

# Digger

APRIL 2026

## The Tree Issue

New and enduring  
Japanese maples

PAGE 17

The art of grading  
bare-root trees

PAGE 23

The long-term value  
of favorite trees

PAGE 15

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Printed in Oregon on domestic recycled paper when available.

**On the cover:** Fall colors on the leaf of Ed Wood Fullmoon Maple (*Acer japonicum* 'Ed Wood #2'). PHOTO COURTESY OF J. FRANK SCHMIDT & SON CO.

**On this page:** Left: Northern Glow® Maple (*Acer pseudosieboldianum* × *palmatum* 'Hasselkus'). PHOTO COURTESY OF J. FRANK SCHMIDT & SON CO.

Right: *Acer pseudoplatanus* 'Esk Sunset'. PHOTO BY MIKE DARCY



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Postmaster: Change of address correction requested to above address.

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# The importance of the NexGen-eration

**The nursery industry has never been short on hard work, long hours, or people willing to get their hands dirty.**

What we are short on these days is something just as important: clear succession plans. Too many good operations are one retirement, illness, or burnout away from uncertainty. That's why the next generation matters so much right now.

In Oregon, we're fortunate to have a young group of professionals stepping up and taking ownership of the future. They've organized themselves into a group called NexGen, and recently I had the chance to attend their annual meeting at Langdon Farms. Walking into that room was a breath of fresh air. Not because everything was perfect or polished, but because it was full of energy, curiosity, and people who actually want to be here.

There were 30-40 young nursery professionals in attendance, with about 150 people on the email list overall. The average age hovered in the mid 20s, with a few folks in their 40s or older sprinkled in. That mix matters. It shows that this isn't just a youth club — it's a bridge. A place where experience and new ideas can meet without ego getting in the way.

What impressed me most was the fact that these young people are making time for each other. In an industry where spring doesn't wait, weather doesn't cooperate, and labor is always tight, carving out space to connect is no small thing. That tells me they're serious. They're not just showing up for a meal and a drink. They're showing up because they see a future worth investing in.

For years, we've talked about succession planning like it's something that happens naturally. The truth is, it doesn't. It takes intention. It takes mentorship. It takes creating environments where younger employees feel welcome, heard, and challenged — not just told how things have always been done. Groups like NexGen help fill that gap. They give young professionals a sense of belonging



Patrick Newton

and a network to lean on as they grow into leadership roles.

Social connections are critical. Relationships are the backbone of this industry. Whether it's between growers and customers, employers and employees, or parents and kids trying to figure out how to pass the torch, trust is built face-to-face. A group focused on the future creates those connections early, before people drift away to other industries that seem easier or more predictable.

The nursery industry in Oregon has a strong history, thanks in part to organizations like the Oregon Association of Nurseries. But history alone won't carry us forward. The next generation will. They'll bring new ideas, new technology, and new ways of thinking — while still respecting the grit and work ethic that built this business in the first place.

If you're reading this and thinking about the future of your own operation, here's a simple step: get involved. If you have a son, daughter, employee, or young manager who's hungry to grow in this industry, encourage them to plug in. And if you would like to attend a NexGen social event or learn more about upcoming gatherings, contact NexGen at [NexGenHort@gmail.com](mailto:NexGenHort@gmail.com). The future of our industry won't build itself. It starts with showing up. ©



# Calendar

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

## APRIL 3-4

### HORTLANDIA

The Hardy Plant Society of Oregon sponsors its annual plant and art sale April 3-4 at The Wingspan Event and Conference Center, N.E. 34th Ave. and Cornell Road, in Hillsboro, Oregon. Vendors from all over the Northwest will provide the latest plant introductions alongside old favorites. Handmade, one-of-a-kind garden art made from materials like metal, wood, glass, ceramic, fabric and stone will be on display throughout the event. Admission is \$25 for the evening sneak preview on Friday, April 3, then \$5 on Saturday, April 4. Parking is \$10. For more information, go to [HardyPlantSociety.org](http://HardyPlantSociety.org).

