

Digger

DECEMBER 2025

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21

25

29

33

- 20 Introduction**
Meet four of Oregon's finest wholesale nurseries.
- 21 Columbia Nursery**
Wayne and Amanda Staehely have tapped their passion for unusual plants into a thriving nursery.
- 25 Ekstrom & Schmidt Nursery**
Brandon Schmidt and Steven Ekstrom have cultivated a reputation for providing quality plants at a low cost.
- 29 Heritage Seedlings & Liners**
Octavio Martinez is carrying on the founder's legacy of propagating rare and unique seedlings and liners.
- 33 Monrovia Nursery Company**
Celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2026, the nursery continues to innovate and set new trends.

COLUMNS

- 7** President's Message
- 46** Director's Desk

DEPARTMENTS

- 8** Calendar
- 12** Northwest News
- 37** Classifieds
- 41** Growing Knowledge
- 45** Digger Marketplace



Printed in Oregon on domestic recycled paper when available.

On the cover: Jose Gregorio (right) and Manuel Gomez rearrange plants at Heritage Seedlings & Liners in Stayton, Oregon. **PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL**
On this page: Clockwise from top left and from left to right: Amanda and Wayne Staehely of Columbia Nursery; Brandon Schmidt and Steven Ekstrom of Ekstrom & Schmidt Nursery; Octavio Martinez and Mark Krautmann of Heritage Seedlings & Liners; Katie Tamony and Georgia Clay of Monrovia Nursery Company. **PHOTOS BY VIC PANICHKUL AND COURTESY OF MONROVIA NURSERY COMPANY**



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SUBSCRIPTION AND CHANGE OF ADDRESS Circulation is controlled. Domestic subscriptions are complimentary to qualified U.S. nursery industry members. Non-qualified U.S. subscriptions are \$42. Qualified foreign subscriptions are \$35 to Canada; \$45 to Mexico; and \$80 for all other countries. Single copy rate is \$6 while supplies last. Notify OAN Publications of change of address. Please allow 3-4 weeks for address change.

Postmaster: Change of address correction requested to above address.

ADVERTISING Contact OAN Publications at ads@oan.org for display and classified advertising rates. Deadlines are the 1st of the month preceding the month of publication.

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Christmas, reflection, and the people who really matter

As Christmas rolls around, I find it's a good time to slow down and take stock. Not just of what's going on around the nursery and with our crew, but also of my own family and personal life.



Patrick Newton

Things seem to be changing faster than ever these days. If you don't hit the brakes once in a while and look around, you might wake up wondering where you are, how you got there, and if you even enjoyed the ride.

Like Ferris Bueller said, "Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it."

This holiday season, let's do just that: stop and look around. Look at your business. How's your crew doing? How are their families holding up? Are there issues you've been putting off dealing with? How are things with your vendors and customers — any fences that need mending?

Then look at your family. Are you happy? How are your spouse, kids, siblings, and parents doing? Are there small things you could do, or words you could say to make the home front better?

I was lucky to grow up in a loving family. Sure, we had our share of arguments and full-blown fights, just like everyone else. But the holidays always had a way of pulling us back together. It was a time to put differences aside and spend some real quality time together.

That feeling — coming back together and reconnecting — is something I've tried to carry forward in my own life.

These days, I'm fortunate to have two families: my family at home and my family here at the nursery. It's important to me that my employees, vendors, and customers all feel like part of that family. We work hard all year, and we make sure to take time to enjoy each other's company

too. Through the summer months, we fire up the grill for carne asada BBQs, and a couple times a year, we let the crew pick a restaurant and we all go out together. Those moments mean a lot; they remind us that work isn't just about production. It's about people.

At **Powell's Nursery**, we also host an annual Christmas party for our crew and their families. It's one of my favorite nights of the year. I get to do something for them that's not about work, it's about saying "thank you."

And it's not just the employees who need to hear it. Their families deserve it, too. Our team spends a big part of their lives at work, and their families make sacrifices so they can do that. They should know they're appreciated as well.

My wish this holiday season is simple: take time to appreciate your people at home, at work, and everywhere in between. Because it's those relationships — the roots we put down and the people we nurture — that make life, and Christmas, truly special.

And like Ferris said, "Life moves pretty fast. If you don't stop and look around once in a while, you could miss it."



Calendar

Get the word out about your event! Email details to Calendar@OAN.org by the 10th day of the month to be included in the next issue of *Digger*.

VARIOUS DATES IN DECEMBER AND JANUARY

WINTER TRUCKS TO TRADE SHOWS

Some deadlines are approaching for the Oregon Association of Nurseries Winter Trucks to Trade Shows program, which allows members to ship booth material – conveniently and economically – to several key green industry trade shows. MANTS, Baltimore, Maryland, January 7-9, 2026, \$595/pallet (reservation deadline December 5, 2025). Utah Green, Sandy, Utah, January 5-7, 2026, \$395/pallet (13 pallets needed by December 5, 2025). Idaho Horticulture Expo, Boise, Idaho, January 21-23, 2026, \$290/pallet (13 pallets needed by December 19, 2025). ProGreen Expo, Denver, Colorado, February 3-5, 2026, \$480/pallet (13 pallets needed by January 2, 2026). Space on each truck will be reserved on a first-come, first-served basis. To reserve space, the OAN needs full payment for each pallet. Pallet pricing does not include drayage or material handling fees. These fees are determined and billed directly by the show management and/or show decorator. Questions? Contact Jamie Moore at JMoore@OAN.org, 503-582-2010. Go to OAN.org/t2ts to reserve space.

DECEMBER 2 OAN OPEN HOUSE

Get in the holiday spirit with a visit to **Bauman's Farm & Garden** for the next OAN Open House! Enjoy a tour and connect with friends from across the OAN community. Plus, get a sneak peek at the brand-new NurseryGuide.com – rebuilt from the ground up to help the industry search, connect, and grow like never before. Please drop in between 3-5 p.m., on Tuesday, December 2 at 12989 Howell Prairie Rd. N.E., Gervais, Oregon. Light bites and beverages will be served. Non-members are also welcome, and members are encouraged to invite them to attend as it is a great way to meet new people and learn about the advantages of being part of the OAN community. Questions? Contact the OAN office at 503-682-5089 or Info@OAN.org.

DECEMBER 5 NEXGEN HOLIDAY PARTY

Don't miss NexGen's Third Annual Holiday Party on Friday, December 5 from 6-9 p.m. at **KG Farms Inc.**, 18995 Arbor Grove Road N.E., Woodburn, Oregon. The party will feature a white elephant, potluck, and drinks sponsored by Wilbur-Ellis. Families are encouraged to join in the holiday festivities!

DECEMBER 8-11 IRRIGATION SHOW AND EDUCATION WEEK

The Irrigation Show brings the brightest minds and the latest innovations in irrigation to one



PHOTO COURTESY OF VALLEY PACIFIC FLORAL

DECEMBER 5-6 VALLEY PACIFIC FLORAL OPEN HOUSE

Valley Pacific Floral will celebrate its new location with an open house from 10 a.m.-6 p.m. Friday, December 5 and Saturday, December 6. The new location is at 2515 Newberg Highway in Woodburn, Oregon. Spin the flower wheel for giveaways, see the new shop and floral displays and explore the new gift lines.

place. As an attendee, you will be making an investment in your business and your career while spending an exciting, jam-packed week with your peers. The show this year is being held in vibrant New Orleans, Louisiana. The Irrigation Show and Education Week is a program of the Irrigation Association, a not-for-profit 501(c)(6) organization dedicated to promoting efficient irrigation. Revenue from the Irrigation Show supports IA initiatives to benefit its members and the irrigation industry by improving industry proficiency through continuing education; recognizing and promoting experience and excellence with professional certification; ensuring industry standards and codes reflect irrigation best practices; and influencing water-use public policy. For more information or to register, go to Irrigation.org/2025Show.

DECEMBER 9-11 OREGON FARM BUREAU ANNUAL CONVENTION

Connect with fellow farmers, attend workshops, develop your advocacy skills and learn from industry professionals at the Oregon

Farm Bureau's Annual Convention December 9-11 at the Sheraton Portland Airport Hotel, 8235 N.E. Airport Way, Portland, Oregon. Get an update on the latest issues in Oregon agriculture and hear insights from American Farm Bureau and OFB staff. Close out the week on Thursday evening with the annual banquet, featuring an awards presentation and plenty of time to celebrate together. For more information or to purchase tickets, go to OregonFB.org/Events.

DECEMBER 17, 18 FIRST AID/CPR CLASSES AT OAN

Need a first aid and CPR certification renewal for yourself or one of your employees? For the first time, the Oregon Association of Nurseries is proud to offer first aid/CPR training to members at no charge through OAN's partnership with the State Accident & Insurance Fund (SAIF). The certification is valid for two years. There are two remaining classes this year, one in English and one in Spanish from 8 a.m.-12:30 p.m. The session in English is December 17. The session in Spanish is 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.

JANUARY 1, 2026 HORTICULTURAL SCHOLARSHIPS

Do you know a high school, college or graduate student who is considering a career as a nursery or landscape professional? If so, applications are being taken beginning January 1, 2026 for 20 scholarships ranging from \$1,000 to \$3,000 from the Oregon Association of Nurseries Foundation. The scholarships are sponsored by individual OAN chapters, and its members. April 1 is the last day to apply. Go to OAN.org/ONF for more information, or contact OAN Director of Finance Stephanie Weihrauch at 503-582-2001 or Scholarships@OAN.org.

JANUARY 7-9 MID-ATLANTIC NURSERY TRADE SHOW (MANTS)

Registration of the Mid-Atlantic Nursery Trade Show (MANTS) is officially open. The show, taking place January 7-9 at the Baltimore Convention Center, is widely regarded as the first big show of the year. Last year alone it drew more than 11,000 of your colleagues and 900 exhibitors. Get in on the event now and save yourself some money. The registration fees increase at certain key dates. Register for the early bird discount (\$20 per person) now through December 5. From December 6 onward, registration will go up to \$30. For more information and to register, go to MANTS.com. ©



Those honored at the 2025 Convention included (from left): Eric Morales Mayoral, Anneke Van Klaveren, Shay Boga, Robert Van Klaveren, Elizabeth Peña, Mark Blye, Jeff Stone, Sarah Noble, Ben Verhoeven, Mikaela Eaton, Noah Fessler and Tyler Meskers. PHOTO BY CURT KIPP

OAN honors industry leaders at 2025 Convention

BY CURT KIPP

Oregon's nursery industry honored several outstanding contributors at the annual President's Awards Dinner, held Friday, October 31. The banquet concluded the 2025 OAN Convention, which was held at Wailea Beach Resort on the island of Maui, Hawaii.

The award winners were as follows:

Emerging Leader of the Year Award winner Tyler Meskers (Oregon Flowers Inc., Aurora) is a member of the OAN Board of Directors, serving currently as secretary and previously as member-at-large of the Executive Committee. Prior to that, he served on the board as a green-

house grower representative. His parents immigrated from the Netherlands to start Oregon Flowers Inc., a grower of cut flowers. After graduating from Oregon State University, Tyler went to work for the family business and became involved in the association.

