

Digger

APRIL 2025

Tree Issue 2025

The allure of
Japanese snowbells

PAGE 21

Getting a handle
on drainage

PAGE 29

Reading the
crystal ball

PAGE 33

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Tree Issue 2025

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Styrax japonicus is catching eyes of gardeners and attention from growers.

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Successful tree growing requires effective drainage to prevent standing water and the problems it causes.

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Tree growers need an accurate read of coming market conditions and a balanced strategy for the long haul.

17 Lesser-known beauties

Many beautiful trees are overlooked because they are not as well known as their cousins.

41 Prioritizing nursery pest challenges

The industry's input is critical to helping the IR-4 Project identify the most pressing nursery challenges.

On the cover: Swan Song snowbell (*Styrax japonicus* 'ORSTSTYx1' PPAF), bred by Ryan Contreras at Oregon State University, is a new, dark-leaved weeping cultivar with pink flowers. PHOTO COURTESY OF PROVEN WINNERS® COLORCHOICE®

On this page: Left: S.j. 'Snow Drops', introduced by Buchholz Nursery, is a dwarf upright form with white flowers. PHOTO COURTESY OF BUCHHOLZ NURSERY Right top: The tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) is a fast-growing large tree and has an unusual blossom. PHOTO BY MIKE DARCY Right bottom: Get to know Sam Pohlschneider in Meet the Leader. PHOTO BY VIC PANICKUL

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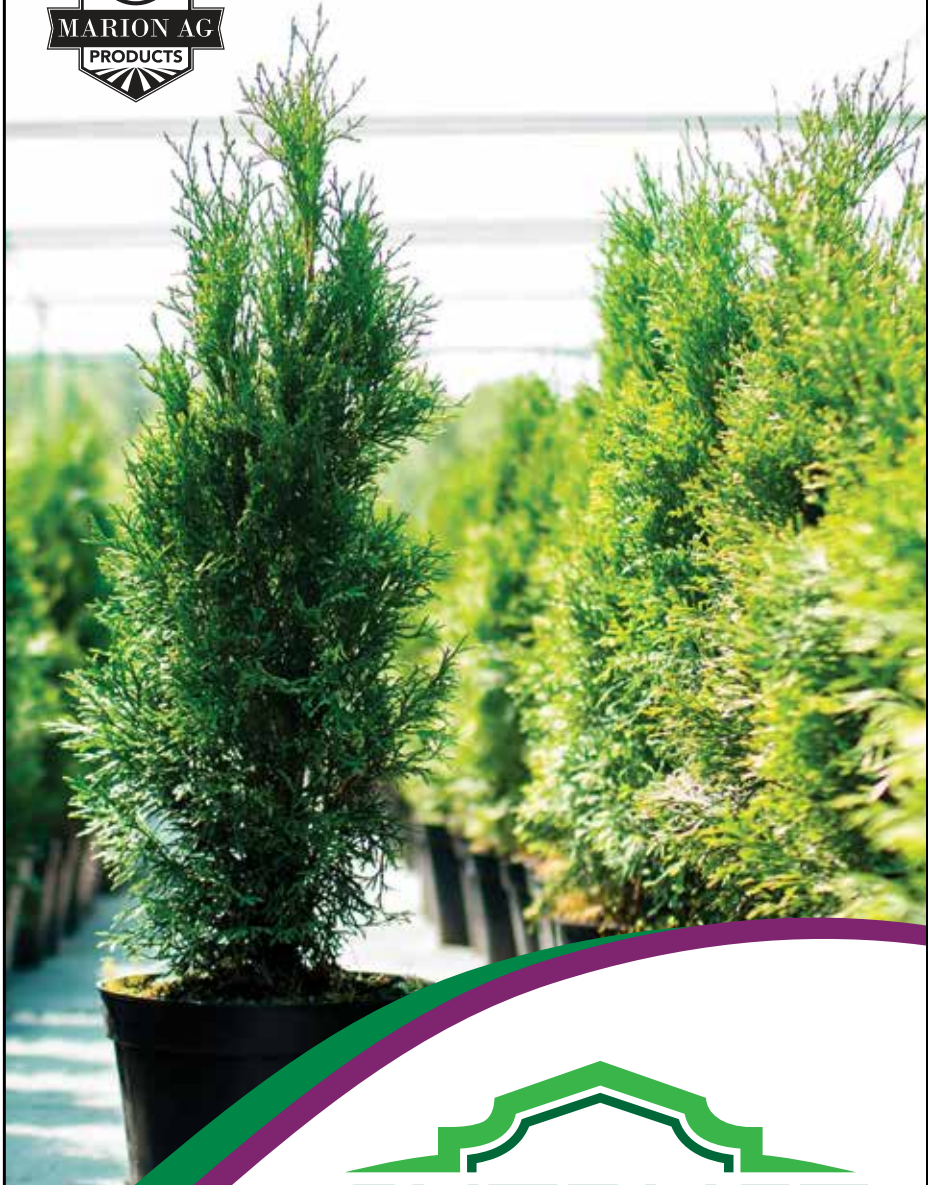
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Make the first move

Ken Free and Amy Wagner are two of the hardest working folks in sales. I've driven here to JLPN Inc. (Salem, Oregon) on a sunny day, to see what makes them tick. Turns out that the most important lesson they teach me is to be proactive with your customers. Make the first move.

Between the two of them, Ken and Amy have 50 years of experience helping **JLPN** grow and produce the finest bare root and container tree seedlings and rooted cuttings. That doesn't mean they are content to rest on their laurels. Like any good team, they are always looking for ways to improve.

Ken tells me that a lot of their material goes out of state, and a perennial challenge is scheduling multiple deliveries to different customers out of the same large truck. It used to be that they would wait for customer A to call and request a delivery, then wait for customer B to ask for a delivery, always on a different date. After that it was a matter of negotiating between the customers to arrive at a single delivery day.

Now Ken builds the truck, using physical paper that he can shuffle and move. Once the puzzle is solved, and he has a full truck, including everything for customers A and B, he'll give them a call and propose a delivery date. This all happens well ahead of when they would have previously reached out. "The customers like it. It's a win-win," says Ken.

The customers no longer have to remember to schedule their deliveries. Ken and Amy do the work for them. JLPN also gets a more efficient truck load, without all the overprocessing and back and forth between customers that no one has time for in the spring.

Another way Ken and Amy are making the first move is by working with customers to roll over orders into the next



Ken Free and Amy Wagner are make the first move when it comes to customers. PHOTO BY SEAN OFFIEL

year. Amy tells me her customers "get busy just like anyone else." Rolling over orders helps customers secure product well in advance. They can always adjust later, but there are fewer panicked last-minute calls trying to order trees that are no longer available. "They really appreciate it," says Amy.

It also helps JLPN reduce overproduction. Now they can better plan rather than produce trees with no customer in mind. Amy tells me it's a shame to "do everything to grow [the trees], and now it's just gone."

Amy and Ken are more than just a good sales team. They are partners for their customers. They are thinking several moves ahead, because they know that by doing so they are helping everyone out. It's about, "mutual respect between us and the customers," says Amy.

So go ahead, make the first move. ☺



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

FIRST AID/CPR CLASSES AT OAN

Need a first aid and CPR certification renewal for yourself or one of your employees? 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 offered June 17, July 16, September 17, October 15, November 19, December 17. Sessions in Spanish will be 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.

APRIL 5

NEXGEN SPRING SOCIAL

Save the date for NexGen's Spring Social 10 a.m. Saturday, April 5. The event will be a collaboration with Oregon Farm Bureau's Young Farmers and Ranchers for the 2nd year in a row. The event will begin at **Oregon Flowers Inc.**, 20727 Highway 99 N.E. in Aurora and then conclude at the **Wooden Shoe Tulip Farm**, 33814 S. Meridian Road in Woodburn. Similar to last year, attendees will have free access to the Wooden Shoe Tulip Festival. RSVP at TinyURL.com/OFBNexGen.

APRIL 15

ONF 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 until April 15 for 20 scholarships ranging from \$1,000 to \$3,000 from the Oregon Nurseries Foundation. The scholarships are sponsored by individual OAN chapters, and its members. April 15 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.

APRIL 18

2025 OREGON URBAN & COMMUNITY FORESTRY CONFERENCE

Join Oregon Community Trees for the 2025 Oregon Urban & Community Forestry Conference from 9 a.m.-4:30 p.m. May 15 at Venue 252, 252 Lawrence St. in Eugene, Oregon. The conference is hosted and organized by OCT in partnership with the Oregon Department of Forestry and USDA Forest Service. This year's conference will explore experiences of urban and community forestry collaboration and



OAN FILE PHOTO

APRIL 11

NEW VARIETIES SHOWCASE TIER 1 ENTRIES DUE

The 2025 Farwest Show is now accepting submissions of new plant introductions for the upcoming New Varieties Showcase. The showcase is an annual highlight at Farwest, the biggest and greenest trade show in the West. The show is August 20-22 at the Oregon Convention Center in Portland, Oregon. Tier 1 entries will be featured on FarwestShow.com and displayed in the New Varieties Showcase on the floor with Hip Labels plant tag labels. Added-value incentives for Tier 1 entries include a layout in the July issue of *Digger* magazine (\$750 value) and Hip Labels plant tag take-aways for attendees. Each Tier 1 submission costs \$250. The Tier 1 submission deadline is April 11. Tier 2 entries will be featured online at FarwestShow.com and displayed in the New Varieties Showcase on the floor with Hip Labels plant tag labels. Each Tier 2 submission costs \$90. The Tier 2 submission deadline is June 13. For more information or to enter, go to FarwestShow.com/NewVarieties or contact Jamie Moore at JMoore@OAN.org or 503-582-2010.

partnerships. Tickets are on sale now, so don't wait to reserve your spot this year! Tickets include conference entry, lunch, and networking social hour (3:30 to 4:30 p.m.). Purchase tickets at TinyURL.com/UrbanForestEvent.