## APRIL 10

### NEW VARIETIES SHOWCASE TIER 1 ENTRIES DUE

The 2026 Farwest Show is now accepting submissions of new plant introductions for the upcoming New Varieties Showcase. The showcase is an annual highlight at Farwest, the biggest and greenest trade show in the West. The show is August 26-28 at the Oregon Convention Center in Portland, Oregon. Tier 1 entries will be featured on [FarwestShow.com](http://FarwestShow.com) and displayed in the New Varieties Showcase on the floor at the Farwest Show along with Hip Labels plant tag labels. Added value incentives for Tier 1 entries include layout in the July issue of *Digger* magazine (\$750 value) and Hip Labels plant tag take-aways for the attendees. Each Tier 1 submission costs \$250. The Tier 1 submission deadline is April 10. Tier 2 entries will be featured online at [FarwestShow.com](http://FarwestShow.com) and displayed in the New Varieties Showcase on the floor of the Farwest Show with Hip Labels plant tag labels. Each Tier 2 submission costs \$90. The Tier 2 submission deadline is June 13. For more information or to enter, go to [FarwestShow.com](http://FarwestShow.com). For more information or to enter, go to [FarwestShow.com](http://FarwestShow.com), [NewVarieties.com](http://NewVarieties.com) or contact Jamie Moore at [JMoore@OAN.org](mailto:JMoore@OAN.org) or 503-582-2010.

## APRIL 15

### ONF HORTICULTURAL SCHOLARSHIPS

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

## APRIL 25-26

### OREGON AG FEST

Explore the incredible world of Oregon agriculture in a fun-filled, festive environment for the entire family. The two-day event is a



OAN FILE PHOTO

## JUNE 11

### 2026 DUFFERS CLASSIC

Join the Oregon Nurseries Political Action Committee for the 2026 Duffers Classic on June 11 at a new location this year – OGA Golf Course, 2850 Hazelnut Drive in Woodburn, Oregon. Early registration is \$145 per person by April 30, 2026. Registration May 1 or later will be \$165 per person. (covers your greens fees, cart, and food). Register early at [OAN.org/Duffers](http://OAN.org/Duffers), as this event sells out. Reconnect with friends while supporting a strong nursery industry voice in Salem and Washington D.C. Check-in begins at 7:30 a.m., tee off at 8:30 a.m. and enjoy a taco bar lunch at 1:30 p.m. Sponsorships are available at [OAN.org/Page/DuffersSponsor26](http://OAN.org/Page/DuffersSponsor26).

unique experience, where hands-on exhibits make learning about Oregon's vast agricultural industry entertaining. Tickets are \$15, free for kids 15 and under. Oregon Ag Fest is held at the Oregon State Fairgrounds, 2330 17th St. N.E. in Salem. For more information or to purchase tickets, go to [ORAgFest.com](http://ORAgFest.com). Make sure you stop by the Plant Something Oregon booth from the Oregon Association of Nurseries, pick up a new Plant Something Oregon retail nursery road map and pick a plant to pot and take home.

## MAY 31

### HRI SCHOLARSHIPS

Scholarships ranging from \$1,000 to \$5,000 each are available from the Horticultural Research Institute, which has more than \$50,000 available for the 2026 scholarship program. Applications are now being taken and the portal is open. Students are encouraged to apply early. The deadline for submitting applications is May 31. Interested students can access the application and find more details at [TinyURL.com/HRIScholarships](http://TinyURL.com/HRIScholarships).

## JUNE 25-27

### AMERICAN CONIFER SOCIETY NATIONAL MEETING

The 2026 American Conifer Society National

Meeting returns to Oregon and is being hosted by the Western Region and they're excited to welcome everyone back. Visitors will be reminded of Oregon's beauty and rich plant diversity. Oregon is conifer country – more evergreen landscape plants are grown in Oregon than any other state in the nation. The event takes place Thursday June 25 through Saturday June 27 at the Holiday Inn Portland South, 25425 S.W. 95<sup>th</sup> Ave., Wilsonville. For more information or to register, go to [ConiferSociety.org](http://ConiferSociety.org).