Mikaela Eaton of **Eschenfelder Farms** is a prior recipient of the Emerging Leader of the Year Award and presented it to Meskers. "Tyler has lent his considerable talents to advocacy on behalf of the entire industry," she said. "[He] moves the needle, both at the business and political end."

Political Awareness Award winner Amanda Staehely (Columbia Nursery, Canby) is a past president of the OAN

Board of Directors (2024) and served in various other board and chapter roles over the past decade, including as a container grower board representative, and as president of Clackamas Chapter. She previously was named the OAN's New Nursery Professional of the Year in 2019. She recently was selected for AmericanHort's Horticultural Research Institute Leadership Academy.

Staehely was unable to attend the convention because she was on a trade mission with Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek in Japan and South Korea. OAN past president Kyle Fessler of **Woodburn Nursery & Azaleas** is a prior recipient of the Political Awareness Award. He accepted the

Convention



Josh Zielinski and Darcy Ruef at the 2025 Convention opening reception. PHOTO BY CURT KIPP



From left: Sarah Noble, Josh Noble, Eric Morales, Elizabeth Peña and Mark Blye. PHOTO BY CURT KIPP



Jamie and Patrick Newton at the 2025 Convention Awards Dinner reception. PHOTO BY JEFF STONE



From left: Sam Barkley, Jeff Stone and Jesse Nelson at the 2025 Convention Awards Dinner reception. PHOTO BY CURT KIPP

award on Staehely's behalf, calling her "a singularly effective voice in the capitol of Oregon and in Washington, D.C."

"Amanda continues to build her skills to serve her nursery and the industry," Fessler said.

Distinguished Education Award winner Lloyd Nackley, Ph.D. (Oregon State University Extension), is a professor in the Department of Horticulture at OSU, where he teaches on campus in Corvallis and mentors interns at the North Willamette Research and Education Center (NWREC) in Aurora. He is a regular educational presenter at the Farwest Show; coordinates the Growing Knowledge series in Digger magazine; hosts regular field days at NWREC; shares research at national and international meetings; and helped coordinate the Nursery Climate Summit at the 2025 Farwest Show.

Nackley was unable to attend the convention. OAN past president Rod Park of **Park's Nursery** accepted the award on his behalf. "To obtain this award, you must stand out and distinguish yourself outside of your own self-interest," Park said.

"Lloyd Nackley has done so."

Outstanding Service Award winner Robert Van Klaveren, Van's Nursery Inc. (Salem) is the second-generation owner of Van's Nursery in Salem, along with his wife, Anneke. He has been a key leader of the Willamette Chapter since 2007, and served on the OAN Board of Directors from 2011–2017. OAN past president Todd Nelson of **Bountiful Farms & Nursery** is a past winner of the award and presented it to the Van Klaverens.

"Robert and his wife Anneke have continued to build and nurture the family nursery to what it is today: a grower of high-quality products," Nelson said. "[Robert is] a quiet leader who exemplifies the bedrock of what makes a chapter and an association succeed."

Chapter or Committee of the Year Award winners the Farwest Show Committee, chaired by Mikaela Eaton (Eschenfelder Farms), were credited with reinvigorating the Farwest Show. OAN vice president Chris Robinson (**Robinson Nursery Inc.**) presented the award. "There were a lot of behind-the-scenes efforts with changes

Convention



From left: Ben Verhoeven, John Coulter and Tom Brewer. PHOTO BY BETH FARMER

in staff,” he said. “[The show] looked fantastic. The seminars and keynote speaker were top notch, the New Products Showcase and New Varieties Showcase were highlights, the tours got high marks and of course the Pub Crawl was phenomenal. It takes leadership to make a committee go.”

President’s Five Stars: In addition to the above awards, outgoing OAN President Ben Verhoeven (**Peoria Gardens**, Albany, Oregon) presented the traditional President’s Five Star Performance Awards for key contributions to his year as president. The recipients included Elizabeth Peña, Eric Morales Mayoral, Mark Blye, Sarah Noble, and Shay Boga. Each is an employee of Peoria Gardens who made key contributions to the business during Ben’s year as OAN president.

Boga was credited for his contributions to the Lean effort at Peoria Gardens, which included leading Kaizen events and serving as a value stream leader in charge of perennial production.

Mayoral was recognized for pitching in to help others, encouraging teamwork and going above the call of duty.

Noble, the office manager at Peoria Gardens, was credited with applying Lean and continuous improvement principles to the nursery’s accounts payable and receivable procedures.

Peña was recognized for pushing to champion and institute a Lean culture at Peoria Gardens, showing its relevance to a farm with 25 employees.

Blye was credited with filling a number of roles at the nursery, including his leadership on various Lean initiatives.

The association also recognized and thanked Verhoeven for his year of service. In a surprise moment, it also recognized OAN Executive Director Jeff Stone for 20 years of service to the asso-



From left: Kyle, Noah, Cami and Mollie Fessler. PHOTO BY BETH FARMER



Tyler and Megan Meskers enjoy the evening while their daughter nods off. PHOTO BY BETH FARMER

ciation. Stone started with the association as director of government relations before becoming executive director. ©

Curt Kipp is director of communications and publications at the Oregon Association of Nurseries and the editor of Digger. Contact him at 503-582-2008 or CKipp@OAN.org.



Northwest News

OAN members and chapters are encouraged to send in relevant news items, such as new hires, new products, acquisitions, honors received and past or upcoming events. Email News@OAN.org.



Little Prince leaps across the U.S. with licensing agreement

Big news from the little pond! Little Prince of Oregon's crowned frog is leaping from coast to coast. The Aurora, Oregon nursery announced that it is teaming up with Lloyd Traven and Peace Tree Farm in Kintnersville, Pennsylvania, to bring its plants closer to East Coast Customers.

The nursery said this would mean faster nationwide delivery, lower shipping costs and the same high-quality, rare, and whimsical plants grown on both coasts.

"From Lords of the Fly® to Fit for a King® and Foot Prince™, our unique plant collections are ready to thrive from Oregon to Pennsylvania and beyond," Little Prince said.

Interested in being a licensee? Little Prince is looking for growers. Contact Mark Leichy at 503-522-9678.



Oregon's Japanese beetle program ended because it was left out of Gov. Tina Kotek's budget and subsequent attempts to secure funding through the Oregon Legislature fell short. PHOTO COURTESY OF WASHINGTON STATE DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

OAN LEADS GROWER-DRIVEN JAPANESE BEETLE SOLUTION

Oregon growers are turning to self-funded measures in their fight against the Japanese beetle. Although specifics are still being worked out, growers shipping to states that quarantine for the pest will need to enter into compliance agreements. They likely will need to either pay for detection and trapping themselves, or pay the Oregon Department of Agriculture to have it done.

Costs are unknown at this time, but these new measures are what's needed to reassure officials in quarantine states and keep markets open, now that the state of Oregon is no longer funding Japanese beetle eradication, OAN Executive Director Jeff Stone told a large group of OAN members in a Zoom briefing in early November.

"With your blessing, we're not going to wait for others to help out," he said.

Plant pest regulatory officials in some states that quarantine for the Japanese beetle, such as New Mexico, became less friendly to Oregon shipments after the state discontinued its Japanese beetle eradication program in September.

It was widely considered a model program. Since 2017 Oregon has seen a 92% reduction in the JB population. ODA reports a total catch

of 1,919 adult beetles in this past 2025 season which reflects a 65% decrease from 2024 — evidence that the consistent trapping and treatment program within infested counties is working.

The program ended because it was left out of Gov. Tina Kotek's budget. Subsequent attempts to secure \$2 million in funding through the Oregon Legislature fell short, despite strong lobbying from the OAN.

Stone and the OAN then met with ODA officials to try to come up with other answers and preserve Oregon's access to quarantine markets.

Most markets in the Eastern U.S. are not affected because they are already infested with Japanese beetle and can't quarantine for it. However, Oregon growers could be blocked from shipping without a compliance agreement to certain Western states that do quarantine for it. Such states include Arizona, California, Hawaii, Idaho, Nevada, Utah, and Washington.

Oregon remains one of the states that quarantine for Japanese beetle, even though the pest is present. The detections have been confined to limited areas, so the state is not considered infested. In fact, Oregon's nursery production areas do not have any known sites of infestation. Most such sites are in the Cedar Mills neighborhood of Portland, with a few in Lake Oswego and East Portland.

“Many of you if not most of you are not actually at risk of having Japanese beetle on your nurseries,” ODA Plant Division Director Chris Benemann told growers on Zoom. “Where we have these sites are not within agricultural production areas. They’re within urban neighborhoods.”

Benemann said she met with the director and deputy director of ODA to get the effort started, and that she anticipates many further meetings.

“[ODA] Director Lisa Charpilloz Hanson was pretty clear that nothing comes for free, so we’re going to need buy in from the industry for what has to happen,” Benemann told growers on the Zoom call.

Stone agreed. “No one likes compliance agreements, but if you want to ship, we’re going to have certain standards that we have to meet,” he said.

Growers on the call indicated they would be supportive.

The market access protection plan is not a replacement for the comprehensive eradication effort that ended this past September. Instead, the plan is designed to meet the import requirements of other JB-free states in the western U.S., and Canada.

U.S. AGRICULTURAL IMPORTS NOW EXCEED EXPORTS

The United States has traditionally been an agricultural powerhouse with a healthy trade surplus, but U.S. agricultural imports now exceed exports and the trade deficit is projected to worsen in the coming years, according to a new study by researchers with the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign and Texas Tech University.

“For most of recent history, the U.S. was a net agricultural exporter. But in the last couple of years, that has reversed, and what used to be a persistent surplus has turned into a persistent and growing deficit, where we’re importing much more than we export. Current projections estimate that the agricultural trade deficit will reach \$49 billion by the end of 2025,” said lead author William Ridley,



The U.S. continues to be a major producer of agricultural commodities, like corn, oilseeds, and cotton, but exports are stagnant or declining. PHOTO BY VADYM

associate professor in the Department of Agricultural and Consumer Economics at University of Illinois.

The researchers noted that imports have increased considerably, particularly fruits and vegetables, such as avocados from Mexico, and canola oil from Canada. The U.S. continues to be a major producer of agricultural commodities, like corn, oilseeds, and cotton, but exports are stagnant or declining. “Row crops are the backbone of U.S. agricultural exports, but markets are shifting as trade conflicts create uncertainty and instability,” Ridley said. “One of the main factors causing exports to nosedive is the ongoing trade dispute with China.”

ICE ACTION IN OREGON ELEVATES CONCERNS OF IMMIGRANTS

Recent ICE activity in Oregon is raising fear in the immigrant community, according to a report by *The Oregonian*, a newspaper in Portland, Oregon. Volunteers with the Portland Immigrant Rights Coalition, which helps monitor ICE arrests in Oregon, noted a dramatic increase in the calls to its hotline, going from about 20 to 40 a month last year to now about 700 a month, including reports of arrests, suspected ICE sightings and requests for “know your rights” information. They also said ICE officers have changed their strategy recently, moving to make arrests later in the day with

more officers showing up at stores, other businesses and public spaces where people gather. Recent incidents include:

- Several armed ICE officers with rifles drawn recently broke down the door of an apartment and arrested two men in Gresham, Oregon, leaving behind one of the men’s wife, Maricruz Andrez and her 3-month old baby. Andrez said the officers showed no warrant.