APRIL 26-27

OREGON AG FEST

Explore the incredible world of Oregon agriculture in a fun-filled, festive environment for the entire family April 26-27. The two-day event, aimed at helping families better understand where their food, fiber and flora come from, is a unique learning experience, where hands-on exhibits make learning about Oregon's vast agricultural industry educational and entertaining. Tickets are \$15, free for kids 15 and under. Oregon Ag Fest is held at the Oregon State Fairgrounds, 2330 17th St. N.E. in Salem. For more information or to purchase tickets, go to ORAgFest.com. Make sure you stop by the Plant Something Oregon booth from the Oregon Association of Nurseries and choose a plant to pot and take home.

MAY 31

HRI SCHOLARSHIPS

Scholarships ranging from \$1,000 to \$5,000

each are available from the Horticulture Research Institute, which has more than \$50,000 available for the 2025 scholarship program. Applications are now being taken, and the portal is open. Students are encouraged to apply early. The deadline for submitting applications is May 31. Interested students can access the application and find more details at TinyURL.com/HRIScholarships.

JUNE 5

ONPAC/DUFFERS CLASSIC GOLF TOURNAMENT

Registration is live for the Oregon Nurseries' Political Action Committee (ONPAC) annual golf tourney, teeing off June 5 at Stone Creek Golf Club, 14603 South Stoneridge Drive, Oregon City, Oregon. Reconnect with friends while supporting a strong nursery industry voice in Salem and Washington, D.C. Check-in begins at 7 a.m. and tee off is at 8 a.m. Take advantage of a \$15 discount by registering before May 31. Sponsorship packages begin at \$250, and many include complimentary player spots. Go to OAN.org/Duffers25 for more information. ©



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.



'Time to Shine'. PHOTO COURTESY OF PORTLAND NURSERY

Portland Rose Festival, Portland Nursery announce official rose

'Time to Shine' is the official rose of the 2025 Portland Rose Festival. It's a stunning yellow-gold grandiflora rose, accented with vibrant magenta hues, and promises to be a captivating addition to any garden with its strong, fruity fragrance and exceptional disease resistance.

Portland Nursery, a retail garden center with two locations in Portland, will donate \$2 from every 'Time to Shine' rose bush sold to the Portland Rose Festival Foundation. The contributions will help fund cultural events, educational programs, and outreach initiatives that celebrate and enrich the vibrant spirit of Portland.

"The Rose Festival is honored that Portland Nursery is continuing the tradition of naming an official Rose Festival rose," said Marilyn Clint, CEO of the Portland Rose Festival Foundation. "By offering 'Time to Shine' as our official festival rose, the nursery not only provides gardeners with a beautiful, resilient plant but also plays a key role in sustaining the community events that make the festival so special."

The 'Time to Shine' rose is now available for purchase exclusively at Portland Nursery locations.



OAN's bill would have kept the threshold at 48 hours and allow a 12-week peak season exemption with a 55-hour threshold. OAN FILE PHOTO

LEGISLATIVE LEADERS KILL OREGON AGRICULTURAL OVERTIME FIX

The Oregon Association of Nurseries' highest state legislative priority suffered a political setback, when its bill to fix agricultural overtime was not introduced in the Oregon Legislature by the February 26 deadline.

House Speaker Julie Fahey (D-Eugene), under pressure from the AFL-CIO, pushed the bill's intended sponsor, Rep. Ricki Ruiz (D-Gresham), not to file the bill. Ruiz, the son of a nursery worker, had earlier shook hands on an agreement to file the legislation on OAN's behalf. Additionally, House Labor and Workplace Standards Chair Dacia Grayber (D-Portland) and Senate Labor and Business Chair Kathleen Taylor (D-Milwaukie) said the bill, if introduced, would get no hearing.

"We're disappointed legislative leaders will allow no discussion, no debate about our bill," OAN Executive Director Jeff Stone said. "The lack of action is going to hurt farms as well as farmworkers, because many of them depend on the extra hours they've gotten up to now, during nursery shipping season and other peak times."

Oregon currently has an overtime threshold of 48 hours, which will go to 40 hours in 2027 if the law is not changed. OAN's bill would keep the threshold at 48 hours and allow a 12-week peak season exemption with a 55-hour

threshold. Agricultural overtime so far has resulted in fewer hours and less take-home pay for farmworkers. This effect is even more pronounced in Washington and California, where a 40-hour threshold has been fully implemented.

OAN leaders felt it was key to have a Democrat introduce the bill in a Legislature that party controls by dual supermajority (18-12 in the Senate and 36-24 in the House). There are other avenues to introduce it as a priority bill and try to advance it, but without bipartisan support, the odds of passage realistically have decreased. Additionally, Gov. Tina Kotek has not shown support.

"We will keep trying," Stone said. "The bill is too critical for nurseries and their workers."

A similar effort in the state of Washington to fix ag overtime languished when two bills that would allow a seasonal overtime extension failed to receive hearings.

EVERDE DECLARES CHAPTER 11 BANKRUPTCY

The operator of a Forest Grove, Oregon, nursery, TreeSap Farms (Houston, Texas), dba **Everde Growers**, filed for Chapter 11 protection on February 24 in the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Southern District of Texas. According to the court documents, the company reported \$100 million to \$500 million in both



Everde operates 15 nurseries in Texas, Florida, California and Oregon. Its Oregon nursery is in Forest Grove. OAN FILE PHOTO

assets and liabilities.

The company cited significant losses in its Southern California operations, driven by weather-related disruptions, that more than offset the profitability achieved in its other regions. In 2022, the Southern California region experienced drought conditions, which were followed by an unusually high number of wet weather days in 2023 and 2024. Additionally, from 2022 to 2024, the company's debt load increased by \$22.5 million, driven by higher working capital needs, lower-than-forecasted profits, and a doubling of interest expenses that culminated in an extra \$25.3 million in interest costs.

The company operates 15 nurseries in Texas, Florida, California and Oregon. Seven of the nurseries are owned by the company and the remainder, including the nursery in Forest Grove, are leased.

On February 25, the court approved an interim Debtor in Possession Order that allows TreeSap to secure up to \$51 million in post-petition financing to provide necessary liquidity to sustain operations through the Chapter 11 process while preserving the debtor's asset base for a potential sale or restructuring.

DCA OUTDOOR DECLARES CHAPTER 11 BANKRUPTCY

DCA Outdoor (Kansas City, Missouri) filed for Chapter 11 protection on February 20 in the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Western District of Missouri. As of the petition date, the company reported less than \$50,000 in assets and \$50 million to \$100 million in liabilities. The company has vertically integrated operations that includes nursery production, landscape distribution, retail, transportation, and marketing businesses.

In Oregon, DCA owns **Schwope Brothers Tree Farms** in Banks. The company also has operations in Illinois, Indiana, Kansas and Missouri.

The company cited a major customer's refusal to pay for \$3 million in shipments, a plant disease at a key nursery in Oregon that led to inventory impairments, and softer economic conditions and weakened demand for landscaping products that further reduced revenues below 2023 levels.

"DCA Outdoor Inc. and its related companies continue our business as usual, including full service to all our customers and partners," the company said in a statement to *Greenhouse Management*.

"We remain fully committed to our clients and our business, and we plan to continue our partnerships for many years to come. Our commitment to delivering premier products and being a leader in our industry remains unchanged, notwithstanding recent challenges in the market.

"To preserve our businesses and provide the necessary breathing room to pursue restructuring and improvement plans, DCA and affiliate companies filed voluntary bankruptcy petitions with the Federal Bankruptcy Court. The companies are working on plans for the future, likely with new partners and investors. The reorganization proceedings allow us to continue supporting our customers and further allow us to deliver our products in the ordinary course of business. We look forward to serving all our clients and customers for many more years to come."

USDA EXPANDS CROP INSURANCE PROGRAM FOR PRODUCERS USING CONTROLLED ENVIRONMENTS

The U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) is expanding the Controlled Environment pilot crop insurance pro-

gram to an additional 48 counties in 17 states for 2026 and succeeding crop years, according to AmericanHort.

The Controlled Environment program from USDA's Risk Management Agency (RMA) is specifically for plants grown in fully enclosed controlled environments and provides coverage against plant diseases subject to destruction orders. Additionally, RMA is making other improvements, including increasing the upper limit of coverage percentage from 75% to 85%, and providing coverage for quarantines when certain qualifications are met.

"Expanding and improving the Controlled Environment program better aligns risk management tools with the needs of producers who grow in controlled environments, encouraging growth, innovation and viability within these sectors," said RMA Acting Administrator Heather Manzano.

The Controlled Environment

program is available in select counties in Oregon, Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Delaware, Florida, Georgia, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, Washington, West Virginia and Wisconsin.

The sales closing date for 2026 coverage is either May 1, 2025, or Sept. 1, 2025, depending on location. For more information, go to TinyURL.com/RMACropInsure.

REGISTRATION NOW OPEN FOR 2025 FARWEST SHOW

Attendee and exhibitor registration is now open for the 2025 Farwest Show, which will be held August 20–22, 2025

at the Oregon Convention Center in Portland, Oregon.

The three-day trade show and conference is produced by the Oregon Association of Nurseries, the trade group representing Oregon's \$1.2 billion nursery industry. Folks can purchase their expo and seminar passes and get early bird discounts at FarwestShow.com/Register.

"The nursery industry is built on fresh connections, forward innovation, new plants and dynamic interaction," Farwest Show chair Mikaela Eaton of Eschenfelder Farms in Canby, Oregon, said. "That's what the Farwest Show is here to facilitate. Farwest delivers a non-stop experience in the heart of Nursery Country, where you can get the ideas, make the connections, see everything that's new, and gain knowledge that will help your business and your career."

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Northwest News

eries and retail garden centers precede the show, starting at 8 a.m. on Tuesday, August 19. That's up from two tours last year. The additional tour will highlight advances in automation in the nursery industry. The trade show floor will be open August 20–22. The expo hours are noon–5 p.m. on Wednesday, 10 a.m.–5 p.m. on Thursday, and 10 a.m.–2 p.m. on Friday. Educational seminars will take place all three days of the show, inside and outside expo hours.

Those interested in signing up for a booth may visit FarwestShow.com/Exhibitor-Sign-Up for information, or they may reach out directly to Allan Niemi at ANiemi@OAN.org or 503-582-2005.