## VARIOUS DATES

### FREE CPR/FIRST AID CLASSES

The Oregon Association of Nurseries is once again offering FREE first aid and CPR certification training for OAN members in 2026, thanks to their continuing partnership with SAIF. These classes provide hands-on instruction in small group settings, covering essential first aid and lifesaving CPR skills. Certifications are valid for two years, and sessions are available in both English and Spanish from 8 a.m.-12:30 p.m. English: June 17, July 15, September 16, October 14, November 18, December 16. Spanish: June 18, July 16, September 17, October 15, November 19, December 17. All classes take place at the OAN office: 29751 S.W. Town Center Loop West, in Wilsonville. Register at [OAN.org/CPR](http://OAN.org/CPR). ©



# 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](mailto:News@OAN.org).

## Oregon ranks as top nursery state

Oregon is the top grower of nursery stock in the United States, according to newly released figures from the U.S.



Department of Agriculture.

“Oregon has long been a leader in high quality nursery and greenhouse material, and the new numbers show that hasn’t changed,” said Patrick Newton, president of the Oregon Association of Nurseries and owner of **Powell’s Nursery**, a wholesaler based on Gaston, Oregon.

According to the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS), Oregon sold \$889 million in nursery stock in 2024. California, Florida, Texas and New Jersey followed.

“Nursery stock” as defined includes broadleaf evergreens, coniferous evergreens, deciduous flowering trees, deciduous shade trees, deciduous shrubs, fruit and nut plants, ornamental grasses, and several similar crops. Of these, Oregon ranked first in conifers, deciduous shade trees, deciduous shrubs and flowering trees. Oregon is also #1 in Christmas trees.

In horticultural specialty crops overall, Oregon sold \$1.3 billion worth of material, which was behind California (\$3 billion) and Florida (\$2.2 billion) but ahead of all other states. Horticultural crops is a broader category that includes all nursery stock categories, plus other crops like cut flowers, potted plants, bedding plants, Christmas trees, food crops grown under protection, cut cultivated greens and others.

## OREGON FUNDS JAPANESE BEETLE TRAPPING, PRESERVES ABILITY TO SHIP

Oregon growers are hopeful they have resolved any uncertainty about shipping nursery products to states that regulate for the Japanese beetle.

They successfully lobbied the Oregon Legislature to resurrect a state Japanese beetle eradication program, while persuading a National Plant Board committee to retain Oregon’s Category 1 shipping status.

These steps remedy the state’s puzzling decision to end Japanese beetle eradication funding in 2025. They came after the Oregon Association of Nurseries worked closely with state leaders, national partners, and regulators to ensure protection for plants and markets.

“These wins reflect the impact of coordinated industry advocacy,” OAN Executive Director Jeff Stone said. “At the same time, OAN members responded to action alerts by making calls and sending emails to legislators. Together, those efforts helped ensure the nursery industry’s voice was heard at critical moments.”

Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek is expected to sign the Japanese beetle eradication funding bill, which contains numerous other unrelated expenditures of importance. Stone expressed gratitude to key legislators who helped.

“Many kudos are appropriate, but special recognition goes to State Sens. Fred Girod (R-Stayton), Christine Drazan (R-Canby); Kate Lieber (D-Beaverton) and Lew Frederick (D-Portland),” Stone said.

As part of the funding bill, Oregon will increase its nursery license fee for the first time since 2018 and will use the money to hire two staffers to help coordinate the Japanese beetle effort.

In Washington, D.C., the National Plant Board committee met. AmericanHort Regulatory and Trade Policy Coordinator Kamron Newberry helped lobby the committee to recognize the Oregon state funding and state eradication effort and convey Category 1 status to Oregon.

“This is a preliminary decision that would need to be ratified by the full National Plant Board,” Stone said.



Alexa Patti is named one of the Leading Women of Horticulture. PHOTO COURTESY OF LITTLE PRINCE OF OREGON

## LITTLE PRINCE’S ALEXA PATTI IS ONE OF THE LEADING WOMEN OF HORTICULTURE

*Nursery Management* features **Little Prince of Oregon Nursery** Head Grower and Nursery Manager Alexa Patti in its Leading Women of Horticulture feature in its March issue.