- At least 35 people (almost all farm workers) were arrested in Woodburn by U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement in late October

- Immigration authorities pulled a group of Latino students out of a car at gunpoint twice in one day in Hillsboro, Oregon.

- ICE arrested four Latino construction workers at a job site in Gresham, Oregon.

- Authorities kept a Latino man on the ground in the middle of a Portland street for nearly two minutes with an agent on top while the man screamed in Spanish that he couldn’t breathe.

- Earlier this month, a Latino U.S. citizen was mistakenly arrested outside his worksite.

As a service to Oregon Association of Nurseries members, the organization has provided a guidance document prepared by the OAN’s law firm Jordan Ramis P.C. It outlines in detail how to be prepared for enforcement action if it should occur and includes specific steps to consider in response to various enforcement scenarios. Employers need to be aware that they, as well as their employees, have rights under the U.S. Constitution that protect them

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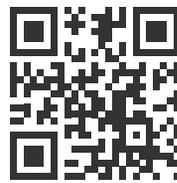
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against unreasonable searches and seizures. ICE is required to follow procedures that are designed to protect those rights. The guidance document outlines these protections in detail, as well as when and how employers can assert and protect those rights.

Download the guidance document at Tinyurl.com/OANICEGuidance and the Spanish version at Tinyurl.com/OANICEGuidanceSP.

PLANT DISEASE CAUSED BY *PHYTOPHTHORA AUSTROCEDRI* FOUND IN WISCONSIN

Cypress mortality, a plant disease caused by *Phytophthora austrocedri*, has been found at a Wisconsin nursery, according to a report by the Midwest Farm Report, an agricultural news website. The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture, Trade, and Consumer Protection said Cypress Mortality affects common nursery plants like juniper, arborvitae, and false cypress. The infection caused severe damage to a field of Star Power Juniper plants.

Phytophthora austrocedri predominantly affects plants in the *Cupressaceae* family and was first reported in the United States in Oregon in 2024. Before then, it was in Argentina in 2007 and England in 2012. The pathogen spreads via infected plants, soil and water. Disease symptoms include stunting; dull green or yellowish foliage in early infections; branch flagging and reddish brown/bronze foliage in advanced infections; lesions or cankers at the base of the plant or branch; and orange/brown discolored wood tissue under bark from lesions or cankers.

Announcements

ANDERSON JOINT VENTURE MANUFACTURES, MARKETS PLASTIC PELLETS

Portland Polymers, a joint venture between **Anderson Pots** and Ryan Thompson, sales manager for Anderson Pots, has begun manufacturing and marketing plastic pellets — made from

recycled industrial plastic — for use in the manufacture of plastic nursery pots and other product and is now at a point where it can sell the product to others after meeting its own needs.

Portland Polymers was started in 2024 because Northwest Polymers, its largest plastic pellets supplier, was getting out of the business. Thompson, a former employee of Northwest Polymers, worked with Anderson owner Chris Anderson to start Portland Polymers. “Our concern was securing enough plastic pellets from our additional suppliers needed for the demand of our nursery pot clients,” Thompson said. “We had a spare warehouse that wasn’t being used and had enough power to run additional equipment” to manufacture plastic pellets. It took time to get the equipment set up and going and to ramp up to be able to supply the needs of Anderson before offering the pellets to others.

For more information, contact Ryan Thompson at 503-702-9276 or Ryan@AndersonPots.com.

MCHUTCHISON, BEEKENKAMP FORM DISTRIBUTION PARTNERSHIP

McHutchison has created a distribution partnership with Beekenkamp. Starting on Jan. 1, 2026, McHutchison will accept orders for Beekenkamp products to growers throughout the U.S., according to *Greenhouse Grower*.

This announcement marks a significant milestone for both companies. Growers will gain access to Beekenkamp’s portfolio of genetics and high-quality young plants while being supported by McHutchison’s sales network and customer service. The collaboration further strengthens McHutchison’s mission to deliver exceptional products and innova-

tive solutions that help growers succeed in an evolving marketplace.

GROWSCAPE EXPANDS FLAGSHIP FACILITY

Growscape, previously The HC Companies and Classic Home & Garden, has opened a new 1.2 million square foot manufacturing and warehouse facility in Middlefield, Ohio. The warehouse alone is 750,000 square feet.

The new centralized, one-stop facility consolidates previously dispersed operations into a fully integrated, high-capacity hub that will benefit customers nationwide, the company said. By housing both production and distribution under one roof, it streamlines the customer experience with fewer shipments and significantly improves order fulfillment. The design also allows for less product handling, ultimately preserving quality and enhancing

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customer satisfaction, Growscape said.

VAN BELLE YOUNGPLANTS APPOINTS NEW VICE PRESIDENT

Austin Wolff has joined **Van Belle Youngplants, Inc.** as vice president, according to *Greenhouse Management*. Wolff has extensive leadership and sales experience from the heavy duty equipment sector. He's also started and led his own companies throughout his career.

BIOWORKS APPOINTS NEW SENIOR BIOLOGICAL SOLUTIONS ADVISOR

Bill Rietkerk has been appointed as senior biological solutions advisor for horticulture by **Bioworks**, according to a company statement. In his new position,

Rietkerk will lead the company's strategic push into the specialty agriculture sector.

In memoriam

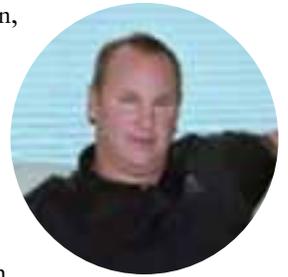
DAN WELLS

The Oregon Association of Nurseries is saddened to report that OAN honorary life member Dan Wells, who started D. Wells Nursery, passed away peacefully on October 13, surrounded by family, according to an obituary notice that ran in the *Statesman Journal*, a newspaper in Salem, Oregon.

The death came after a long decline from Parkinson's disease and dementia. He was 66 years old.

Daniel Craig Wells was born on August 25, 1958 in Salem to Robert and Arlene Wells and has three sisters, Nancy, Connie, and Jannie. He spent his entire

life in Woodburn, Oregon, and grew many crops throughout the years, including trees, strawberries, pumpkins, and squash.



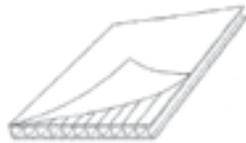
Dan Wells

In 1984, he married Diana Krupicka in St. Paul, Oregon. Married for 41 years, they raised two sons, Dylan and Darren. He was a proud grandfather to four grandchildren — Dylan has three boys: Daxon, Drew, and Drake. Darren has one boy, Troy, with a little girl due in February.

Daniel was known for his infectious laugh, strong personality, and unwavering loyalty to the people he cared about. ©

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What gardeners look for at garden centers



Salem gardener Michael Cushing loves going to garden centers to find unusual and interesting plants to bring home to his garden. One that did well in his garden this year was *Pleione* 'Tongariro'. PHOTO BY MIKE CUSHING

With 2025 ending and a new year beginning, it seems like a good time to get some feedback from gardeners on what their vision is for their garden. What do they look for when deciding on a garden center and what plants to buy?

Hearing what gardeners have to say about their gardens can be useful to garden centers. We can always benefit from fresh ideas. The visions presented here are from those who enjoy the art of gardening. They are not members of the industry.

The major question was what is your vision for your garden and what makes you go to a particular garden center?

Lisa Fuller

Lisa Fuller is an avid southwest Portland gardener who has gardened in

her current location for almost 20 years. Lisa says her garden is pretty mature now and she loves some of it but other parts she wants to change but need new ideas.

At garden centers, she likes to see display gardens that change with the seasons, masterful container plantings, and well-conceived displays. She wants to see eye-catching combinations of plants that complement one another, especially when trees and shrubs are the backbone, like in a real garden.

Lisa says parking should not be a hassle and there should be places to sit. Pathways should be relatively flat/level and restrooms should be easily accessible. Knowledgeable salespersons are a necessity and if they cannot answer a question, they should find someone who can. Garden centers should have depth in qual-



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.



Portland gardener Lisa Fuller's favorite plant this past season, *Senecio candicans* 'Angel Wings', was not new, but was introduced in the last few years. PHOTO BY LISA FULLER

ity garden supplies and tools and leave the mediocre brands to the big box stores. She understands the most requested plants have to be stocked but thinks a higher percentage should be devoted to the new introductions. Everybody wants what's new!

Lisa's favorite plant this past season was not new, but was introduced in the last few years. It is *Senecio candicans* 'Angel Wings'. Although winter tender (but fine if kept in an unheated greenhouse), it was a star in her part shade garden, where anything to lighten and brighten the palette is needed. This plant is a beacon of silver that helps lift all the other silvers and grays.

Ruth and Gary Clark

Ruth Clark and her husband, Gary, 

What I'm Hearing

have a three-acre garden just outside Vancouver, Washington. The garden was designed around several gigantic walnut trees. Originally it was an open expanse of lawn, but there have been changes over the years with the addition of beds and paths, retaining walls, garden art, and a shed.

Gary has a large shop and creates metal garden art that can be seen throughout the garden.

Ruth said that she really became a gardener when she moved to the Pacific Northwest 25 years ago. She likes nurseries that have unusual or hard-to-find plants, and she always enjoys a good gift shop.

"I will stop at any garden center that catches my eye, and I look for interesting plant selections, healthy, weed-free plants, and decent prices," she said. "On an outing with friends, I might go to four or five nurseries in one day. We like to string together nurseries in one geographic area and are always excited to find a new favorite. We may go back to some of those nurseries every year after that."

Jolly Butler

Jolly Butler has gardened in Portland for over 40 years and considers gardening a great passion. She considers her garden a private, calm place with shrubs and lots of flowers. Her garden is named Millefiori which is a combination of the Italian words, "mille" (thousand) and "fiori" (flowers).

When Jolly visits a garden center, she considers the outing in one of three categories: to get something new and unique, to perhaps visit an old friend by buying a familiar plant, or to experience a new adventure! She believes that a garden center should have healthy plants, a good variety of plants (including old favorites and new selections), and a helpful and friendly staff. Restrooms should be prominently signed and easily available.

Like many gardeners, Jolly enjoys seeing seasonal displays at garden centers. Often such displays can trigger a new idea or new a plant combination. In Jolly's garden, she likes year-round interest and often uses evergreens. Her philosophy is that flowers are often short lived, whereas evergreens last throughout the year and



Gary Clark has a large shop and creates metal garden art for his garden. PHOTO BY MIKE DARCY

continue for many more years.

Michael Cushing

Salem gardener Michael Cushing has always been a fan of nature, plants and flowers. He got his first actual gardening experience when he was in his 30s and living in Juneau, Alaska. He said that Alaska has an extremely challenging hardiness zone.

"After 25 years of fighting darkness, ice, and slugs, I moved to the Willamette Valley where I discovered that gardening was an addiction, also known as a hobby," he said.

Michael's garden has moderate to heavy shade on a steep, north-facing slope. He has two major motivators to go to a garden center. One is to search for unusual and interesting plants that will hopefully thrive in his garden environment. The second is to see extensive and nicely designed display gardens that would invite customers to wander and experience the nursery's plants in a garden setting.