The show floor will be packed with more than 300 exhibiting companies, including wholesale growers, re-wholesalers, garden centers, landscape designers and service providers, allied service

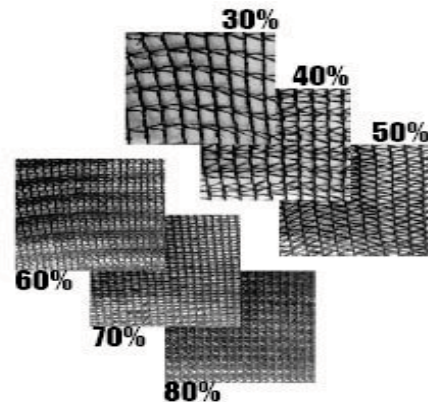


In 2024, there were more than 330 exhibitors at the Farwest Show. OAN FILE PHOTO



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Smaller parcels of farmland sell for higher prices in Oregon, just as it does nationwide, despite strict land-use laws that limit development and the rich crop diversity of the state. PHOTO COURTESY OF CAPITAL PRESS

providers and suppliers, and more. An estimated 4,000+ attendees and guests will browse the latest plants, products and services available to horticultural businesses.

Hotel registration is also now open, with discounted rates available exclusively for show attendees.

“You need a home base for your high-energy, high-output Farwest Show experience — somewhere to rest and recharge,” said Allan Niemi, director of events for the Oregon Association of Nurseries. “Our four host hotels are right in the middle of the action. They give you easy access to the Tuesday tours, the Wednesday keynote, the expo and seminars Wednesday through Friday, and the signature social events in the evening, including Farwest Happy Hour and Farwest Pub Crawl.”

There are four host hotels this year, all located within an easy walk of the Oregon Convention Center. They are Hyatt Regency Portland, Courtyard by Marriott Portland Downtown Convention Center, Doubletree by Hilton Portland, and Hotel Eastlund. When booking through Farwest, attendees and staff receive reduced room rates and free WiFi when they check in at the hotel.

To secure a hotel room within the discounted hotel room block, visit the Farwest Show website at [FarwestShow.com/Hotel](https://www.farwestshow.com/Hotel) and follow the reservation instructions provided by each hotel. Attendees may also call their hotel of

choice to book a room or make their reservation online. The special, discounted room block rates will be available through July 31, 2025.

It’s worth noting — the Farwest Show has not partnered with any travel agency for the 2025 show. Please be aware that there are companies contacting exhibitors directly claiming to have room blocks on behalf of the Farwest Show. They are not associated with the Farwest Show, and we have no control over booking and cancellation fees associated with their service. No housing coordinator for the Farwest Show will make outbound calls to solicit reservations.

SMALL PLOTS OF FARMLAND SELL FOR MORE IN OREGON

Smaller parcels of farmland sell for higher prices in Oregon, just as it does nationwide, despite strict land-use laws that limit development and the rich crop diversity of the state, according to *Capital Press*, an agricultural newspaper in Salem, Oregon. “Oregon’s farmland sector is unique in a lot of ways. As far as the small parcel premium goes, this is one area where it fits in the crowd,” Oregon State University economist Dan Bigelow stated in a blog post.

Bigelow conducted an analysis that compiled a database of 17,655 Oregon farmland transactions between 2000 and 2023. The properties were zoned exclusive farm use, outside urban growth boundar-

ies and between 5 and 2,000 acres. The small parcel premium held true in every region. The more populated the area, the more pronounced the pattern was. In the Willamette Valley, an acre in a sale of 5–10 acres went for about \$10,000 more than an acre in the 10–20 acre category, and over \$25,000 more than an acre in a sale that included 100 acres or greater. In northeast and southeast Oregon, the smallest acreage sales went for about 20 times the price per acre as properties of 100 acres or more.

TREE SOURCE ACQUIRES RYAN CREEK NURSERY

Ryan Creek Nursery in Aurora, Oregon, has been purchased by Tree Source effective March 10. It will be operated in conjunction with Tree Source’s existing operations in Oregon and managed by the Tree Source teams in the region, according to *Lawn & Landscape* magazine. According to its website, Tree Source owns farms in Boring, Oregon; Rupert, Idaho, Kaysville, Utah; Pleasant Grove, Utah; Parker, Colorado and Peyton, Colorado.

“We are excited to bring Ryan Creek Nursery under the Tree Source family of entities,” said Eric Mitton, the owner and president of Tree Source. “This acquisition will allow Tree Source to serve its customers at an even higher level than before. We have great respect for what »

Northwest News

Aaron [Wilcott] has built at Ryan Creek Nursery and look forward to carrying on his legacy of growing great plant material at an affordable price. We look forward to the opportunity to work with the employees and customers of Ryan Creek Nursery. Tree Source has a bright future, and acquiring Ryan Creek Nursery makes it even brighter — we couldn't be more excited.”

Announcements

BRIGGS, SIDHU & SONS PROPAGATE *PHYTHOPHTHORA* RESISTANT RHODODENDRON

Briggs Nursery (Elma, Washington) and Sidhu & Sons Nursery (Mission, British Columbia) are exclusive propagators of the Holden Arboretum's *Phytophthora*-resistant line of hardy *Rhododendron*.

The Holden's® *Rhododendron* Series has been rigorously tested and selected for their resistance to *Phytophthora cinnamomic*. These new *Rhododendron* are both highly ornamental and cold hardy to USDA zone 5. All 5 cultivars maintain a similar compact habit, reaching a mature size of 3-4' high x 3-4' wide in 6-8 years. As an added bonus, all plants set buds at a young age.

Cultivars include:

Holden's® Peach ('HoldenRhodo213' PP34540) — Mauve pink flower buds that open to ivory-peach flowers with a hint of yellow at the throat.

Holden's® Pink ('HoldenRhodo211' PP34628) — Pink flowers with a hint of yellow in the throat cover this plant.

Holden's® Red ('HoldenRhodo221' PP35416) — Tight trusses of rose red flowers cover this extremely vigorous performer.

Holden's® Fuchsia ('HoldenRhodo212' PP34541) — Eye-catching fuchsia flowers arranged in tight trusses cover the plant.

Holden's® Pink Flare ('HoldenRhodo201' PP33594) — Tight trusses of pink buds open to ruffled, soft pink flowers with cinnamon splash. Closest to white currently available.



Timothy Fulmer is turning wool produced by his sheep into wool pellets that act as a natural fertilizer, soil amendment, soil substrate, and a water-conservation tool. PHOTO BY VIC PANICKHUL

NEW PRODUCT UTILIZES WOOL AS FERTILIZER, SOIL AMENDMENT

Timothy Fulmer and his wife Kimberly stumbled on an idea on the internet and are turning wool produced by his sheep into wool pellets that act as a natural fertilizer, soil amendment, soil substrate, and a water-conservation tool that they say outperforms peat.

The couple had found studies by agronomists doing trials domestically and abroad and his wife had learned about using sheep wool for plant production during her environmental studies at the University of Oregon. From this idea, he started **Wild Wisdom Wool** in August last year and is now offering his product commercially to the nursery industry. Wild Wisdom Wool is based on his 20-acre home farm in Willamina, Oregon. “We're among the 20 small farms across the country doing this,” Fulmer said.

“Raw wool is superior at retaining water; being hygroscopic and hydrophobic, wool captures and then slowly releases moisture,” Fulmer said. “Its pH is only 9.3 so it's non-acidic, which offers an advantage over peat, which is acidic. Because wool is comprised of keratin, it is also a durable mulch and soil amender. Wool is also a fantastic fertilizer, with an N-P-K ratio of 10-0-4 and it slowly releases nutrients so it can last an entire growing season.”

The wool goes straight from his sheep to his pellet machine. “It has not

been cleaned or treated,” Fulmer said. “Nothing is added to the product.”

For questions or more information, call Fulmer at 971-312-2295 or go to WildWisdomWool.com.

RENDON NAMED DIRECTOR OF CENTER FOR PESTICIDE REGISTRATION RESEARCH AT NWREC

Dalila Rendon has been named assistant professor of practice in horticulture at Oregon State University and the director of the Center for Pesticide Registration Research, also known as IR-4, at the North Willamette Research and Extension Center in Aurora, Oregon.



Dalila Rendon

Rendon will primarily be responsible for providing leadership in the development and implementation of a program designed to expedite the registration of pest management products for Oregon specialty crops. She will also develop outreach programs to educate and inform horticultural and commodity groups, including tree nut, small fruit, hop, oilseed and forage producers, as well as processors and other agricultural professionals, about the requirements and processes needed to register safe,

effective, and environmentally sound pest management solutions for specialty crops.

Rendon most recently served as a research associate at the USDA-ARS Horticultural Crops Disease and Pest Management Research Unit and the Department of Horticulture at Oregon State University.

In memoriam

JACK BIGEJ

The Oregon Association of Nurseries is saddened to report the passing of Oregon Nurseries Hall of Fame member Jack Bigej, the second-generation owner of **Al's Garden & Home**. He passed away the night of February 25 while surrounded by his family. He was 83.

He was born on October 1, 1941 to Al and Ann Bigej. In 1948, they started Al's Fruit Stand as a roadside fruit stand housed in an old chicken coop along Highway 99E in Woodburn, Oregon, where the business still exists today. Jack later took over Al's Fruit Stand and continually evolved the business, expanding it into Al's Garden Center and later Al's Garden & Home, a renowned multi-location garden center chain with additional locations in Sherwood, Gresham and Wilsonville, Oregon. Meanwhile, he advocated for fair industry practices and sharing his passion for plants with future generations. In 1964 he married his wife Deanna.

By 1995, Jack had talked his children, Darcy, Dorothy and Mark into the business along with Mark's wife, Amy. His influence on Oregon horticulture continues to inspire those around him.

Jack served as president of the Oregon Association of Nurseries in 1993, and was inducted into the Hall of Fame in 2017. He also received several OAN awards, including the Outstanding Service Award in 2005, Honorary Life Membership in 2004, Retailer of the Year in 1992, and the Pat Richardson Memorial Award in 2002 (given to honor an individual or company who has been innovative in implementing new technology into the nursery business). He >>

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Northwest News

was also honored by Garden Centers of America with the Garden Center of the Year Award in 2005 and by Oregon State University College of Agricultural Sciences with the 2025 Hall of Fame Award.

“He was the most amazing father figure and mentor in my life and the lives of so many,” Amy Bigej stated on her Facebook page.