Patti’s approach to team management is rooted in individualized support and professional development. She views her role as a facilitator of her employees’ long-term success, both in and out of the nursery. By prioritizing the person over the position, she fosters a culture where team members feel valued as individuals, not just names on a spreadsheet.

“I’ve never known someone as young as Alexa and with as short of a horticultural career who absolutely knows her stuff,” said Mark Leichty, director of business development for the Aurora, Oregon, nursery. “From the very first day I met her, I kind of recognized Alexa as a savant of sorts who brings to the table an extraordinary amount of knowledge on how to grow plants.”

## YOUNGBLOOD NURSERY VENTURES INTO TROPICAL PLANTS

Sparked by a dinner conversation at MANTS, Youngblood Nursery Inc. (Salem, [»](#)

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## Northwest News

Oregon) has launched a tropical plants division. “We’ve been working on growing this division of our nursery for the past 2½ years,” office manager Mackenzie Allaert said.

“We do feel like there was an untapped market that we could help fill,” Allaert said. “What we offer in being able to ship tropical/indoor plants on the same truck as the landscape/outdoor plants is something that hasn’t been offered before to our knowledge. Our goal was to make all plants more accessible to our customers and therefore the end consumer.”

“Our goal is to bring a full line up of plants that will suit anyone’s desires/needs, from rare very hard to find plants, to common more well-known plants,” Allaert said. “The tropical/indoor plants have a dedicated page on our website and social media, under Rooted by Youngblood.”

Currently the nursery has a 2-acre greenhouse that was upgraded for the purpose of growing the tropical indoor houseplants.

For more information go to [YoungbloodNursery.com/Rooted](http://YoungbloodNursery.com/Rooted).

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### ATLAS GREENHOUSE ACQUIRES STUPPY GREENHOUSE

Atlas Greenhouse has acquired Stuppy Greenhouse, according to *Garden Center* magazine. Together, the companies represent nearly 200 years of combined industry knowledge and experience. They said the combination expands options and delivers more comprehensive solutions for customers across markets and geographies. Customers will continue to have full access to both the Atlas and Stuppy product lines.

Atlas Greenhouse was founded in 1986 and is headquartered in Alapaha, Georgia. Stuppy was founded in 1873 and is headquartered in Kansas City, Missouri.

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### MONROVIA LAUNCHES DIRECT-TO-CONSUMER SALES

Home gardeners are now able to purchase plants directly from **Monrovia Nursery Company** (Dayton, Oregon) at [Monrovia.com/Shop/Direct.html](http://Monrovia.com/Shop/Direct.html). Visitors to the website can choose from



Youngblood Nursery in Salem, Oregon, has launched a tropical plants division. PHOTO COURTESY OF YOUNGBLOOD NURSERY

a curated selection of craftsman-grown nursery plants and they’ll be packed and shipped directly to them.

“One of the top comments we hear from home gardeners is frustration over not being able to find that certain plant they really want in their landscape,” Monrovia’s trend spotter and Chief Marketing Officer Katie Tamony said. “We know garden centers can’t carry everything. ShopMonrovia Direct gives everyone the opportunity to find that perfect plant.”

Free shipping is available on orders over \$100.

Shoppers also have the opportunity to join Monrovia’s “Let’s Be Buds” loyalty rewards program where every purchase, interaction, and referral can add up to more points for future shopping. Members earn one point for every dollar spent at [Monrovia.com](http://Monrovia.com). When you reach 100 points, they can be redeemed for \$5 off future purchases.

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### TERRA NOVA MAKES BOLD ADDITION TO HEUCHERA GRANDE™ SERIES

**Terra Nova Nurseries** (Canby, Oregon) has unveiled *Heuchera* GRANDE

‘Carnelian’, a new addition to the *Heuchera* GRANDE series.

The *H. villosa* hybrid is lauded for its bold, textured foliage which adds visual interest to partial shade or full sun landscapes and gardens. ‘Carnelian’ is bred for its oversized, ruffled leaves in rich carnelian red with coppery undertones. It grows with a fast, mounding habit, making it a standout container or landscape plant; ‘Carnelian’ also adds lasting impact to mass plantings and mixed beds with reddish-bronze foliage that shimmers like polished stones. It’s drought-tolerant once established, deer-resistant and a powerful pollinator attractor. It grows most actively in the summer, reaching a height of 18” and flower height of 30”.