Michael enjoys the luxury of often hearing presentations by garden center owners and their staff. He believes that a good presentation often leads to a visit to the presenter's business. He visits a variety of garden centers on a regular basis to get that one plant that he envisioned and coming home with five or more. A particular

plant that did well in his garden this year is Tongariro orchid (*Pleione* 'Tongariro').

Tom Bland

Lake Oswego gardener Tom Bland started his love of gardening at the early age of 5. His mother was an avid gardener, and she gave him a plot of land to start a vegetable garden. His current garden has lots of shade, and that limits the plant palette.

To help compensate for the limitations of a shade garden for many annuals and for a vegetable garden, Tom and his wife, Diane, have a community garden space that gets full sun. Here he can grow annuals for summer color and have a vegetable garden.

Their home garden is a Certified Backyard Habitat, with a requirement that 25% of the space be devoted to native plants.

In the spring, Tom will buy lots of assorted annuals for summer color for both the home and community garden. After this initial garden center visit, Tom will visit a garden center with a specific plant in mind. His philosophy is that if he finds a neat plant, he will find the space. Plant selection is more important to him than displays. Tom goes through garden phases. Once it was rhododendrons, then daphne, and now bonsai.

Gene Rozenboom

Gardening has been a lifelong pursuit for south Portland gardener Gene Rozenboom. Gene began gardening in his teens and has not stopped. His garden has transformed over the past dozen years from an overgrown, neglected landscape to a beautiful unique urban garden.

Gene describes his garden as a formal, orderly, natural garden. He is always on the lookout for the unique and unusual, and especially plants that he has not seen before. He frequently visits garden centers for new ideas.

When visiting garden centers, neatness is a priority. He does not want to see dead or wilted plants. Pathways should be clean, and preferably paved. Gene's ideal of a good garden center does not include having to walk around on muddy, wet pathways.

The sales staff should be happy and helpful and not look bored. He looks for displays with a broad range of plants. That is especially important for getting new ideas for mixing plants. He loves seeing containers planted, because he has many in his garden and new ideas are always welcome.

Gene focuses on several different categories of plants, including dwarf conifers, Japanese maples, and ferns. He is always on the lookout for more! He has recently added a new perennial bed to his garden which opens a new area for plants. As the saying goes, there is always room for one more.

The common message

Gardeners are a very diverse group with certain standards for the ideal garden center. Perhaps no single garden center is going to be able to satisfy every gardener, but the message from these gardeners says that neatness is very important as well as a knowledgeable and friendly sales crew.

Having unique and unusual plants is also important. Perhaps that could become the basis of a new monthly display. Gardeners depend on garden centers to meet all their unique gardening needs and enjoy visiting their favorites frequently. They are all delighted that garden centers are such an active part of our horticulture community.

Happy New Year! ©

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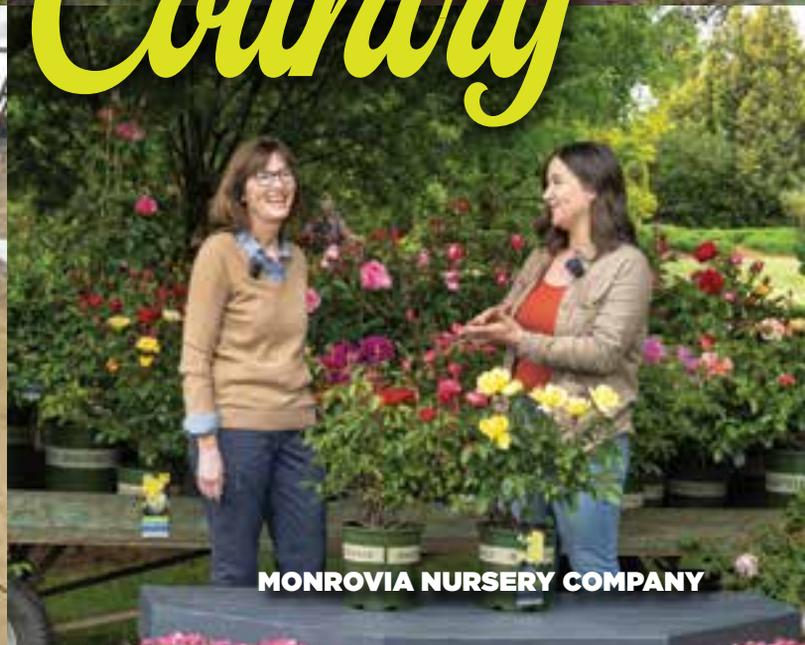
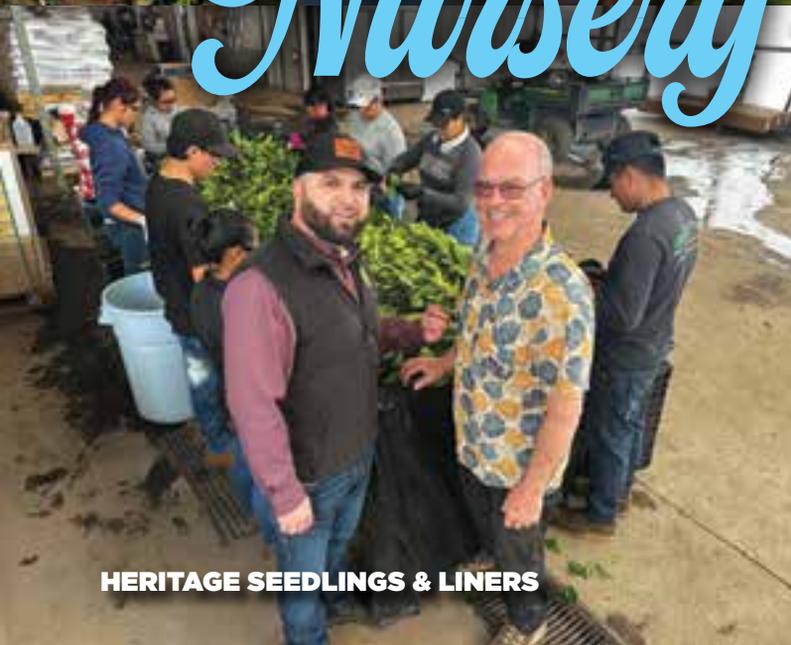


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Clockwise from top left and from left to right: Amanda and Wayne Staehely, Brandon Schmidt and Steven Ekstrom, Katie Tamony and Georgia Clay, and Octavio Martinez and Mark Krautmann. PHOTOS BY VIC PANICHKUL AND COURTESY OF MONROVIA NURSERY COMPANY

Oregon's family nurseries form the backbone of the backbone of the state's agricultural economy. Nursery and greenhouse material is the state's top ag commodity, generating \$1.22 billion in sales in 2022.

There are several factors behind this success, including an ideal climate for dormancy and growth, adequate rainfall for irrigation, quality soil on abundant land, and — perhaps most of all — the dedication and ingenuity of Oregon growers.

At **Columbia Nursery** in Canby, Oregon, the duo of Wayne and Amanda Staehely started small and have been growing Wayne's dream of a nursery specializing in growing rare and unique conifers and Japanese maples. When the nursery became a substantial business and the family grew, Amanda took over to run

the day-to-day operation of the businesses and raise the kids at home on the nursery.

Venerable **Monrovia Nursery Company** moved its headquarters from California to Dayton, Oregon in 2025, and will celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2026. The nursery started in 1926 with just 10 acres near Los Angeles and has become to the nation's largest grower of premium plants by sales and container acreage. It's thrived through wars, recessions and the latest pandemic and has been a pioneer in the nursery industry with a number of firsts: container growing, customized soil mixes, plant patenting, nationwide shipping and consumer branding.

The founders of **Ekstrom & Schmidt Nursery**, Brandon Schmidt and Steven Ekstrom, grew up with different back-

grounds and educations, but they are united in their passion for plants. Over the years, they've refined their nursery's focus and are known for Japanese maples, dogwoods and redbuds. They have a dual focus on quality and low cost and have developed a reputation for good cash-and-carry plants for small garden centers.

Heritage Seedlings & Liners in Salem and Stayton, Oregon, was founded by Mark and Jolly Krautmann and they turned their passion for rare plants into a thriving business focused on raising rare and unique seedlings, rootstock and woody plants. Now, Krautman has passed the torch to new owner Octavio Martinez to carry on his legacy and expand it.

Read on to meet these growers, and learn what makes Oregon Nursery Country. ©



Wayne and Amanda Staehely started Columbia Nursery with one acre, a small can yard and one greenhouse. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

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86 listings

COLUMBIA NURSERY LLC

BY EMILY HOARD

Wayne Staehely, owner of **Columbia Nursery LLC** in Canby, Oregon, grew up on the family farm in Canby, so it's not surprising that he knew that he wanted a career in nurseries since he was a kid. Growing up with a farming background inspired him to work with plants in the future.

As a kid, he would often visit nurseries down the road from his family's farm and they would give him unique plants to grow. Now, he is known for propagating and growing rare specimen trees.

When he was in high school, he got his first job at a retail nursery selling plants and he learned more about propagating them.

Starting the nursery

After high school and years of working

in retail and managing other nurseries, he started his own wholesale nursery with one acre, a small canyard and one greenhouse.

"It started small, and I have been growing it ever since," Wayne said. He gave the nursery his own name initially, and then after a few years of doing business he changed its name to Columbia Nursery. He added a second greenhouse in the first location before moving the business to a larger location.

In 2013, he moved the nursery a third time to expand its operations with more property.

Amanda, his wife and co-owner of the nursery, said the business really did start from the ground up.

A partnership

"I've always supported him on the sidelines," Amanda said about when the nursery first started. "We got married"



From left: Sebastian Morales, Jimena Casas and Caludia Hernandez trim evergreens in the can yard at Columbia Nursery in Canby, Oregon.
PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

and as the nursery grew and started to shift and become a substantial business, someone had to be here on a daily basis to organize trucks and the paperwork.”

Amanda said she chose to be that person to run those day-to-day operations.

“It made sense for me to be here to run it on a daily basis and we had little kids, so I could be here with them,” Amanda said. The couple has three children they raised at their home on the nursery.

“The nursery really is his dream and his passion, and then I helped take it into the business portion of it,” Amanda said. “I’m who the customers talk to on the day-to-day, and it’s very much his baby for sure.”

How they developed their specialty

Columbia Nursery specializes in growing rare and unique conifers and Japanese maples.

Wayne said his nursery offers a variety of unique types of Japanese maples and other different varieties of maples and specialty varieties of spruces.

“And then we have a lot of cultivars under those species,” he said.

Amanda added that the nursery has a lot of large plants that are relatively old compared to what other nurseries carry. “One of our slowly growing dwarf varieties is one foot wide but is eight years old,” Wayne said.

Amanda said when her husband decided to start the plant nursery in 2008, he already knew the material he wanted to grow was a long-term investment.

“He knew then that the material he wanted to grow himself would not turn over in three to five years. He wanted a larger specimen project that would be about 12 years, so it was a lot of time and

money and effort at the beginning,” she said. “It’s been a slow process to grow into what it is now, but we knew that at the beginning.”

Wayne talked about how he developed his nursery’s specialty.

“I like landscaping and I like plants in general so when I was doing retail, I’d see varieties I liked and didn’t like,” he said. “And when I joined the American Conifer Society, I would look at different landscapes. With my friends, I would go look at different nurseries in Canada and down south.”