His bigger-than-life personality was contagious. He adored his wife of over 60 years, who was there beside him until the very end. He raised his kids and grandkids to know how to work hard and bring passion to whatever they set out to do.”

He loved sharing his passion for gardening and plants to anyone who would stop and listen. “His legacy will live on and we will do our best to fill his big shoes,” Amy stated in her post. “The greatest gift Jack has left us is his strong faith and we know he is now resting in Heaven, looking down and telling us all to



Jack Bigej and his wife Deanna. OAN FILE PHOTO

get back to work, the sun is out!”

A celebration of life was held for Bigej on March 20 in Mt. Angel.

A scholarship at the Oregon Nurseries Foundation was set up in his honor. To contribute, checks can be made out to Oregon Nurseries Foundation and

mailed to the OAN office at 29751 S.W. Town Center Loop W. in Wilsonville. Write “Jack Bigej” in the check memo line. Donations can also be made online at [OAN.org/Donations](https://www.OAN.org/Donations). Please put “Jack Bigej” in the donor comment section. ©



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Some lesser-known trees to consider



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.



Davidia involucrata, commonly called the dove tree, or handkerchief tree derives its name from the form of its white flowers. PHOTO BY MIKE DARCY

There are many choices in the trees that can be selected for our homes. The selection process deserves some research, which unfortunately is often neglected. Of course, the ultimate size in both height and width is important, as well as the growing environment.

Do we want a tree with showy flowers? Need they be in the spring, or is summer or fall an acceptable blooming period? What about leaf texture and color? Is fall color a desirable characteristic?

These are just some questions that should be considered when planting a tree. One should think of planting a tree as a lifelong investment because in most cases the tree will be a permanent addition to the garden. It will probably be around much longer than the gardener who planted it.

The following trees are a diverse group that should be better known. There is not one tree that will fulfill every individual wish, so a selection of the attributes of each, should be considered.

Discovered in China

To select a tree with an interesting history is a bonus and *Davidia involucrata*

is a good example. In the late 1800s, Père Armand David, a French missionary, botanist and zoologist, became the first westerner to see this tree in Sichuan Province in China. He sent specimens and seeds to the Jardin des Plantes in Paris.

Since this tree was unknown to Western science, a new genus was created and named in honor of Père David. It was introduced into the United States in the early 1900s. It is commonly called the dove tree, or handkerchief tree, and when it is in bloom it is obvious how it got these names.

The flowers are small, red-anthered clusters that are located between two large white bracts that can give the appearance of fluttering doves or handkerchiefs blowing in the wind. Viewing this tree in bloom is quite spectacular. Unfortunately, these trees were not readily available for home gardeners, nor was there a large demand because the trees did not typically come into bloom until they were 20-plus years old.

Sonoma Horticultural Nursery in California discovered a plant with larger bracts that also bloomed at the young age

of 1–2 years. Suddenly there was a market created for this new variety called ‘Sonoma’ (*D. involucrata* ‘Sonoma’). It is a reliable spring bloomer and will probably become more popular as more gardeners see the white wings fluttering in the spring.

Underused wonders

There are many trees that are underused, primarily because they are not well known. I am often surprised when I see certain trees that seem to thrive with minimum care and provide spring or fall color and sometimes both, but are rarely planted.

One such tree is the *Stewartia gemmata*. Not only does this deciduous tree have showy white flowers in the spring, but in the fall the red orange leaf color is outstanding. I have had one in my garden for almost 20 years, and it never fails to put on a show in spring and fall.

Sometimes plants, like people, have their name changed. Today, with DNA and genetic advancements, it is sometimes discovered that a group of plants is in the wrong family or genus.

Michelia maudiae is a good example. When I first learned of this plant, that was its given botanical name. With further studies, it was discovered that it is part of the *Magnolia* family, so the new name is *Magnolia maudiae*.

Regardless of the name, this evergreen tree is a worthy plant that deserves to be better known. The white flowers appear in early spring and look as they are in a straight row on the branches. The flowers themselves are very worthy of a spring flowering tree, but they have another outstanding attribute, and that is their ➤

What I'm Hearing

fragrance. It is a sweet fragrance the permeates the air around it.

Trees in unfamiliar places

One of the perks of going on a garden tour is the likelihood of seeing a new plant or perhaps a familiar plant that is used in a different way.

I was familiar with tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*), but had never seen it in flower until two years ago on a garden tour. This is a fast-growing large tree that is definitely not for a small garden.

Upon first seeing the flower on this day in mid-June, I did not know what it was, nor did most of the other people in the tour group. The flower was tulip shaped, hence the common name “tulip tree,” and the color was a greenish yellow with orange at the base. Such an unusual and striking bloom.

On the same tour as mentioned above, was an *Abies koreana* ‘Frosty’. This conifer has striking blue cones and signaled that there may be many other conifers in this garden. The garden owners were conifer collectors, and there were many new plants to be seen. This particular *Abies* was showing off its abundant cones that were held upright and provided a nice contrast against the matte green foliage which had a light silvery color on the underside of the needles.

Another tree that always draws attention from visitors but rarely is seen is *Quercus alnifolia*. The underneath side of the leaves of this oak tree has a fuzzy golden texture, almost like indumentum on a rhododendron. I cannot say much about this as a mature tree because it is only about 4 feet in height, but it has survived several winters with no protection and looks good throughout the year.

Scratching the surface of tree diversity

There are so many trees to choose from and most of us are probably at a beginner's level of the diversity that is available. If your city has a botanic garden or arboretum, that would be a good place to discover what will grow in your region and what the trees actually look like when



The tulip tree (*Liriodendron tulipifera*) is a fast-growing large tree and has an unusual blossom. PHOTO BY MIKE DARCY



Stewartia gemmata puts on a show in the spring as well as the fall, with showy white flowers in the spring, and the leaves turn red orange in the fall. PHOTO BY MIKE DARCY

growing out in the open.

Remember that selection is important, because a tree is a very long-term investment. Garden centers are a great place to get your questions answered regarding the perfect tree for your yard. The knowledge-

able staff will ask the correct questions to assist you in obtaining just the right tree for your yard. You can be certain that you will get the best selection to thrive in your yard for you to enjoy for years to come. ©

MEET THE LEADER

The voices of Oregon's nursery industry



PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

WHAT IS YOUR BACKGROUND?

Worked on the family grass seed farm growing up. Graduated from Oregon State University with a degree in agriculture. Interned at Bailey Nursery in Yamhill, Oregon, in the summer of 1996. After graduating from OSU, went to work at Marion Ag Service as a crop adviser for 4 years. Then, went to work at Woodburn Nursery & Azaleas for three-and-a-half years. Started Pohlschneider Nursery in 2000 while working at Marion Ag. In 2005, I went back to the family farm full time to work for my parents and continue to grow my nursery operation. Today, the nursery covers 60 acres, and the farm continues to produce grass, squash, and clover seed.

WHAT'S YOUR GUIDING PRINCIPLE?

I want to be fair, firm and honest while running a manageable and profitable business.

WHAT'S A GOAL YET TO BE ACHIEVED?

We have been expanding and growing

in the past few years and we've hit the size that we want to be. Now we need to focus more on capacity, dialing in the number of plants with our current space and the desirable number of employees.

WHAT WAS YOUR BEST BUSINESS DECISION?

To stay in business. Our first crop came in 2008 during the recession, and it was a challenging time. We paid an excavator to come in and burn some of our crop. We did not have the knowledge and had not been established in the market. Through discussions with peers, third parties, and another gut check, we put more effort into the business and more focus.

WHAT WAS YOUR HARDEST DECISION?

Deciding how much risk to take on. We expanded a lot and that created a lot of financial and personal pressure. I think we have found the size and capacities we are com- >>

Sam Pohlschneider

Owner/president

Pohlschneider Nursery, St. Paul, Oregon

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Meet the Leader

fortable with. Sometimes it is more knowing what we are not, more so than what we are.

WHAT WAS YOUR GREATEST MISSED OPPORTUNITY?

Nothing stands out. Just focus on how we can continue to improve and grow within our risk capacity.

WHO WAS YOUR MOST SIGNIFICANT MENTOR?

I have had many mentors over the years through the startup and established phases who gave me the confidence that what we were going through is normal. They told me that everyone goes through this, and gave me encouragement to keep going on.

WHAT'S YOUR BEST BUSINESS ADVICE?

When trying to make a decision, write down on the top of a piece of paper pros/cons with a line down the middle and list all of the pros and cons to the deci-

sion. By the time I am done filling it out, and all the scatter-brain ideas are written down, the decision is usually pretty clear. Then ask the question: What is the worst possible outcome? And if we can live with that, then proceed and implement.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT THE INDUSTRY?

The people. I am grateful to be surrounded by great people. Vendors, peers, customers; it is a blessing. I also enjoy the diversity of work, from propagation to growing, selling, building infrastructure, and equipment.

WHAT ARE THE MOST CRITICAL CHALLENGES FACING THE INDUSTRY TODAY?

Labor. The new heat and overtime laws have resulted in decreased take-home pay. We give our employees raises every year, but these two issues result in reduced hours worked and take home pay.

WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST CHALLENGE?

Keeping good people. We do our best to treat and pay our employees well, and then one day they can just be gone.

WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO GO TO WORK EVERY DAY?

To continue to become better, more efficient, and more simplified. As a business owner I have the responsibility to create a positive experience and supportive environment for our employees, customers, and suppliers.

WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

My wife and kids. Laura and I celebrated 25 years of marriage this year and are raising three fine boys. They have good heads on their shoulders and will be a positive influence in their career field, families, and communities. I am proud of their accomplishments and the men they are growing into and look forward to what is next. ©



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New frontiers for Japanese snowbells

Styrax japonicus 'Evening Light' (above and below) from J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co. has glossy deep purple foliage that is unique among snowbells, providing a dramatically dark backdrop for fragrant white, bell shaped flowers that appear in June. With adequate soil moisture, some reblooming will occur. PHOTOS COURTESY OF J. FRANK SCHMIDT & SON CO.

***Styrax japonicus* is catching the eyes of gardeners and greater attention from growers**

BY ERICA BROWNE GRIVAS

While its strong wood may be used as ribs for umbrellas and walking sticks, it is better known for its tiers of bell-shaped blossoms adorning the branches in spring. The flowers, which can be fragrant, attract bees, butterflies and hummingbirds, and its gray-laced-orange bark offers winter interest.