The company’s breeding team recommends allowing GRANDE ‘Carnelian’ to dry slightly between waterings for greenhouse growing. The finish time from a liner to a 4-inch pot is six to eight weeks; finish time from a liner to a 1-gallon pot is 10 to 12 weeks. ‘Carnelian’ prefers moderately well-drained, organic soil and has average water needs once planted in the garden. The new addition to Terra Nova’s *Heuchera* GRANDE Series is hardy in Zones 4–9.

## SHOWCASE YOUR NEW AND IMPROVED PLANTS AT 2026 FARWEST SHOW

The New Varieties Showcase at the 2026 Farwest Show is the perfect place to show off your new or improved plants. New breeding and new introductions drive consumer interest, improve garden performance and push the industry forward. This trade show feature is your chance to reach and inspire more than 4,000 passionate retailers, brokers, garden writers, and more who browse the dazzling exhibit in search of the latest and the greatest at the Farwest Show August 26–28.

**Tier 1 (\$250): Deadline is Friday, April 10**

- Full-color print inclusion in the July *Digger* magazine (a value of \$900!) that goes out to more than 8,000 industry subscribers.

- Displayed with Hip Labels plant tag take-aways for attendees.
  - Featured online at **FarwestShow.com**.
  - Featured in the New Varieties Showcase on the show floor
- Tier 2 (\$90): Deadline is Friday,**

**June 12**

- Featured online at **FarwestShow.com**.
  - Featured in the New Varieties Showcase on the show floor with a Hip Labels plant tag label.
- To be accepted into the showcase, plants must differentiate themselves from similar offerings on the market. Each submitted variety must be available for purchase for the upcoming 2027 season from at least one exhibitor at the 2026 Farwest Show.

New (or improved) plant varieties are vetted by a panel of horticulture indus-

try experts. Fees are only collected upon showcase acceptance.

Submit your plant at **FarwestShow.com/New-Varieties-Showcase-Submissions**.

Questions? Contact Trade Show Manager Connie Lindsay at [CLindsay@OAN.org](mailto:CLindsay@OAN.org) or 503-582-2005.

## BUSINESS BANKRUPTCIES IN OREGON HIT 12-YEAR HIGH

Business bankruptcies in Oregon jumped 25% last year to 250, their highest point since 2013, more evidence of the growing strain on Oregon's economy, according to a report from *The Oregonian* newspaper in Portland, Oregon.

The numbers are worrying for Oregon, where bankruptcies rose almost four times faster than nationwide. There has been growing pressure on the state's economy over the past two years with ➤

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## Northwest News

layoffs topping Great Recession levels. Job cuts at Nike, Intel and Oregon Health & Science University add to the pressure at smaller companies, which supply those big organizations.

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**Courtyard by Marriott**, 435 N.E. Wasco St., rate is \$189, cutoff date is August 7.

**Hotel Eastlund**, 1021 N.E. Grand Avenue, \$189-\$209, cutoff August 3.

**DoubleTree by Hilton**, 1000 N.E. Multnomah St., \$159, cutoff July 31.

**Hyatt Regency Portland**, 375 N.E. Holladay St., \$199, cutoff August 7.

Beware of Housing Pirates! No housing coordinator for the Farwest Show will make outbound calls to solicit reservations.

### BIOWORKS INTRODUCES SANDRINE COPPER SOAP AND CINTRO INSECTICIDAL SOAP

Biological-based plant health solutions **BioWorks** announced the launch of Sandrine Copper Soap and Cintro Insecticidal Soap. These two crop protection products are designed for effective, targeted control of key fungal, bacterial and insect pests within IPM programs, according to *Nursery Management*. These



Farwest Show attendees browse new products on display at the New Products Showcase in 2025. OAN FILE PHOTO

solutions support commercial production in greenhouse, nursery, ornamental, cannabis and specialty crop systems.