“To sum it up, he’s a plant nerd,” Amanda said.

“When you start a nursery in 2008, everybody looks at you like you’re crazy and you’re not going to be here very long,” Amanda said. “But it has grown and our sales reflect that as well, so it’s

exciting to see it grow to what it is now.”

Most of what they grow is shipped out of state.

“Over 90% of our finished product leaves the state of Oregon,” Amanda said. “The majority is on the East Coast. Our largest international market is in Canada and we also sell to Japan as well.”

Wayne said most of their customers are re-wholesalers, but they also sell to some high-end retailers as well.

Successes and challenges

Amanda said the challenges of running a nursery have come with successes.

“Things come up when we don’t expect them, like repairs on equipment or infrastructure,” she said. “Some devastating repairs hit us two years in a row.”

But she said they keep a good perspective when those challenges arise: “Today is a bad day and I get the right to



Over 90% of Columbia's finished product is shipped out of state. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

be upset, but we take the good with the bad and think, ‘Do you still love it at the end of the year?’”

Amanda said some of those hurdles have helped the couple take a step for-

ward with their business and try things they might not have otherwise.

“Our structure came down with an ice storm, but now it’s beautiful,” she said. “We redid all the electrical tiling” ➤



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and it really is in the best shape it has been, and the plants show it too.”

Wayne said the propagation process and the growing of new cultivars that haven't been done before can be experimental. “Any time we have a propagation error, we see what varieties were successful, and some years they fail and there's a list of challenges,” he said. “As time progresses, and the plants get bigger we find successes.”

Once, a customer called and asked what the ending height of a certain variety is expected to be. Wayne said he didn't know because it was the first of its kind.

Amanda said the nursery grows many varieties and some are hard to propagate, so sometimes the process can be about guessing and checking what works.

The Staehelys enjoy hearing customers remark upon the unique varieties that Columbia Nursery offers.

“When we hear customers say, ‘I've

never seen that before,’ or ‘I haven't seen it in that size,’ that's really cool,” Amanda said. “People from across the United States send us photos of the plants. Having people be happy about something you spent time growing, it means we're doing something right.”

A look ahead at the future

As he looks toward the future of Columbia Nursery, Wayne said he plans to just to keep being able to grow and supply the numbers of plants to keep customers happy.

“We try to speculate for the future to grow the nursery and we want our customers to grow as well,” he said. “We look at what our customers' needs are and our strengths.”

As he considers adding new varieties to his repertoire, he also considers deleting some varieties that don't work as well.

“Those are things we're always looking at, what to add and what to take away,” Wayne said.

Amanda added that customer satisfaction is a huge priority.

“My goal would be to be better known,” she said. “I want to introduce the material, and I want every corner of the U.S. to know us. That'd be fun.”

She said she and Wayne love the amazing plants they grow and they have strong relationships with their clients.

“It's a great industry to be a part of,” she 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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Brandon Schmidt (left) and Steven Ekstrom started with a 10-acre plot and have grown Ekstrom & Schmidt Nursery to 160 acres and have become known for Japanese maples, dogwoods and redbuds. PHOTO BY VIC PANICKUL

FOUNDED

2013

OWNERS

Steven Ekstrom and Brandon Schmidt

KNOWN FOR

Japanese maples, dogwoods, and redbuds

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EKSTROM & SCHMIDT NURSERY

BY VIC PANICKUL

The seed for **Ekstrom & Schmidt Nursery LLC** started with a 10-acre plot that Brandon Schmidt bought in 2010. In the time since, he and his business partner Steven Ekstrom have grown the nursery to more than 160 acres and have become known for Japanese maples, dogwoods and redbuds.

“We’ve become known for good cash-and-carry plants for small garden centers looking for trees and shrubs,” Ekstrom said. “We’ve developed a reputation for nice quality, low-cost plants for garden

centers. It was the precedent that my dad had of being fair with customers,”

The owners of Ekstrom & Schmidt grew up with different backgrounds and different educations, but their love of plants is what ended up bringing them together as business partners.

Schmidt grew up in Damascus, Oregon, and earned a funeral science degree from Mount Hood Community College. “I was a mortician,” Schmidt said.

Ekstrom grew up at **Ekstrom Nursery**, where his dad was partner with his uncle.

Schmidt met the Ekstrom family at church and went to the same high school

Ekstrom & Schmidt Nursery



Ekstrom & Schmidt has become known for good cash-and-carry plants for small garden centers looking for trees and shrubs. The nursery has developed a reputation for nice quality, low-cost plants for garden centers. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

as the Ekstrom kids. He really got to know them during the years dating Steven's older sister, Heidi. He didn't know at the time that later marrying Heidi would lead to him working in the nursery industry.

"I was a mortician for five years and we were living in Hood River," Schmidt said.

He and his wife would come down to visit family and friends, and he would tease his father-in-law, Jim Ekstrom (former co-owner of Ekstrom Nursery), and say "I should just quit the funeral home and come work at the nursery for you. It was almost a passing joke."

Schmidt was getting to the point where he was considering managing the funeral home and eventually buying it from the owner when his father-in-law called and said in all seriousness, "We could use you on the farm and be happy to have you."

It took three months for he and his wife to decide to do it, put their house up for sale and move into one on the nursery farmhouses.

"It was 2006," Brandon said. "I kind of jumped in with no previous nursery knowledge or experience and it was a baptism by fire. I worked in the shop, I



The sun rises over the nursery with Mt. Hood in the background. PHOTO BY BRANDON SCHMIDT

drove trucks, loaded trucks, worked irrigation, spraying, planting. Basically, anything that needed to be done." By doing so, he also learned all the facets of the nursery business.

Ekstrom, on the other hand, grew up on the nursery. "I spent mornings weeding when I was a kid. I'd help with inventory and walk down the row with a clicker," Ekstrom said. "The nursery was a part of



From right: Placido Rodriguez, Brandon Schmidt, Benjamin Romero, Mateo Lucas, Andres Lucas-Mendoza and Cipriano Luna remove plants from pots to prepare them for re-potting.

PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

growing up. They told us when we were 12 we could start driving the row tractors, and that's the day we looked forward to. My dad and grandpa and uncle Don were gracious and got us all involved."

He went to Western Oregon University and graduated in 2010 with a bachelor's in marketing and came home and started to work in the family nursery.

Going out on their own

Ekstrom was still in college at the time he bought the 10-acre plot in 2010, but they were both working at Ekstrom Nursery.

"We worked evenings and weekends to start our own nursery," Schmidt said.

They slowly bought plants and started planting. They had access to crews from Ekstrom's dad's nursery, who could help plant on their off time.

"It was fun to do our own side farm," Ekstrom said.

Originally, his father and uncle, who co-owned Ekstrom Nursery, were going to part ways and split the business, but when it didn't look like his uncle and dad were going to split, they worked to start their own nursery.

"We were always going to have a nursery on the side ... to learn," Ekstrom said, "but when my dad and uncle weren't going to split, we felt it even more important to start our own. It took a while to get it going."

"We could grow and rent equipment from Ekstrom Nursery and sell through them initially," Schmidt said. "They got the plants they needed and we got the

sales we needed at the beginning.

"It allowed us to get started a lot easier and faster. All we had to do was keep track of the equipment and supplies we used and then square up at the end of the year. It worked out really well." Hiring workers that were from Ekstrom Nursery benefitted the pair in more ways than one.

"We relied on our crew's experience with things we didn't know," Ekstrom said. "We had the benefit of their experience."

"We also relied on a lot on our community," Schmidt said. "When we were short on plants, we relied on them, and in return when they were short of something that we had, they turned to us."

In 2014, a nearby 20-acre property with an existing nursery went up for sale. They decided it was a good opportunity to purchase it as it had five greenhouses, a barn with an office and a loading dock. This is the current location of Ekstrom & Schmidt Nursery in Troutdale, Oregon.

In the time since, they added five more greenhouses and another large barn and cooler. The original property had overgrown nursery stock in the ground. Since then, Ekstrom & Schmidt has transformed that into 13 acres of container-grown stock. Schmidt later sold the small 10-acre property and purchased another 20-acre property and lived on it and farmed it.

When Ekstrom's father finally split from his brother, he brought over 160 acres from his share of Ekstrom Nursery, along with a portion of the client list.

"My Dad set us up for where we

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Ekstrom & Schmidt Nursery

are now,” Ekstrom said. “From growing up counting trees and weeding getting opportunity to run equipment and play in the nursery, he was always there for us. Our nursery rests on his reputation. That set the tone for us. He has been generous to everyone in our industry, helping guys like us starting our own farms.”

Developing a specialty

When Ekstrom and Schmidt first started, they planted in the ground and grew things they knew that Ekstrom Nursery needed. They were 80–90% field grown and B&B. Now, the production has flipped, with 70% of the plants grown in the field and finished in containers.

Over the years, they’ve refined their focus on products and their business.

“We’re known for Japanese maples, dogwoods, and redbuds,” Schmidt said. “Maples have always been a big part of

our nursery.”

The duo have developed a market for themselves and did a lot of footwork to get their name out. “We went to trade shows to get our names out there, Farwest and MANTS,” Ekstrom said. “We picked up new customers at trade shows.”

They also relied on relationships and word of mouth. A supplier they worked with in the Midwest came out and shadowed them and saw what they did and thought it could work well with one of their customers, so they introduced Schmidt and Ekstrom to them.

Some 70% of the nursery’s customers are small independent garden centers or local chains and 30% are re-wholesalers who pick up material and sell to landscapers.

What’s next

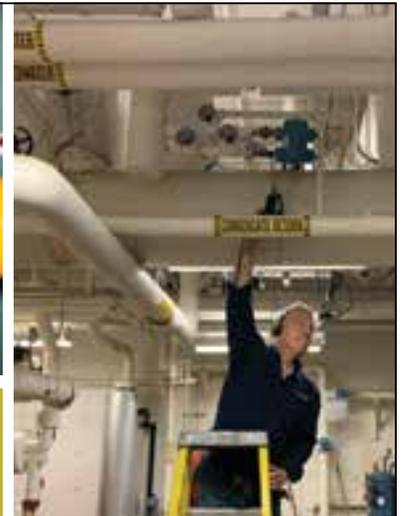
Schmidt said they would continue their focus on independent garden centers.

“We want to provide more inventory and add more variety of sizes to broaden our reach,” Ekstrom said. “We want to also have a selection of bigger finished plants and continue to add new popular varieties.”

“Most of our plants are DIY sized and some of our customers want more landscape-sized plants for their customers,” Ekstrom said. “We want a sizing spectrum so that we can meet the needs of all of our customers. That’s the goal.”

“We want to be a one-stop-shop for our customers so that they don’t have to go somewhere else to fill their orders,” Schmidt said. ☺

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



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In June, Heritage Seedlings & Liners founder Mark Krautman (right) sold the nursery to longtime employee Octavio Martinez. PHOTO BY VIC PANICKUL

FOUNDED
1982

OWNER
Octavio Martinez

KNOWN FOR
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HERITAGE SEEDLINGS & LINERS

BY JON BELL

Sometimes Mark Krautmann looks back on the life he's lived thus far and can't believe it.

A Missouri farm boy, he met the first love of his life, Jolly, a native of Taiwan, while they were both studying soil sciences at Texas A&M University. They married and spent the next 49 years together.