Styrax japonicus, or Japanese snowbell, has been making waves in the industry, gaining attention from growers, breeders and gardeners as an uncommon compact ornamental tree.

Nightfall® (*S.j.* 'JFS 6SJ' PP34817), bred by **J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co.**,

made news grabbing both the judges' and peoples' choice awards in the Farwest Show New Varieties Showcase in 2022. In 2024, **Robinson Nursery Inc.**'s reblooming Starway to Heaven® (*S.j.* 'RNI-RIXRED' PP35353) repeated the sweep.

Wide appeal

Maria Zampini, owner of UpShoot Hort, leads the tree program at Proven Winners® ColorChoice® and is bullish on the appeal of Japanese snowbells. "I think in general that consumers are looking for nice, tidy, smaller-size selections to be a focal point in the landscape and/or for small spaces," she said. "Snowbells tick many of these boxes as well as others like fragrance, being maintenance-free, disease- and insect-free, and more. I mean, what's not to like?"

"There are lots of great reasons to >>



New frontiers for Japanese snowbells



grow *Styrax*,” agreed Ryan Contreras, an Oregon State University professor leading breeding programs in the Department of Horticulture program in Corvallis. “They like a bit of irrigation in summer, but there’s not a huge issue with any pests or pathogens.”

The trees thrive in both sun and partial shade, and are being offered in multiple profiles and bloom colors. Opinions differ as to the strength of fragrance, and the fall color isn’t especially strong.

However, their good manners and relatively compact size are a major plus amid increasingly dense housing, said John Lewis, president and owner of **JLPN Inc.**, a propagation nursery in Salem, Oregon. JLPN introduced Marley’s Pink® snowbell (*S.j.* ‘JLWeeping’ PP23755, initially known as ‘Marley’s Pink Parasol’, which had to be renamed due to trademark issues).

Named after Lewis’ daughter Marley, this selection of *S.j.* ‘Pink Chimes’ appealed to Martha Stewart so much she planted an allée of them bordering her tennis court in 2016 (she later added first purple-leaf cultivar, *S.j.* ‘Evening Light’). “Snowbells are definitely taking off for us in popularity largely due to the great aspects of the tree and the ever-shrinking lot sizes of residential homes,” Lewis said. “You might have a small space to



JLPN Inc. introduced Marley’s Pink® snowbell (above and left), named after owner John Lewis’ daughter Marley and the tree appealed so much to Martha Stewart that she planted an allée of them bordering her tennis court in 2016. PHOTOS COURTESY OF PROVEN WINNERS® COLORCHOICE®

landscape, but plant lovers want to fit in as many ornamentals in as possible. The smaller stature of some cultivars can make that a reality. Plus, I think the consumers are becoming more sophisticated with their tree selections for the landscape.

There are many species of trees that are so over-planted in the landscape, and *Styrax* really stands alone when it’s in bloom.”

Consequently, he is “seeing an increase in our seedling sales for growers that are wanting to increase production on some of the newer varieties that are

on the market. We are currently growing the seedlings for grafting understock, and developing our grafting program, which will include our selection Marley’s Pink.”

Charting the change

Japanese snowbells, native to Korea, Japan and southern China, have a long history in the United States, and were introduced in the 1860s.

Schmidt has been breeding snowbells since introducing Snowcone® (*S.j.* ‘JFS-D’) in the early 1990s, said new plant



Upright Starway to Heaven® snowbell (above and below), a chance seedling discovery at Robinson Nursery Inc., has foliage that emerges red, turning deep green, and it blooms in spring with a repeat in fall. PHOTOS COURTESY OF PROVEN WINNERS® COLORCHOICE®

development manager Guy Meacham. More pyramidal and uniform in branching than the species, “Snowcone® set us on the path to find better *Styrax*,” Meacham said, noting that it remains a top seller.

“The issue was that *Styrax* forms are extremely variable,” Meacham said. “If you plant 200 seedlings, you’ll have 200 very different plants. Some will be good; some will be bad. So, we wanted to create some standardized cultivars so growers would know they’d have a decent-looking plant.”

Japanese snowbells may be upright or weeping, and offer green or purple foliage, with flowers ranging from white or pink. The typical height ranges between 15–30 feet, although *S.j.* ‘Snow Drops’, introduced by Buchholz Nursery, is said to grow 3 feet tall by 2 feet wide in 10 years. It’s a dwarf upright form with white flowers.

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New frontiers for Japanese snowbells



Swan Song snowbell (*S.j.* 'ORSTSTYx1' PPAF), bred by Ryan Contreras at OSU, is a dark-leaved weeping cultivar with pink flowers. PHOTOS COURTESY OF PROVEN WINNERS® COLORCHOICE®

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Nightfall wowed by combining purple foliage with contrasting white flowers and a dramatic weeping habit. The nursery recommends staking Nightfall to 6–7 feet to maintain its stature.

For Meacham's money, some of the historical highlights in *Styrax* breeding and introductions, in addition to Schmidt's, include:

- *S.j.* 'Evening Light', for that breakthrough purple leaf;
- *S.j.* 'Spring Showers', a seedling selection released by the National Arboretum in 2011; Marley's Pink snowbell, for its abundant pink flowers; *S.j.* 'Fragrant Fountain' PP19664, a vigorous weeping white-flowered cultivar with a strong central leader; and Starway to Heaven® snowbell.

Zampini recommends three Oregon-bred favorites from Proven Winners® ColorChoice® Flowering Tree program:

- Swan Song snowbell (*S.j.* 'ORSTSTYx1' PPAF), bred by Contreras at OSU, is a dark-leaved weeping cultivar with pink flowers she calls "the next evolution."
- Upright Starway to Heaven® snowbell, from Robinson Nursery in McMinnville, Oregon, is "perfect for smaller spaces" and bears white flow-

ers against nicely glossy foliage.

- Marley's Pink snowbell.

Starway to Heaven®, the recent Farwest double winner, stands out in both flower and leaf.

Maxing out at 5–8 feet wide by 20 feet tall, it easily fits in narrow corners. Another chance seedling discovery at Robinson's Nursery, its foliage emerges red, turning deep green, and it blooms in spring with a repeat in fall.

Marley's Pink brings the flower power, which is both abundant, and long-lasting.

"This cultivar blooms so heavily that the leaves will almost be dwarfed in size until the blooming is over," said Lewis. "Everything this plant has for energy goes into the amazing fragrant pink show that it puts on every year. The pink color is very strong and doesn't fade to a pale pink/white when exposed to heat."

Cultivation challenges

Snowbells take well to rooting and hybridizing, but they can be finicky at some stages.

"There's no trick about crossing them," said Contreras. "The bigger trick is propagation and production. Some folks have been dropping *Styrax* in recent years as they can be a little more challenging. You can root easily from cuttings, but the cuttings don't overwinter."

A good portion of rooted cuttings fail, and we don't know why.

"It's been a mystery for 40 years," said Meacham. "They just don't leaf out, but the roots look absolutely perfect."

In terms of attrition, Contreras said, "some will wake up and grow on, but what we have seen is you can root about 90%, and after winter one you'll lose more than half, and the year after that half again." »

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New frontiers for Japanese snowbells



S.j. 'Snow Drops' (above and below), introduced by Buchholz Nursery, is a dwarf upright form with white flowers that grows to 3 feet tall by 2 feet wide in 10 years. PHOTOS COURTESY OF BUCHHOLZ NURSERY

So how are most growing *Styrax*?

“Some folks have success with grafting, some are budding, and more recently there are plants in tissue culture — that’s the most effective way to bulk numbers fast,” Contreras said. Adam McClanahan, national field representative for Robinson Nursery said, “[Starway to Heaven®]’s not great from rooted cuttings. It can be finicky and difficult to take off. We had [sic] success with grafting, chip budding and tissue culture. Ideally, we’d prefer tissue culture. It overwinters well once it has a little root established.”

“We do ours from soft wood cutting in summer,” Schmidt’s Meacham said. “It’s important to watch moisture levels over the first winter.”

What’s next

Looking toward the future, Schmidt is expanding the range of material used for crossing. “We are still doing crosses with the cultivars we have,” Meacham said, “but there are a great many species to consider not in cultivation, native to Asia or South and North America. We are looking at doing some crossing of those.”

What would be on his wish list? “There isn’t really a strong-growing upright, pink-flowered form; that’s something we would strive for. Also, deeper pink flowers in general, since some can fade in the sun.”

Contreras is looking closer to home for breeding alternatives



Styrax japonicus 'Fragrant Fountain' PP19664 is a vigorous weeping white-flowered cultivar with a strong central leader. PHOTO COURTESY OF J. FRANK SCHMIDT & SON CO.



J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co. has been breeding snowbells since introducing Snowcone® (S.j. 'JFS-D') in the early 1990s. PHOTO COURTESY OF J. FRANK SCHMIDT & SON CO.

to improve climate-readiness. “I have an idea I would like to cross *Styrax japonicus* with *Styrax redivivus*, the West Coast native — they really are bulletproof as far as drought goes.” Crossing a proven cultivar with a more resilient native is a strategy he’s seeing across genera.

Yet he also has his eye on Starway to Heaven® for its distinctive foliage. “I’m intrigued by Starway to Heaven® and hybridizing that with Swan Song. If we can change the game on its foliage that’d be intriguing.”

“I suspect breeding will look to find shapes other than weeping which have

dark leaves and/or dark pink- or rose-colored flowers,” Zampini said.

Styrax cultivars can build a strong niche, Lewis said, possibly even competing in size and stature with ornamentals like Japanese maple. If cultivars can differentiate themselves with strong marketable qualities that the end consumer can easily see, such as Marley’s Pink, and have a reasonable growth rate for marketability.

The future is looking bright for snowbells.

“I think as more and more people begin to recognize the strong characteristics of *Styrax*, with the willingness to plant something different than the rest >>

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Snowcone® set J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co on the path to find better *Styrax* and it remains a top seller. PHOTO COURTESY OF J. FRANK SCHMIDT & SON CO.

Japanese snowbells

of the neighborhood, you will see it used more and more,” Lewis said.