Sandrine Copper Soap is a liquid copper octanoate formulation that provides broad-spectrum activity against fungal and bacterial pathogens, including *Corynespora*, powdery mildew, *Botrytis*, bacterial leaf spots and downy mildew.

Cintro Insecticidal Soap is a potassium soap of fatty acids providing contact-based control of soft-bodied insects, including aphids, whiteflies, spider mites, thrips, mealybugs and leafhoppers. The mode of action eliminates pests by damaging cell membranes and stripping away the protective waxes that shield the insect. Cintro Insecticidal Soap is labeled for indoor and outdoor use and is effective on bedding plants, trees and shrubs, citrus and stone fruit, nuts, herbs, vegetables and other specialty crops.

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Questions? Contact Tana Klum at [TKlum@OAN.org](mailto:TKlum@OAN.org) or 503-582-2012.

## Announcements

### DOUG GROTT RETURNS AS COO OF MARION AG SERVICE

**Marion Ag Service** (St. Paul, Oregon)

announced that Doug Grott is returning to the company as its first chief operating officer. “As Marion Ag Service continues to experience significant growth, the organization is investing

in leadership roles that focus on internal coordination, efficient operations, and ensure the continued delivery of high-quality service



**Doug Grott**

to customers,” the company stated in a release. “The creation of the COO position reflects Marion Ag Service’s commitment to more unified operations and long-range success.”

Grott returns to Marion Ag with more than 20 years of experience in agricultural retail and business development. Known for his strong industry relationships and practical leadership approach, Doug previously contributed significantly to Marion Ag’s operational alignment and customer service efforts. In this new role, he will leverage his extensive industry expertise to help drive innovation while upholding the company’s core values. >>

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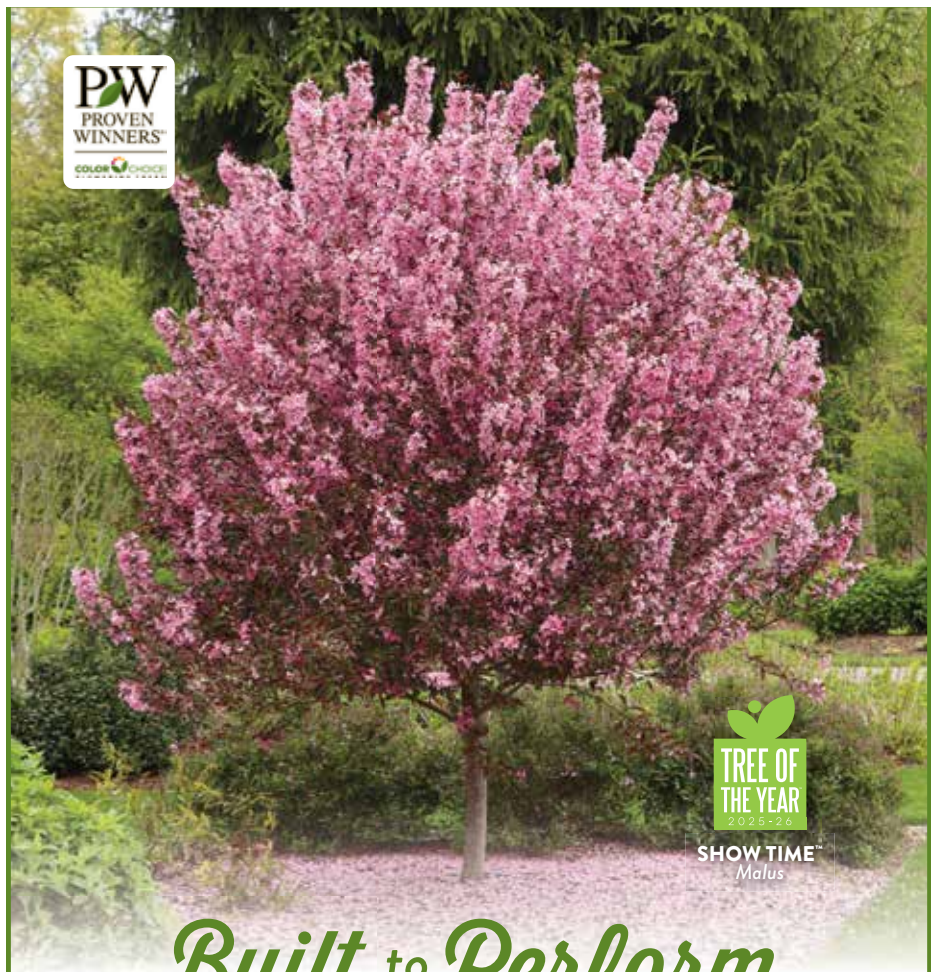
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## Northwest News