Along the way, they founded **Heritage Seedlings & Liners** in Salem in 1982, raising rare and unique seedlings, rootstock and woody plants at a time when interest in those kinds of trees and

plants was just about to explode. They raised a family, traveled the world and loved each other while growing their nursery business into a hugely successful endeavor that today spans 20 acres of greenhouse production and more than 2,300 acres of farmland.

"I wake up every day, honestly, and I think, 'I can't believe I've lived this life,'" Krautman said. "Jolly and I were very close as a couple, as business partners and as parents. Everything was just delightful. We had such an amazing experience. It's been longer and more rich and nuanced than I could have ever dreamed."

Krautmann speaks partly in past 

Heritage Seedlings & Liners



The nursery focuses on producing seedlings and liners of rare and unusual ornamental plants. PHOTO BY VIC PANICKUL

tense, as he's recently entered a season of transition. Last year, sadly, Jolly passed away after a two-year bout with brain cancer.

And though he's not stepping fully away from Heritage, in June Krautmann solidified a deal to sell the woody plant part of the business to Octavio Martinez, who first started working for Heritage as a summertime employee when he was 13 — some 25 years ago.

Octavio couldn't find a better heritage to follow, so to speak.

"I think I always knew that there was something that I wanted to pursue here at Heritage, especially with Mark and Jolly," Martinez said. "They've always had a passion for the way they run their business and how they treat the people who work for them."

Planting the seeds

After earning their master's degrees from Texas A&M, Krautmann and Jolly moved west to the Willamette Valley in the late 1970s. He took a job with a seed company, then worked for a nursery in Portland doing everything from loading and unloading trucks to pruning.

While he was there, he also got to



Nancy Gonzalez (right) and Juana Rivera tape Hearts A'Fire® redbuds to their stakes in one of the hoop houses at Heritage Seedlings and Liners. PHOTO BY VIC PANICKUL

meet all the suppliers, one of whom happened to be renowned horticulturalist Verl Holden. Their meeting sparked a friendship that lasts to this day — and that set Krautmann on his horticultural path.

"Verl really inspired me a lot," he said. "I just found it utterly fascinating. Here's a guy using his knowledge of soil microbiology to benefit his propagation

program with kinnikinnick and delivering these absolutely beautiful one-gallon plants. He was just so proud, like a parent, of each of them."

His interest in more unique species piqued, Krautmann started growing rare seedling trees like paperbark maple, katsura and *Stewartia* on his back porch. He sold some to the nursery where he

worked, and when that business sold, he focused solely on getting the seedling business off the ground.

“I kind of vetted my proposal to some industry stalwarts, that what I was interested in doing was growing unusual, really rare seedlings,” Krautmann said. “Basically, their comment across the board was, ‘Oh, you’ll never make any money growing that oddball stuff.’ Except they used a different four-letter word there.”

But with little to lose — Jolly had stable work by then — Krautmann forged ahead with the oddball stuff and it took off. Key to Heritage’s early success was focusing more on the market back East as opposed to Oregon. Krautmann said the region had a “more robust sense of variety and landscape plants and rare plants,” so when he took out ads in nursery magazines and traveled back East with samples, buyers were hungry.

“We got fortunate because we rode that wave of emerging interest in unusual ornamentals and just kind of caught everything just right,” he said.

Good fortune

In the ensuing years, Heritage flourished, doubling in size annually for a run of at least 15 years. The Krautmanns jumped from renting 5 acres to buying 20 and putting up greenhouses, eventually growing the nursery to its present size. Yet while the rare and unusual seedlings were popular, the nursery needed more of a bread-and-butter crop to generate cash flow.

The answer: disease-free Japanese maple root stock. The plants are very susceptible to a bacterial pathogen called *Pseudomonas syringae*. Krautmann said Heritage grew all of its Japanese maples under greenhouse shelter, protecting them from late fall frost that makes them especially vulnerable to *Pseudomonas* infection.

“Our seedling maples are unusually well-grown,” Krautmann said, “so they basically sold themselves because people would buy them and they would always come back for them because they never lost expensive maple grafts due to latent *Pseudomonas* infection in our rootstocks.”

They also added a wildflower seed



Heritage Seedlings and Liner owner Octavio Martinez checks in on head grafter Feliz Texele.
PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

business to serve the habitat restoration market. Today, that business offers hundreds of Pacific Northwest native seeds for plants like vine maples, columbine, Oregon iris and sickle-keeled lupine.

On top of lots of hard work, fortuitous timing and the addition of a grafting arm of the business in the mid 1990s, Krautmann pins plenty of Heritage’s good fortune on the people who have worked for the nursery. He said he’s always tried to pay his workers well and done what he can to elicit their loyalty.

For Krautmann, that’s not just lip service. In recent years, he’s added mobile homes on his properties so several year-round employees have places to live and raise their families.

“We don’t charge them much rent, and it gives them a way to feel the stability of a home,” Krautmann said.

A special bond

Martinez started working for Krautmann the summer he was 13, and he loved it from the get-go.

“I just fell in love with the work, the industry, just the idea of growing plants and making the world greener,” he said.

He worked at Heritage in the summers but came on full-time after high school. Initially he took on entry-level positions. Then, with the bonus of being ambitious, skilled and bilingual, he made his way up to crew leader, supervisor, inventory manager and, eventually, general manager. And though he had opportunities to leave, he never wanted to.

He also said he and Krautmann developed a personal and very tight relationship over the years, especially as Martinez’s father wasn’t involved in his early life.

“There is a special bond that he and I have,” he said.

Mark agreed.

“He’s a very ambitious and very clever young man, and he and I just get along,” Krautmann echoed. “I tell people that he is like my brother, my best friend and my son, all of ‘em wrapped in one.”

On the horizon

About eight years ago, when Martinez hit his 30s, he started thinking about how the rest of his life was going to play out. He wasn’t necessarily thinking about becoming an owner at Heritage, but he was curious to know what Krautmann had in mind for the future.

While Krautmann didn’t have answers at the time, he came back to Martinez a few years later as retirement entered the picture. Krautmann knew he had three main options. He could shutter the business, he could sell it to an outsider or he could sell it to Martinez and, in the process, keep the culture, people and legacy intact.

“And he said he’d rather do that because — and this is exactly what he said — ‘I can sit and feel good about it when I wake up in the morning and drink my coffee,’” Martinez said.

The plans took a few years to unfold, but in June of this year, the deal was

Heritage Seedlings & Liners

done. Martinez acquired the woody plant and seedling side of the business, while Krautmann retained the native seed business. Both still fall under the Heritage name to take advantage of the brand value that's been built up over the decades.

The unique structuring of the deal allows Martinez to acquire all the shares of Heritage stock through projected profits over the next 10 years. He'll also lease the land from Krautmann and eventually purchase it from him.

As for Krautmann, his future sounds like a retirement in name only. He'll be around to assist Martinez in a consulting role while also still heading up the seed business. He and his new wife, Nancy Buley — the longtime director of communications for **J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co.** — have some international travel planned, including a trip to Turkey next year.

They now live on a farm in McMinnville, where Krautmann is focused

on a 500-acre oak restoration project, and he's also very involved in both the Oregon Garden and the planned Portland Botanical Gardens.

Krautman said he's confident that the woody plant side of Heritage is in good hands with Martinez.

"I'm just so pleased that it's an opportunity for him and, really, for us to move on but still stay involved," he said. "I think it's also a good, timely example to my peers to not overlook the people who made their companies successful."

What's next?

Martinez said his goal for Heritage is to not only maintain its reputation for excellence and unique varieties, but to elevate it to the next level. That will likely mean adding new varieties while also staying focused on the nursery's cash crops.

He isn't necessarily focused on growth, but on improving what's already

in place. One recent example: He switched the nursery's one-gallon pots from traditional solid pots to air pruning pots, which help cultivate healthier root systems.

"My goal is really to represent and to continue to take Heritage to the next level in quality and the variety of plants we offer," Martinez said. "I want to continue to keep Heritage as a unique place where you can find the woodies that you don't find anywhere else."

"I'm excited and I'm humbled," he continued. "Just seeing how Mark took me under his wing and just rewarded or acknowledged the hard work that I put in throughout the years — I'm very grateful." ©

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

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Over years, Monrovia has become known for shrubs, trees and perennials. PHOTO COURTESY OF MONROVIA NURSERY COMPANY

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MONROVIA NURSERY COMPANY

BY ERICA BROWNE GRIVAS

In 1926, starting with just 10 acres in 1926 in California citrus country near Los Angeles, Harry E. Rosedale, Sr., a young immigrant from Denmark, set out to transform American horticulture.

Today, **Monrovia Nursery Company** — now based in Dayton, Oregon — is the nation's largest grower of premium plants by sales and container acreage. They produce over 22 million plants across more than 4,000 varieties annually.

Monrovia has thrived through wars, recessions, and the latest pandemic by maintaining three core principles: a commitment to excellence, innovative plant

selection, and nimble marketing strategies.

From flood to flagship

Rosedale honed his propagating skills at Armstrong Nursery before buying 10 acres with a partner in Monrovia in 1926. He continued solo after the partnership dissolved three years later.

Then came the Los Angeles Basin Flood of 1938, “washing all the plants down to Long Beach,” said Katie Tamony, Monrovia’s chief marketing officer.

“He was pretty much wiped out,” she said. But with friends and suppliers rallying, he moved, bought another nursery of the same size, and began again. “This guy had a lot of perseverance.” Rosedale’s enterprise grew steadily through the 

Monrovia Nursery Company



In 2025, Monrovia moved its headquarters from California to its 750-acre nursery in Dayton, Oregon. PHOTO COURTESY OF MONROVIA NURSERY COMPANY

decades, each expansion reflecting the nursery's adaptability and vision. By 1952, the business had grown to 80 acres in Azusa, California, where new propagation techniques were refined. Monrovia later added a 750-acre Dayton, Oregon location in 1984, and a 600-acre Cairo, Georgia site in the 1990s. By 2005, it was cultivating 750 acres in Visalia, California. Then, in 2025, Monrovia officially designated its Dayton, Oregon campus as company headquarters.

The Dayton headquarters resembles a Craftsman lodge surrounded by lush display gardens and an outdoor kitchen — the perfect setting for next summer's centennial celebration August 27, 2026.

"Oregon has become the flagship nursery where we tend to hold the largest customer events, grow the largest variety of plants and do the most shipping across the country," said Tamony.

Dayton works perfectly for conifers, maples and cold-hardy plants; Visalia grows plants spanning hardiness zones; and site in Cairo focuses on tropicals, hollies, and evergreen magnolias.

Monrovia remains family owned. Harry Rosedale's son Miles served as CEO until 2020 and continues as co-chairman of the board. The current CEO is Jonathan Pedersen.

Pioneering the modern nursery

Often called a visionary, Rosedale is credited with numerous industry firsts: container growing, customized soil mixes, plant patenting, nationwide shipping, and consumer branding.

In an early brochure, Rosedale said: "We are always looking for new and improved varieties so you can have that 'something special' to attract your customer's attention."

Rosedale pioneered container-grown landscaping plants to help plants establish without transplant shock. Previously plants were grown in-ground and dug for shipping. "He realized that it would make it a lot easier to ship plants if they were grown in containers originally," Tamony said.

