAN is solution-oriented and has demonstrated bipartisan cooperation to advocate for the industry’s interests. This will not change in 2025. We believe Gov. Kotek and legislative leadership when they say they have an open door and will work across the aisle on promoting Oregon’s priorities. However, politics is politics and there are significant differences between the minority and majority on what it means to move the state forward.

This year is the starting gun for the race for governor and we will see political positioning for that race, as well as races



Jeff Stone
OAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

for Congress. The tone and tenor for the 6-month legislative session, which begins this month, will depend on communication between caucus leaders, the governor and a bevy of industries, like the OAN. We will play hard, but fairly.

Federal vs. state and vice versa

Unfortunately, the possible train wreck at the federal level may permeate what happens in the state. We are seeing reports that “blue state” legislatures may attempt to pass “Trump proof” legislation and promote policies that are not in the interest of OAN or agriculture.

Conversely, if the incoming president pushes for mass deportations of immigrants, implements tariffs on Canada and Mexico, or cuts USDA APHIS, then we will have our hands full.

We are up for the challenge and so is AmericanHort.

Speaking with strength

You, the members, are the best advocates the association has. I have often said that 50 words from a constituent are worth 500 from a lobbyist. We have resources to help you directly connect with your elected officials.

I am proud of the advocacy training we conduct to help you become the best messenger you can be. OAN is building an army of elite voices. We encourage you to jump in, tap into your passion and expertise, and join arms with your community to make Oregon a better place. Our next Advocacy Training session is scheduled for noon on Tuesday, January 14, 2025. We hope to see you there! ☺

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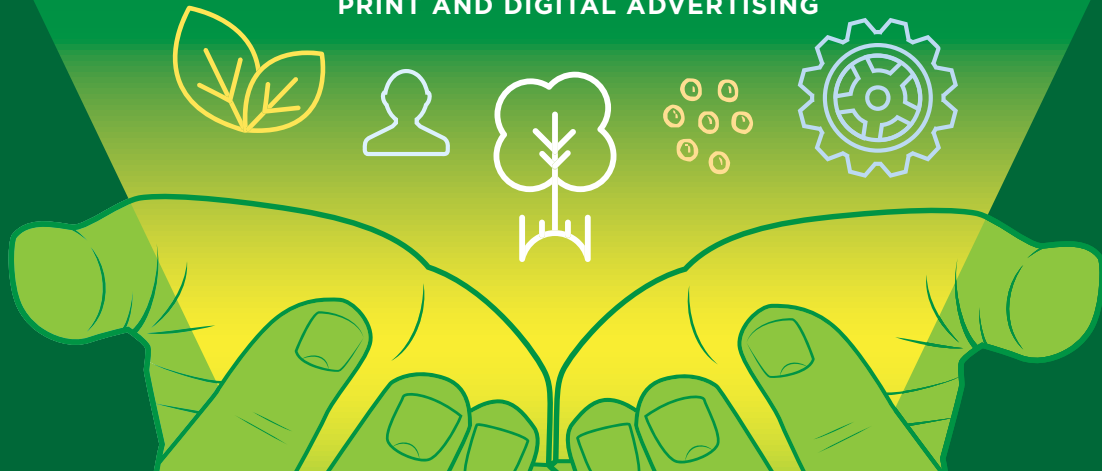
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