“It needs greater exposure to architects, landscapers and end consumers. I feel there has been a lot more motivation on the market to expand the selections of *Styrax*. There’s probably under five *Styrax* cultivars that are players in the market, but the world has more crabapple cultivars than you could shake a stick at, so plant something that’s a little more unique and rewarding.”

At Robinson, “demand has been solid and continues to increase annually,” said McClanahan. “As more folks become familiar with and more professionals are using them in the landscape, we have confidence it will only continue to gain momentum.”

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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Getting a grip on drainage

Standing water can encourage diseases and create a poor environment for plant roots and microbes

Most nursery plants won't grow in standing water. Nurseries should be designed with good drainage to minimize the time plants spend in standing water. PHOTO COURTESY OF JERRY WEILAND

BY EMILY HOARD

In areas like Oregon's Willamette Valley, with heavy rainfall and clay-rich soil, an effective water drainage system is essential to the success of a plant nursery.

Businesses like **Hostetler Farm Tiling LLC** in Canby, Oregon and **Creekside Valley Farms LLC** in Lafayette, Oregon, work with growers to assess their field drainage and install tiling on their properties.

Bret Hostetler is the owner of Hostetler Farm Tiling, which he described as a multi-generational ditch-digging outfit. "I took over from my father, and he took over from his father," Hostetler said.

The business has adapted to new technology over the years to make drainage systems more efficient. GPS replaced lasers and plastic tile replaced clay tile. "Instead of putting separate pieces of pipe in at one time, now there's one piece. That revolutionized the drainage you can put in," Hostetler said.

Paul Kuehne, president and tile manager of Creekside Valley Farms, has been working on field drainage for 15 years. He tiles his own property and also works with other farms.

"It's a very important step in any >>



Designing a field for water drainage in the first place can help mitigate problems later on. PHOTO COURTESY OF HOSTETLER FARM TILING LLC

Getting a grip on drainage



The tile system allows water to constantly drain off, minimizing crop losses and permitting growers to access the fields earlier in the season.

PHOTO COURTESY OF CREEKSIDE VALLEY FARMS

situation in the Willamette Valley with the amount of rainfall and the clay-heavy soil that doesn't allow water to drain cleanly, so it affects the rooting zone," Kuehne said.

Saturated soil can encourage plant diseases and it can create a poor living environment for the plant roots and microbes that are essential to soil health.

Poor drainage encourages disease

Standing water can encourage the spread of water molds like *Phytophthora cinnamomi* and *P. pulurivora*, said Nik Grünwald, Ph.D., a scientist with the USDA Agricultural Research Service (ARS) in Corvallis, Oregon. All *Phytophthora* and *Pythium* molds love water.

"They are notorious for needing standing water to move from plant to plant and eventually kill them with root rot," Grünwald said. "They need standing water to sporulate and the spores swim in the water from one plant to the other. Standing water makes the disease much worse."

But standing water isn't the only concern, according to Jerry Weiland, Ph.D., another scientist with the USDA-ARS.

"It can even get into irrigation systems and spread that way," he said. "*Phytophthora* is one of the most common nursery diseases I see when I'm out in nurseries and it's almost always associated with overwatering or poor drainage issues. Those pathogens reproduce rapidly

with excess water and take off."

Grünwald is a research scientist in the Horticultural Disease and Pest Management Unit and was hired to work on water molds including *Phytophthora ramorum*, which causes sudden oak death and also infects other woody ornamentals such as *Rhododendron*, *Viburnum* and *Pieris*. The Grünwald Lab studies the sequence of genomes of pathogens.

Weiland, a research plant pathologist, has been working for 17 years to improve disease control, including efforts to battle *Phytophthora* root rot.

Root and soil health

Hostetler said that with surface water or a high water table, roots become stressed and don't want to grow. The soil health is diminished because it's not the right environment for the microbes and worms that would help the roots flourish. Air is essential in the soil for things to grow.

"Sometimes where there's surface water the soil is impermeable and won't allow water to go down into the soil," Hostetler said.

Most plant roots need a gas exchange or else they will suffocate, Weiland said.

Nursery plants are not happy when their roots are wet, Grünwald said. Nurseries should be designed with good drainage to minimize the time plants spend in standing water.

Kuehne said tiling allows a plant to have deeper roots and are therefore more tolerant to stress and have more access to moisture.

Causes of poor drainage

Grünwald said poor drainage can occur if rainwater accumulates and stays in low areas, if land is not properly leveled to allow for runoff, or if the soil is compacted and does not allow for drainage.

Poor drainage could also be the result of soil composition. Soils rich in clay are made of smaller particles so they compact together and make it harder for water to drain out, compared to soils with sand that have larger particles that stay farther apart and leave room for quick drainage.

Hostetler said clay-heavy or tight soils don't allow for water to get below certain layers, creating a high water table. Repetitive machinery like a tractor on top of the same area can compact the soil and also make it harder for water to pass through.

Hostetler added that property owners need to consider their neighboring farms too in terms of where their water is draining.

Overwatering

Weiland said the number one cause of poor drainage in a nursery is watering more than what can drain away.

"Some nurseries water eight hours a day and in some cases an hour a day might be too much depending on the cir-

cumstances,” Weiland said. “If you start to see water puddling up, too much water was applied.”

Irrigation leaks can also be an issue if water is applied and never stops because the system is leaking.

Irrigating early in the morning and only as needed can help a grower avoid standing water as well. Weiland said the easiest way to reduce the risk of disease is to decrease the amount of water applied and increase the time between watering.

“What is the minimum amount of water for a plant to thrive?” Weiland said. “Another good tip is to not water or to reduce watering when it’s cloudy, cold or already raining. Plants aren’t using much water then and the ground is already wet.”

Solutions

There are many solutions to these problems. Grünwald said it’s important to map the waterflow through a nursery and understand where water can puddle. With that info in hand, the next step is to regrade that ground or add a better drainage system to make sure there is never standing water around the nursery plants.

Grünwald added it’s crucial to ensure irrigation water is free of pathogens by filtering and treating it with chlorine, ultraviolet or other water decontamination techniques.

“Avoid when pathogens can move from plant to plant and infect them,” he said.

Growers can test the water for pathogens. They can float rhododendron leaves in a water sample and see if lesions appear on the leaves after a few days.

He suggested using electronic watering systems that can calculate how much water a plant needs based on the weather and the plant’s evapotranspiration rate, or how quickly the plant takes up water and releases it into the air.

Hostetler said the first thing to consider is subsurface water control.

“That’s the only way to control how much water comes onto your land. You can’t control the rain,” Hostetler said. He recommended treating really bad areas with a surface inlet, which can let a large amount of water pass.

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Getting a grip on drainage

be beneficial for smaller areas.

Kuehne said tiling helps protect the plants from too much standing water.

"Tile allows roots to grow deeper down into the soil so in the summer they have access to more water deeper in the soil," Kuehne said. He added that the longer roots provide a higher value for the plants. The tile system allows water to constantly drain off, minimizing crop losses and permitting growers to access the fields earlier in the season.

"When you're growing a high value crop like in a nursery, you don't want any part of the field damaged," Kuehne said.

He said investing in tiling is much cheaper than the cost of losing crops due to water damage.

"The ground is warmer so you can get out on the field sooner and you can till soil when there are wetter conditions," Kuehne said. "It just makes for a more

accessible area."

Hostetler said it's never too early to get ahead of surface water or field water issues.

"The sooner you do something about it the sooner you won't regret it. It's an investment in the land," he said.

Getting it right from the start

Designing a field for water drainage in the first place can help mitigate problems later on.

Grünwald said plants that are potted should have a clean gravel surface and plants that are not should sit on mounds so water flows away from them. Sometimes it requires installing pipes or gravel or regrading the land.

Weiland said to look for leaks in the irrigation system. Gauges can show a loss of pressure and indicate a leak. Another thing is to test for pathogens in recycled water and clean it with ultraviolet treatment. He

also recommended grouping plants together that have similar water requirements.

"Junipers and cacti don't need a lot of water so don't put them next to plants that need a lot," Weiland said.

Kuehne said nursery owners with a new property should call a company like Creekside Valley Farms to assess the drainage needs of that property and set up a plan for tiling.

"We are available to help consult and do installations on drain tile projects," Kuehne said. ©

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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Reading the future

Octavio Martinez of Heritage Seedlings and Liners said he devises production numbers by starting with an educated guess based on trends over the last three years. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

An accurate read on coming market conditions and a balanced strategy are critical to weathering ups and downs of tree-growing business

BY MITCH LIES

In the high-stakes, risky business of tree production, an accurate read on future market conditions can be critical to successfully weathering the ups and downs of the industry, particularly as the cost of production continues to rise and return on investment can be years down the road.

“It’s a huge investment,” noted Chris Robinson, co-owner and general manager of **Robinson Nursery Inc.** in Amity, Oregon. “Because of the increase in input costs, labor costs, and the cost of goods, we like to stick to the items that we know

are profitable. If something’s not profitable, we’re not going to grow it, because we know that there is going to be a steady increase in input costs over the years. So, we pay a lot of attention to the SKUs that we grow, and then also how much money each of those items are making and if they’re worth growing or not.”

Octavio Martinez has worked 24 years at **Heritage Seedlings and Liners** in Salem, Oregon and is in the process of purchasing the nursery from founder Mark Krautmann. He’s been around long enough to know the business and



“You’ve got a lot of factors affecting the economy, and we are hoping that what we propagate now, we can sell in three years.”

— Octavio Martinez
Heritage Seedlings and Liners

production cycles involved. “We are in a very risky business,” he said.

Martinez said he devises production numbers by starting with “an educated guess.”

“We look at the trend of the last three years, what the sales were like, and from there we get an average and make an educated guess of what the market is going to be two or three years down the road,” he said. “You’ve got a lot of factors affecting the economy, and we are hoping that what we propagate now, we can sell in three years.”



Reading the future



Octavio Martinez inspects some propagated plant starts in the greenhouse at Heritage Seedlings and Liners. He balances the nursery's long-term goals with short-term needs. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

A delicate balance

Martinez, who will finalize his purchase of Heritage Seedlings and Liners on June 1, said he learned to balance a nursery's long-term goals with its short-term needs by watching the previous owners, Mark Krautmann and his wife, Jolly, who passed away last summer, balance their production philosophies.