The first containers? Metal egg cans from the breadmaking industry, said Nicholas Staddon, a plantsman and consultant who worked for Monrovia for 27 years in sales and as a spokesperson. After moving to plastic, the company eventually introduced the trademark green pot and in the 1960s, launched the first photo plant tags.

In the 1940s, Monrovia began scheduled shipping to garden centers in California and Arizona and cultivated its own direct sales force rather than using brokers, Tamony said. "In the 1950s, we were the first nursery to ship container plants across the whole country. In the '50s

and '60s Martin Usrey built on Rosedale's philosophy of what a plant needed to thrive, and he established the research department, which led us to create the custom soil mixes." Beginning with *Pyracantha* 'Rosedale' in 1941, Rosedale made Monrovia a trailblazer in breeding and patenting. Today, Monrovia has patented or trademarked hundreds of varieties, offers an exclusive collection from plant explorer Dan Hinkley, and builds strong relationships with breeders globally.

"We've introduced more plants than anyone else in North America," Tamony said, via both breeding and sports discovered in the field.

Monrovia has led with sustainability initiatives as well. In the 1970s, Monrovia became the first grower to recycle irrigation runoff, setting an industry standard that continues today. It was an early adopter of reusing vegetative waste, banning neonicotinoids, adding mycorrhizae into soil, and incorporating integrated pest management (IPM).

What sets Monrovia apart

"Woody ornamentals are our forte, but some of the genera we're known for are juniper, boxwood, and ilex and flowering shrubs like camellias and roses," Tamony said. "We are the largest grower of Flower Carpet roses in the country."



Monrovia has increasingly embraced automation to free up employees for skilled work. PHOTO COURTESY OF MONROVIA NURSERY COMPANY

“One of their great programs was with Itoh peonies,” recalled Staddon.

“People had been able to buy tubers since the ’60s, but a Canadian breeder approached us with a tissue culture technique.”

It was expensive, but former CEO Bruce Usrey gave the go-ahead. “It took about three years to get going and it was a rip-roaring success,” Staddon added.

He said they also introduce southern blueberries nationally via tissue-cultured hybrids from **Fall Creek Farm & Nursery Inc.** in Lowell, Oregon, resulting in the wildly popular ‘Bountiful Blue’.

Because it was produced by tissue culture, it was vigorous and a heavy fruiter. ‘Bountiful Blue’ was a game-changer and quickly became a household name at many nurseries and garden centers.

Growing techniques complement the plant selection. “We prune our plants more frequently and with more care, to produce a fuller plant,” said Tamony. “And we’re known for our topiary craftsmanship — spirals, cones, pompoms, espaliers and patio trees.”

A culture of craftsmanship

Monrovia employees are known as craftsmen, a term coined by Rosedale, because propagators and growers were and are absolute masters of their craft.

“We feel like the work, it’s an art and science. They work with their head, heart and hands to create beautiful plants,” said

Tamony. “That’s something that is very much a part of our culture.”

That philosophy extends beyond the nursery gates. “From the very beginning, Monrovia has been committed to making the whole industry stronger,” says Jonathan Pedersen, president and CEO. “Early technical advances, breakthroughs in plant production and opportunities for professional development weren’t kept secret. It’s a principle we still practice today in production, plant health, marketing and across our company. When we work together it makes us all better. It truly is part of our DNA.”

The investment in both technology and people results in employee longevity. For Tamony, the annual service awards are a highlight. “Every year, I’m amazed at how many people have worked for Monrovia over 30 years,” Tamony said. “There are families where people met their spouse here, their kids work here, or their brother works here.”

Monrovia has increasingly embraced automation to free up craftsmen for skilled work. “We’ve invested in automation, looking at how we can automate steps that don’t require craftsmanship and may lead to repetitive injuries,” said Tamony.

Since implementing TTA Cutting Edge and Flex Sorter systems in California and Oregon, Monrovia has seen remarkable productivity gains, she said. The Cutting Edge processes between 1800–3000 cuttings per hour and can plant

more than 2,000 in an hour. This represents a huge leap forward for the nursery in terms of time saved. The Flex Sorter has boosted sorting rates to 900 per hour compared to 184 manually.

In addition, on demand tag printing has cut time spent on labeling in half, as the time consuming task of applying price stickers has been eliminated. Spacing robots now handle the physically demanding work of arranging containers, processing 485 two-gallon plants per hour versus 200 by hand. For five-gallon containers, robots space 384 per hour compared to 100 by hand.

Even with automation, she noted, skilled craftsmen remain essential for operating the equipment.

Looking ahead: the next century

As Monrovia approaches its centennial, Tamony said the milestone represents a threshold into a new era.

“For a business to be in business for 100 years, you have to keep reinventing,” Tamony said. “What made you successful 50 years ago didn’t make you successful 20 years ago. This year is like a doorway into, ‘What do we need to look at with new eyes?’”

That philosophy is grounded in rigorous consumer research. Each June, Monrovia surveys gardeners about their motivations, purchases, and struggles. The findings inform trend predictions released each September through webinars open [▶▶](#)



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to customers and consumers.

Current research reveals key shifts. “Patio culture” is booming, with consumers wanting container gardens featuring edibles, dramatic foliage, and shrubs. There’s growing appetite for unusual edibles — dwarf blueberries, nectarines, and cold-hardy figs, persimmons, and kiwis.

Climate change drives innovation. “Whether you get a lot of water or little water, the climate is changing, and people are looking for plants that can really not just survive the heat, but really thrive in it,” Tamony said. Monrovia is developing zone-five options that are both cold-hardy and drought-tolerant for regions like Utah, Colorado, and the Midwest facing new weather extremes.

Natural landscapes and native plants are trending, but Tamony offers a nuanced perspective: mixing pollinator-friendly natives with climate-appropriate cultivars may be an easier on-ramp for most gardeners than an all-native garden.

Breeding priorities include compact varieties for shrinking gardens, longer-blooming perennials, and breakthrough roses delivering disease resistance and fragrance. The company has expanded perennials and continues developing regional natives, though Tamony noted hyper-local natives are better sourced from local growers.

Pollinator support remains central. The Bee a Winner program has given away more than 8,000 pollinator plants through garden center contests. This year, based on customer fascination with hummingbirds, Monrovia launched a program with downloadable planting plans.

Looking ahead, Tamony said, “How we’re thinking about the future is, ‘How will people be gardening? What will they be looking for and how can we grow that for them?’”

These questions have guided Monrovia for nearly a century — and they promise to keep the pioneering nursery relevant for the next hundred years. ©

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

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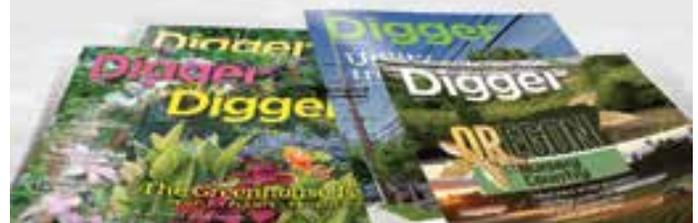
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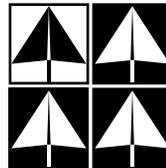
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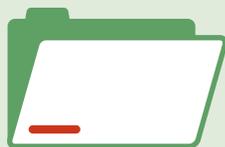


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Adaptable, not just marketable

Plants in drought tolerance field trial at North Willamette Research and Extension Center, part of the study by Amelia Keyser-Gibson. PHOTO COURTESY OF OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

Public interest surges in climate-ready plants, but what does that mean?

BY LLOYD NACKLEY

At the end of October 2025, Xera Plants announced plans to consolidate its Southeast Portland retail garden center with its Sherwood farm operations in 2026.

Though modest in size, Xera has long been recognized as one of Oregon's premier niche propagators of Pacific Northwest climate-adapted plants. Its

selections, drought-tolerant perennials, resilient shrubs, and regionally proven natives, have earned a loyal following among gardeners and collectors seeking plants that perform reliably under the Pacific Northwest's distinctive pattern of wet winters, dry summers, and increasingly variable extremes.

The timing also coincides with a broader surge of interest in "climate-ready" plants. From the Farwest Climate Summit to recent trade editorials such as *Green Infrastructure: Growing for a Hotter Future* in *Nursery Management Magazine*, industry attention has turned toward adaptation, function, and measur-

able ecosystem services.

Consumer research further supports this trend, showing that buyers increasingly value sustainability, environmental benefits, and native plant performance. Xera's decision to move its retail center, serves as an entry point for a timely discussion: what does it mean for a plant, or a nursery, to be "climate-ready"?

What does "climate-ready" mean?

Oregon essentially bridges the maritime Pacific Northwest and the interior Great Basin, making it a natural laboratory for studying climate adaptability in plants. In the Willamette Valley, heart of

Growing Knowledge

nursery country, we grow within a modified Mediterranean climate.

Classic Mediterranean climates, such as southern California or coastal Chile, feature wet winters and long, dry summers, with rainfall concentrated in a few months and extended cloudless periods in summer. Plants adapted to these conditions balance extended drought tolerance with the ability to exploit brief wet periods.

The Willamette Valley shares the general pattern but with cooler, wetter winters and maritime-tempered summers. This creates a productive growing region, but one with sharp seasonal contrasts that challenge plants to manage feast-and-famine cycles.

Only 2% of Earth's land surface has Mediterranean-type climates. For nurseries in Oregon, this means we operate in one of the world's most uncommon climate regions. Climate change is shifting our baseline: summers are getting hotter and longer, winters less predictable, and extreme events more frequent. For a plant to be "climate-ready," it must endure change within change, adjusting to a moving environmental baseline that challenges even well-adapted species.

Adding complexity, Oregon-grown plants are often sold outside the state, where climatic stresses differ markedly. The Southeast U.S., for instance, is humid subtropical, with hot, humid summers and mild winters, while the Midwest and Northeast experience temperate continental climates, with cold winters and rapid freeze-thaw cycles. A cultivar that thrives under Oregon's moderate stresses may face entirely different constraints elsewhere.

Climate readiness, then, is regional and multi-faceted: heat and drought in the West, freeze tolerance in the North, and flood or humidity resilience in the Southeast. Understanding these distinctions is essential for nurseries and landscape professionals alike.

What makes a plant climate-adapted

Climate-ready plants are those with traits that allow them to adjust, not merely survive, under shifting environmental conditions.

Responses occur on multiple times-



Graduate researcher Scout Dahms-May collects plant transpiration measures as an assessment of phenotypic plasticity. PHOTO COURTESY OF OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

cales. Within a single plant's life, acclimation allows morphological or physiological adjustments: leaves may shrink or thicken in response to heat or drought. Across generations, adaptation occurs as populations evolve to thrive under particular conditions.

Together, these mechanisms represent phenotypic plasticity, the ability to modulate form or function in response to the environment.

Drought as a case study

Drought is the defining feature of the western U.S. Some experts predict that in the West landscape irrigation accounts for ~70% of residential water use per person, and increasing populations intensify this demand.

Restrictions during drought are common. For example, during a drought in 2022, metro regions in Utah limited irrigation to twice per week. During a multi-year drought in California, 2012–2016, some surveys suggested that urban vegeta-

tion declined up to 10% because of mandated water restrictions.

Roses provide an illustrative example of plasticity in practice. Chen et al. (2023) examined five popular cultivars, including Oso Easy® Urban Legend®, Petite Knock Out®, and Cherry Frost™, under irrigation intervals that simulated water restrictions. Though total water applied remained constant, some roses maintained flowering and canopy health, while others showed wilting and slower recovery. The differences reflected physiological strategies: stomatal closure rates, leaf size and orientation, and root system efficiency.

This demonstrates that "drought-tolerant" is not a single trait, but a coordinated set of responses that unfold over time. For growers, this underscores the importance of observing how plants respond under stress, rather than relying on labels alone.

Phenotypic plasticity in action

Plasticity underlies resilience. Plants can adjust morphology (leaf area, root depth) and physiology (stomatal control, water-use efficiency) to cope with water stress. Some plants will shed leaves, some will change leaf size and shape, and some will go dormant, letting the foliage completely desiccate. These can be characterized in a range of drought tolerance and drought avoidance.

A recent publication (2025) by Amelia Keyser-Gibson and others took a deeper dive into drought-tolerant, so called climate-ready plants in study sites across the West, in Oregon, California, and Utah. They tested redbuds (*Cercis occidentalis*, *C. canadensis*) and ninebark (*Physocarpus*) cultivars ('Monlo' and 'Little Devil') under reduced irrigation.

Even under low irrigation, zero to two times per season after establishment, plants maintained physiological performance and visual quality. This confirms that these species have sufficient plasticity to handle variable moisture conditions, providing reliable landscape performance while reducing maintenance and water demand.

Epigenetics: plants remember stress

Adaptability also occurs at the molecular level. Plants can retain a "memory" of stress through epigenetic modifications, such as DNA methylation, which prime genes to respond more rapidly to recurring stress. These marks may persist across generations, offering seedlings a head start in stressful environments. For growers, this suggests that controlled stress during production could "train" plants for resilience in the landscape.

Together, physiological plasticity and epigenetic memory define real climate readiness. A plant's ability to sense, adjust, and remember stress is central to consistent performance across environments.

Industry implications: marketing and consumer behavior

Marketing climate-smart plants is increasingly both an ecological and commercial imperative. Beyond aesthetics, plants serve as green infrastructure by



Manzanita plants grown and sold at Xera Plants are similar to collections selected by Oregon State University Neil Bell and Heather Stoven, brought to evaluation 15 years ago, showing a nice connection between researchers and production. PHOTO COURTESY OF OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

cooling cities, managing stormwater, sequestering carbon, and mitigating urban heat (Markgraf, 2025).

Urban heat islands can raise daytime temperatures by 1–7 F and nighttime temperatures by 2–5 F, with extreme cases reaching 10 F, creating stress for human and ecological systems alike. Consumers and landscape professionals increasingly value plants for measurable functions, not just beauty.

Research by Alicia Rihn, Ph.D. (University of Tennessee), Ariana Torres, Ph.D. (Purdue), and colleagues demonstrates that consumer decisions are influenced by both environmental awareness and future-oriented thinking. Individuals who consider long-term consequences are more likely to purchase plants for mental health and ecological benefits.

Their work suggests that younger, urban, and more educated consumers spend approximately 80% more on native and climate-adapted plants than non-adopters. These studies also indicate that marketing is most effective when it emphasizes specific, measurable traits such

as drought tolerance, pollinator support, or flood resilience are in alignment with consumer motivations and increasing both adoption and spending.

Portland fits the research demographic for climate-conscious consumers: younger, urban, and highly educated. The city's median age is 38.6 years, and 51% of residents aged 25 and older hold at least a bachelor's degree, well above the national average of 33% (Portland State University). Combined with a strong gardening culture and environmental ethos, these demographics align with consumer segments identified in research by Rihn, Torres, and colleagues, groups more likely to purchase native and climate-adapted plants, often spending up to 80% more than non-adopters.

Xera and other Oregon nurseries, including Cornell Farm, Cistus Nursery, **Little Prince of Oregon**, and Van Hevelingen Nursery, have effectively targeted this interest through marketing that emphasizes plant function: drought resilience, pollinator value, and low-input performance. The Hardy Plant Society of

Growing Knowledge

Oregon and similar advocacy groups have further amplified this message, nurturing public enthusiasm for plants that contribute to climate resilience and ecological health.

At first glance, the consolidation of Xera's Portland retail store might seem paradoxical given these market dynamics. However, Xera has stated through social media and customer communications that the change is a move toward operational efficiency by uniting retail and wholesale operations at the Sherwood site. The new model provides greater logistical efficiency while positioning the nursery closer to suburban communities such as Sherwood, Wilsonville, Tualatin, and Tigard, where larger lot sizes often translate to more substantial landscaping projects. This approach hopes to mirror the success of other Portland-area retail garden centers that operate on the metropolitan edge, places like **AI's Garden & Home**, **Bauman Farms**, Cistus Nursery, **Farmington**

Gardens, Fessler Nursery and Tony's Garden Center. These businesses offer can create agro-tourism type opportunities for urban customers willing to travel. For growers, these hybrid spaces can reinforce brand identity, create efficiencies, and enhance the storytelling opportunities around Oregon nursery plant production.

Moving beyond buzzwords

Oregon's nursery industry has long led in innovation, from advanced production systems to technology-enabled plant management. This leadership offers an opportunity to redefine climate readiness. True climate-ready plants are defined not by labels, but by their capacity to adjust, adapt, and thrive under shifting environmental conditions.

It is useful to distinguish terminology. Climate-adapted plants fit an existing climate, whether native or not. In the PNW, this generally means tolerance of cold, wet

winters and hot, dry summers.

Climate-ready or climate-smart plants, by contrast, focus on plastic responses and acclimation to change, essentially, within generation adjustments to the shifting baseline of climate change.

While native plants often capture public attention, not all natives are suitable for urban scenarios or extreme weather outside their historical range. Likewise, the focus cannot be on plasticity alone, considering that some plants with the highly plastic responses have become the most notorious invasive plant species in North America. Therefore, effective communication is as important as production.

Though quite the mouthful, phenotypic plasticity and epigenetics offer a conceptual framework for breeders and growers. Think of plasticity like a plant's "gearbox" — it can shift how it grows and uses resources depending on the conditions it faces, and epigenetics as the

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“memory” that helps it respond faster if similar stress comes around again.

Future breeding may prioritize flexibility itself, selecting genotypes that perform across diverse conditions while screening for traits of plant invasiveness. For growers, integrating mild, controlled stress during production, monitoring recovery, and sharing observations can enhance plant resilience and inform practical management decisions.

Similarly for marketing, broad terms like “drought-tolerant” and “climate-ready,” can be paired with biological basis, like deeper roots, adaptive leaf architecture, sustained flowering under heat. Programs like the Climate Ready Landscape Plant initiative test plants under real-world stress to identify flexibility, ensuring that performance is consistent, not lucky.

Practical takeaways

Train for toughness: controlled targeted stress during production can strengthen responses for plants in the landscape.

Observe adaptability: if a stressful event (heatwave, irrigation accident, missed fertilization) happens, monitor the recovery speed after stress as a key resilience indicator.

Select for flexibility: prioritize consistent performance across environments.

Tell the real story: strengthen effective marketing with mechanistic explanations.

Collaborate: breeders, growers, and researchers each hold part of the adaptation puzzle.

By combining rigorous science, applied research, and clear storytelling, Oregon’s nursery industry can continue to lead nationally by producing plants that are not only marketable but genuinely climate-ready, fostering landscapes that are resilient, functional, and ecologically responsible. ©

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Two decades in the making



Jeff Stone
OAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

This is officially column number 181. That is a lot of time, a lot of roads traveled together, a lot of success, challenges and heartbreak.

I feel deeply honored to have served as your executive director for the last 15 years. What is more astounding to me is that this is my 20th year at the Oregon Association of Nurseries.

Two decades of economic change

Over the years, both the United States and Oregon have undergone significant economic transformations.

While national trends have defined much of the direction, Oregon's economy has followed a path of its own, often mirroring national changes but also reflecting unique regional strengths and vulnerabilities.

I was elevated from your government relations director to the top spot in the midst of the devastating Great Recession. This financial crisis reshaped the U.S. economy, exposing vulnerabilities in the housing market, consumer debt, and financial institutions. In the aftermath, job recovery was slow but steady, and the 2010s became a period of long but uneven growth.

Oregon lost over a third of its nursery producers during this period. Our sales dipped to levels that were terrifying. The industry had crested to just over \$1 billion in sales before the recession. By 2010, it had sunk substantially to \$745 million.

Over the next 15 years, the nursery reattained and surpassed the \$1 billion mark, but we are different. We are more cautious. The rapid advancement of internet sales and smartphones as a tool has changed the very nature of the business. Sadly, there are fewer in the industry, but we remain resilient.

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic dealt a sudden and severe blow to the economy. Unemployment soared, busi-

nesses closed, and entire industries — especially hospitality, travel, and retail — were upended.

My long-standing relationship with then-governor Kate Brown paid off. It was not certain that the nursery industry would be deemed essential to remain open during the early days of the pandemic. We made the case we could sell to the public through our elite retailers and producers, efficiently and safely.

What was far from certain was our out-of-state markets. We had trucks leave Oregon, only to be turned back at their destination states.

Rather than throwing up our hands, Oregon, Minnesota, Florida, and Arizona created an interactive map with help from the states' departments of agriculture. It showed the real-time status of each state. It was a game changer. It allowed our industry to fill the exploding need for plant material, demanded by people stuck at home.

The blessings of leadership

Patrick Newton is now the 20th president I am serving under. During my time, I have had the unique privilege to work with our volunteer leaders, board members and presidents. Each have distinguished themselves and brought their considerable knowledge, perspective and gifts to shape the association.

The phrase "leaders emerge during the times they are needed" is attributed to John Kenneth Galbraith. He observed that leaders often come to the forefront in challenging circumstances. During crises, such individuals with strong character and vision are more likely to take charge and lead effectively. I subscribe to this notion 100%.

A president or a board cannot choose the economic or political times they inherit.

We have taken a measured approach during good times — making wise investments in making Oregon's nursery industry stronger — and we've displayed steely gumption during times that test patience and souls.

We are different now. Both good and

bad circumstances and experiences shape who we are as an industry, as a business and as people. It is the people who make this association successful. We have a committed board, visionary leaders and the best association staff in the nation. There are a lot of nursery industry associations with talented staff. I admire and value the tremendous work and effort by my colleagues. I will absolutely put up the OAN staff against any of them and with great confidence declare that ours is the gold standard for serving the nursery membership.

Our staffers are largely invisible to the general membership, but you see their work. It is an email about the trusted services the association provides to make business life just a little easier. It is the positioning and marketing of the industry to extend your hard-earned dollars to buy and sell green goods. It is the people who are upgrading our first-of-its-kind Nursery Guide website, which we expect to relaunch this month. It will extend your reach to markets wherever they reside.

A note of personal thanks

We have seen a number of impactful industry leaders pass away over the past year or so. When this happens, it reminds me how much I appreciate the fact that our industry is like a family — to each other and to me personally.

There are too many people in this industry to mention who have shaped who I am. They have made me a better person, husband and father. I treasure every day I serve you and will remain doing so until it is time for my own curtain call. ☺

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