"Mark has always been sort of the visionary, the expansionist who always wanted to grow more trees. And Jolly was always the numbers person, always asking, 'Well Mark, you want to grow 10,000 more trees, well, where are we going to sell them?'" Martinez said. "So they balanced each other really well."

"I'm kind of a hybrid, because I worked with Jolly and Mark for the last 24 years," he said. "I have the Mark in me telling me to plant more trees, but the Jolly in me is telling me, 'Wait a minute.' And I think that is the formula it is going to take to be successful going forward."

Robinson said he is constantly fluctuating production levels, but rarely does he do so by more than 10% in any one year.



"The profit killer for our industry is overproduction, because whether you sell the tree or not, there's a significant investment in that tree."

— Chris Robinson

CO-OWNER AND GENERAL MANAGER
Robinson Nursery Inc.

The nursery monitors market conditions and uses data from its customers to help determine whether to increase, decrease or hold flat on production.

"Our computer system allows us to

take requests for plants whether we have them or not, so we have some really good data on what consumers want," Robinson said. "And then we take our best guess as to what that is going to look like 48 to 60 months from now.

"There is a lot of guesswork involved, but we use the best data that we have at our hands, and then we try not to decrease or increase a significant amount a year," he said.

Robinson added that one key to surviving in the tree business is long-term customer relationships. "We have developed good relationships with our customers so that we keep in constant communication on what they need, what is selling, how we can help each other to make sure that we're all planting the right stuff," he said. "Because of our relationships with our customers, and the fact that we've been in business for 40 years, that allows us to keep this production cycle going."

Robinson added that the worst thing a nursery can do is overproduce. "The profit killer for our industry is overproduction, because whether you sell the tree



At Robinson Nursery Inc. co-owner Chris Robinson said he constantly fluctuates production levels, but rarely by more than 10%. OAN FILE PHOTO

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Reading the future

or not, there's a significant investment in that tree," he said.

Martinez agreed. "You're three years out from seeing a dime for that tree that you planted. And if you over propagate, you can't sell it. And then you have to make the decision: Do I transplant it and have a bigger plant and hopefully sell it next year? So, basically, do you put good money into bad money, invest in another year of labor and growing it and hopefully sell it next year?"

Growing in a down cycle

From 2007–2011, with the tree market flush, prices depressed and growers reducing production, Tory Schwope, owner of DCA Outdoor (Kansas City, Missouri), Rio Verde Plantas (Cornelius, Oregon) and Schwope Brothers Tree Farm (Banks, Oregon) went counter intuitive. Schwope decided to increase production.

"I planted 10 times more trees than I had been planting," said Schwope, who also has operations in Kansas, Indiana, Illinois and Kentucky.

Schwope Brothers, which produces bareroot shade, flowering and fruit trees, had to scramble to meet budget during the ensuing production cycle. "I was young, so I did all kind of crazy things to generate free cash outside of my normal business operations," Schwope said.

"When the market took off in 2013, I had a lot of trees, whereas most all of the producers had way less than they normally would have," Schwope said.

As an afternote, DCA Outdoor filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy on February 20 in the U.S. Bankruptcy Court for the Western District of Missouri. The filing cited multiple factors: a major customer's refusal to pay for \$3 million in shipments, a plant disease at a key nursery in Oregon

that led to inventory impairments, and softer economic conditions and weakened demand for landscaping products that further reduced revenues below 2023 levels. The company indicated it is restructuring its debt and will continue to operate.

What to plant

Nursery owners also noted that knowing which species to plant in any cycle is critical to the long-term success of an operation. Robinson said he is planting more upright and smaller trees of late to accommodate the current housing trend of building on smaller lots.

"Rather than individuals planting a lot of shade trees like they did in the past housing boom, now people are planting typically a single ornamental tree in their front yard," Robinson said. "So, we're growing much less shade trees and still really good numbers of ornamental trees. And then, because of the smaller yards and smaller houses, upright trees are a big trend. So, anything that has a very narrow habit, like slender silhouette sweet gum or a kindred spirit oak, or anything that is very narrow is a hot trend right now."

As for today's market, Schwope said it doesn't inspire him to increase production. "Even for me, who has been very aggressive with increasing production over the years, the last couple of years, I've been decreasing production"

"When you look at wage inflation and even the demographics of the industry and how challenging it is to find management and sales people, it doesn't seem like a good time to be increasing production," Schwope said.

The bottom line is in order to be a viable tree producer it is critical to be planting every year. "The question," Schwope said, "is are you planting a little bit more or are you planting a little bit less than you planted last year?" ©

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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- Track and support tasks established at Manager meetings and Section Grower meetings.
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- Communicate and enforce company policies.
- Follow proper chain of command to receive work instructions and report any problems or concerns to the Production Manager.
- Perform all work in a safe and efficient manner.

General Duties

- Become a valuable growing resource, supporting the operational success of the nursery, and perform any other reasonable task as required by management and in accordance with applicable laws.

Mental and Physical Requirements

- Specific knowledge of agricultural practices.
- Able to climb up and down equipment.
- Lift up to 50 pounds.
- Able to operate hand tools (such as trimmers, fertilizer applicators, backpack blowers).
- Able to operate machinery (such as tractors, forklifts, case loaders).
- Ability to operate a personal computer.
- Ability to demonstrate company customer service philosophy.
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- Ability to coordinate customer service activities with staff in and outside the office.
- Ability to read, understand and carry out verbal and written instructions.
- Ability to move around the office with occasional lifting, bending and reaching.
- Ability to plan, organize and prioritize work.
- Ability to maintain and file documents.
- Ability to sit at a desk or computer terminal, writing, typing, keying and coding information.

Work Environment Characteristics

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- Ability to perform duties both outside and inside in varying conditions including extreme heat, extreme cold, and wet and/or humid weather conditions.
- The work environment for this position may include observations near moving mechanical parts.
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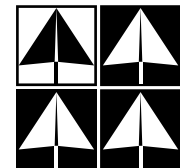
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2015	V4-6	#62422	3,762	\$48,000
2015	V4-6	#62468	6,944	\$30,000
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GROWING KNOWLEDGE

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



Prioritizing nursery pest challenges

Figure 1: IR-4 Project works hand-in-hand with researchers to conduct trials that determine the safety and efficacy of new pesticides for crops that are important to the nursery and greenhouse industry. PHOTO COURTESY OF USDA-ARS

Input critical to helping IR-4 Project identify most pressing nursery challenges

BY JERRY WEILAND

Are you facing challenges with diseases, pests, or weeds in your nursery? Or are your current pesticides and biological control agents less effective than you would like? The IR-4 Project is here to help and is asking for your participation in a survey to identify the Pacific Northwest's most pressing nursery challenges.

Your input is critical to making sure

that new pesticides and biocontrol agents become available for the types of specialty crops that you grow. Once the IR-4 Project receives your input through the Grower and Extension Survey, they work hand-in-hand with researchers to conduct trials that determine the safety and efficacy of new pesticides for crops that are important to the nursery and greenhouse industry (Figure 1, above).

The minor use problem

With an annual farm gate value of \$1.22 billion, nursery and greenhouse plants are big business in Oregon. Insect, disease, and weed control is an important

part of keeping the industry profitable. Many growers rely on pesticides — including fungicides, insecticides, herbicides and more — as part of an integrated pest management program to protect their investment and to produce healthy plants.

However, before these pesticides can be used by growers, agrochemical companies must first ensure these chemicals are safe and effective for their intended use. Each pesticide undergoes rigorous testing to determine the application rates that are effective for controlling diseases, pests, and weeds without causing phytotoxicity to the crops that they will be applied to.

In addition, agrochemical compa- ➤

Growing Knowledge



Figure 2: In crop safety studies, pesticides are applied to minor use crops at different rates to see if phytotoxicity develops. Results from this type of study determine the pesticide rates that are safe to apply to crops without damaging them. PHOTO COURTESY OF USDA-ARS

panies must also collect data showing that the pesticides are safe for human health and the environment when used appropriately. This information is then sent to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), who evaluates the pesticide's risks and benefits during a process called registration.

If the pesticide meets the standards for registration, it is labeled and approved for use.

All of this testing is expensive. Therefore, agrochemical companies focus most of their registration efforts toward large-scale agricultural crops (think corn and soybean) where the return on investment is large, rather than for minor use crops where the return is much lower. Minor use crops are defined as those having less than 300,000 acres in production and include specialty crops such as fruits, nuts, vegetables, and herbs, as well as most nursery, floriculture, and greenhouse crops like annuals, perennials, ornamental trees and shrubs, and houseplants.

In practice, this means that many newer pesticides may not get labeled for use on minor use crops when the costs for testing outweigh the potential profit of adding these crops to the pesticide label.

This problem, known as the "minor use problem," was recognized in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Soon after, Congress approved funding for a new federal program known as the Inter-regional

Research Project #4 or IR-4.

What is the IR-4 Project?

The IR-4 Project is a federally funded, nationwide program whose mission is to support the registration of safe and effective chemical and biological-based pesticides for food and environmental horticulture (i.e., ornamental) crops. That funding allows IR-4 to cover the costs for testing, shifting the expense away from agrochemical companies, so that new pesticides can be approved for the minor use crops that are important to our industry.

Since 1977, IR-4 has secured over 60,000 pesticide registrations for ornamentals, including fungicides, insecticides, herbicides, botanical extracts, biological control agents, and even plant growth regulators.

The process of selecting and testing pesticides for use on minor use crops takes several years and begins with the Grower and Extension Survey ([TinyURL.com/IR4GrowerSurvey](https://www.tinyurl.com/IR4GrowerSurvey)).

This survey is conducted biennially and is designed to identify any pest, disease, or weed issues that you, as a grower, are having difficulty controlling and for which there are few or no management options.

The survey is short and only takes a few minutes to complete, covering questions about the pest management strategies that you use, the kinds of plants that you grow, and for any additional informa-

tion you have about the specific insects, weeds, or diseases that you are having problems with. That's it! Click submit and you are done.

After the surveys are received, IR-4 summarizes the results and meets with pesticide company representatives, regulatory agencies, researchers, and growers at the biennial Environmental Horticulture Workshop to decide which pesticides should be prioritized both nationally and regionally for testing. IR-4 then coordinates testing with researchers from around the nation to conduct two types of experiments — crop safety studies and efficacy studies.

In crop safety studies, pesticides are applied to minor use crops at different rates (no pesticide, and low, medium, and high rates) to see if phytotoxicity develops. Results from this type of study determine the pesticide rates that are safe to apply to crops without damaging them (Figure 2, above).

In efficacy studies, pesticides are applied to the crops at different rates, volumes, and frequencies to see which method best controls the pest, disease, or weed in question. Results from this type of study are used to write the application instructions for crops included on the pesticide label.

Once the testing is completed, the results are compiled and evaluated to determine which pesticides are consistently safe and effective. The data are then submitted to the EPA for registration and, if

the results are favorable, a new pesticide is labeled for use on a minor use crop.

IR-4 in action

Many growers don't know that the largest ornamentals IR-4 program in the nation is right here in the heart of Oregon, in Corvallis. Initially established by Bob Linderman, Ph.D., management of the program was recently taken over by me at the Horticultural Crops Disease and Pest Management Research Unit (HCDPMRU).

Crop safety and efficacy experiments are conducted by Kenny Rolfe, our program's full-time technician who has been with the IR-4 Project for over 20 years.

Substantial improvements were made to the facilities in 2022, including a new shade structure and renovations to both the can yard (new gravel pad with weedmat) and greenhouse (new concrete walkways, automated drip irrigation, and



Figure 3: In 2024, a boxwood blight efficacy trial was conducted. Twelve treatments were evaluated, of which five show promise for controlling this devastating disease. PHOTO COURTESY OF USDA-ARS

new plastic sheathing). In 2023 alone, our program conducted 66 crop safety trials involving 17 pesticides on 27 different crops. To put that in perspective, this is almost 10 times the output of any other crop safety researcher in the US.

In 2024, we also conducted a boxwood blight efficacy trial (Figure 3,

above). Twelve treatments were evaluated, of which five show promise for controlling this devastating disease. Based on the results, adjustments still need to be made to application rates, and the trial will be repeated in 2025.

In addition to the program run by me, there are several other research- ➤

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IR-4 Survey



IR-4 Summaries



IR-4 Database



PNW Handbook

A sample of pesticides tested

Fungicides	Bactericides	Nematicides	Insecticides	Herbicides	Biologicals/Extracts
Benomyl	Acibenzolar	Acephate	Abamectin	Indaziflam	<i>Bacillus subtilis</i>
Boscalid	Copper hydroxide	Ammonia hydroxide	Afidopyropen	Pendimethalin	<i>Pseudomonas fluorescens</i>
Fludioxonil	Hydrogen dioxide	Chlorfenapyr	Cyflumetofen	S-metolachlor	<i>Streptomyces lydicus</i>
Fluopicolide	Kasugamycin	Dimethoate	Dimethoate	Flumioxazin	<i>Trichoderma harzianum</i>
mefenoxam	Oxatetracycline	Fluopyram	Methiocarb	Dimethenamid-p	Cinnamon oil
Propiconazole	Potassium phosphite	Methiocarb	Pyrifluquinazon	Dithiopyr	Neem oil
Pyraclostrobin	Streptomycin	Oxamyl	Spirotetramat	Oxadiazon	Thyme oil

ers in Oregon who run IR-4 trials on ornamental crops, including Marcelo Moretti, Ph.D. and Ed Peachey, Ph.D. (herbicide efficacy and crop safety); Luisa Santamaria, Ph.D. and Jay Pscheidt, Ph.D. (disease efficacy and crop safety); and Lloyd Nackley, Ph.D., (insect efficacy and crop safety).

A resource for your disease, pest, and weed control needs

If you have ever used a fungicide or antibiotic to control a disease, or an insecticide to control insects, or an herbicide to control weeds, you likely have IR-4 to thank for conducting the background testing necessary to get those products registered for your nursery crops.

Take a look at just a few of the pesticides that have been tested through IR-4 in the table above. Chances are you will have used at least one or two of these in your own day-to-day operations.

In addition, take some time to browse the research summaries online at TinyURL.com/IR4Summaries. This is a great place to find out which active ingredients have been effective against a multitude of insects, weeds, and diseases.

For example, if you were looking for a pesticide to help with nematode control, there is a new 2024 Nematode Efficacy report that summarizes nematicide tests against six different nematodes on several crops. You can also search the IR-4 database (TinyURL.com/IR4Database) for specific results by problem (insect, weed, or pathogen), crop, and pesticide.

Please note, however, that inclusion in these reports does not necessarily mean that those pesticides are yet registered for use. To find that information, always check the

pesticide label and also consult the Pacific Northwest Pest Management Handbooks (PNWHandbooks.org), our local resource for the latest insect, weed, and disease control information, including the pesticides currently registered for each crop.

Why your input matters

Historically, participation in the Grower and Extension Survey by growers from the West has been lower than the South, North Central, and Northeast regions. In fact, the West had the lowest participation ever in 2023 with only 14 respondents from 13 states and, only three people (two western growers and one researcher) showed up at the biennial meeting.

As a result, there wasn't much information about which pests and diseases were the most troublesome to western nurseries and there were few votes to advocate for western interests.

Oregon and other western states are therefore missing out on a key opportunity to have their unmet insect, weed, or disease control needs addressed through IR-4.

How you can help

1. The easiest and most significant way to make sure that Oregon's nursery and greenhouse industry continues to have access to new pesticides for crop protection is by filling out the Grower and Extension Survey (TinyURL.com/IR4GrowerSurvey). Although the deadline is August 29, 2025, consider filling it out now before you forget!
2. You can also attend the biennial meeting to advocate for priorities that are important to you and your industry. The next meeting will be held October 6–8, 2025 and attend-

ees have a vote on which pesticide trials get prioritized. Additional details will be forthcoming at the IR-4 Workshop website at TinyURL.com/IR4Workshop.

3. Lastly, you can help by providing plants for IR-4 research. Sometimes, it is extremely difficult to find small quantities (25–50 plants) of smaller-sized plants for use in IR-4 trials. For example, recent fungicide trials for flowering dogwood were cancelled because researchers could not find reasonably priced, 2–3 foot tall saplings for the experiment.

Conclusion

I hope this article has clarified IR-4's role in making new pesticides accessible so that western growers can continue producing healthy plants for the nursery and greenhouse industry. Again, please take a moment to fill out the survey if your business has any unmet pest management needs. You can also reach out to me if you have any questions. ☺

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Seeing a generational shift

There are some fundamental truths in the nursery and greenhouse industry. Two stand out to me as we are in the middle of spring.

First, Oregon nursery businesses may offer a complex mixture of green goods, while serving different markets and running at different sizes, but they all share the common denominator of being family run. Family is a cornerstone of our little slice of heaven in the Pacific Northwest. I am exceedingly proud to be a part of this world.

The second truth is the generational shift in our leadership, particularly over the course of the last decade.

Some background. During Oregon's key period of rapid growth in the 1980s, our industry blossomed due to the hard work, intestinal fortitude and pure drive of several nursery titans.

Our Oregon Association of Nurseries was blessed with leaders like Dick Joyce, Jack Long, Rod Park, Jack Bigej, Norbert Kinen, Tom Fessler and Doug Zielinski. These leaders then handed the reins to the group that led us into the 2000s, including Kathy LeCompte, John Coulter and Mark Krautmann. They all did their part to build our legacy.

Without the shoulders of those who preceded the current generation, the industry would be a fraction of what it is today. Now we're seeing that new generation shine.

Same work ethic, new era

Nursery Management magazine recently published a survey that outlined the challenges in attracting new workers into our industry workforce, and lack of engagement by the next generation serving on industry boards.

This is not what we are seeing in Oregon. During my 19 years of service at the OAN, a new generation has taken the reigns of leadership, with some following the footsteps of their fathers and mothers. Forged in the fires of rapid growth, deep recessions and industry consolidation during the toughest economic times, our new leaders have learned from the experience of those who have capably led OAN over

the last four decades.

This generation is in the process of taking operational control of their family operations and we should be grateful they are doing just that. Across the country, family farms are shrinking and growers are aging out. This will happen here in Oregon too, but what I am seeing now is a surge of fresh leadership. Have hope. We've seen this new generation is equal to grapple with the plethora of seismic changes in the market and political world.

What others are saying

Forbes magazine did a story on how businesses can prepare for the future. It pointed to the need to attract board members 50 or younger due to the need for more tech-savvy minds to face innovations that could disrupt markets.

With the rapid democratization of knowledge and information readily available at everyone's fingertips, the future not only demands we innovate fast, but stay alert for disruptive innovation from others. Not everyone will meet this challenge. The emerging truth is that the lifespan for companies is becoming shorter.

LinkedIn conducted a review and found that 90% of directors are in agreement that diversity of age is important to achieving diversity of thought. However, the average age of independent directors of S&P 500 companies is going up, and is now just over 63. That's two years older than a decade ago. Only 6% of S&P 500 board directors are 50 or younger.

In light of this, do boards really have the age diversity they not only need, but claim to value? My conclusion: many boards know they need to bring in the next generation, but the existing generation is not ready to let go yet.

What makes our board different

The Oregon nursery industry has long been a plant production innovator, incorporating new ideas and technologies, and seeing the market curvatures of the road ahead. Does the industry get knocked down a time or two? Yes. But as I've told my two daughters, in the words of legendary football coach Vince Lombardi, "It's not whether you get knocked down, it's



Jeff Stone
OAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

whether you get up."

I have served under 19 boards of directors in my time at the OAN. I have had the privilege to be the executive director for 14 of those years. We serve with a single goal in mind: to support and advocate for our members.

In 2016, led by a next-generation leader, Mark Bigej, the OAN board of directors created a task force to update the composition of the board to match the makeup of our industry to ensure that all production types are appropriately represented. This innovation has made the board more responsive to the issues and needs of our grower community.

Born from the industry to serve the industry

I asked our board members if they got their fire and start from Future Farmers of America, which is a fantastic generator of talent for the agricultural community. I found out very few participated in FFA. Instead, they learned from working the family farm.

The S&P 500 board members' average age is 63. OAN Executive Committee board members have an average age of 44, and for the full board of directors, it's 47.5.

Smart, innovative, future focused — we can all take tremendous solace that the generational shift of leadership at the OAN has put the industry in strong, capable hands. ☺



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