### NUTRIEN APPOINTS NEW EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT OF SALES

Chris Reynolds was named executive vice president of global sales at **Nutrien**, according to Agri-Pulse, an agricultural news website. The role will unify leadership across the wholesale and retail sales organizations and strengthen how Nutrien delivers value to customers worldwide. The appointment follows a planned leadership transition as Jeff Tarsi, who has led Nutrien's global retail business, steps into an advisory role.



Chris Reynolds

### HARRELL'S EXPANDS HORTICULTURE TEAM

Industry veteran Chad Keel has joined **Harrell's** horticulture team, strengthening the company's commitment to support nursery and greenhouse growers. Keel brings extensive field experience and a strong background in horticultural media and controlled-release fertilizer technologies, the company said in a statement.

In his new role, Keel will support Harrell's horticulture team across the United States, with a primary focus on the continued growth and success of POLYON® controlled-release fertilizers within the horticulture market. ©



Chad Keel

# The long-term value of favorite trees



*Acer pseudoplatanus* 'Esk Sunset' has variegated white, pink and green leaves, with more prominent pink tones on the underside. PHOTO BY MIKE DARCY

Trees provide so much for our planet and for our very existence, and yet they require so little in return. Their roots help hold the soil together, the leaves give us clean air, the flowers give fruit, their canopy gives us shade, and the list goes on.

Living here in the Pacific Northwest where we are surrounded by tree canopies, it is easy to forget what a privilege this is.

Earlier this year, much of the southern United States had some devastating storm damage that included high winds, ice, and freezing temperatures that did major damage to many trees. Many neighborhoods witnessed mature, 100-year-plus trees that were toppled. With this kind of destruction, it can be difficult to put into words the thoughts of those living within this ruined space.

Josh McCoy, media and content director for the City of Oxford, Mississippi, wrote a eulogy that expresses this far better than I can: "We are sorry that we could not save you. But know that while your wood may be carried away, the history you witnessed, from the quiet Sunday strolls to the roaring Saturday nights, is woven into our very air. You were more than trees; you were the frame

through which we viewed our lives. Rest easy, old friends. The Square will feel a little brighter, a little hotter, and a lot emptier without you."

Josh's comments resonated with me and made me consider the value of trees much more deeply. With that consideration in mind, I began to think more about my own trees. So, here are four different trees that are among my favorites for being appropriate for my garden. It is always wise to do a bit of research before planting a tree because in most cases the tree will be here long after the gardener has departed.

There is something about an oak tree that just commands attention and respect. With about 500 distinct species, and all being native to the northern hemisphere, there is probably some variety of an oak that would be suitable for every garden.

## Golden oak

To just pick one is difficult but my choice at this moment is going to be *Quercus alnifolia*, also called the golden oak because of the rusty brown color of the underside of the leaves. The one in my garden is still at what I would call a "shrub stage" of 7 feet, but references say



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](mailto:ITGMikeDarcy@Comcast.net).

it can eventually reach about 30 feet.

It is especially appealing in the winter garden to see such a colorful shrub/tree. It is a native of Cyprus and in 2006, the Golden Oak was selected to be that country's national tree.

## *Acer pseudoplatanus*

Many plants have stories that go along with their names and if this story about *Acer pseudoplatanus* 'Esk Sunset' is true, it is a great plant name story. The story is that when it was introduced in the United States, someone thought 'Esk' was an abbreviation for Eskimo and the tree became commonly referred to as 'Eskimo Sunset'. Once the facts came out, the name was changed back to the original because it was named for the Esk Valley on the east coast of New Zealand's South Island, where it was discovered.

While this is a deciduous tree, the spring, summer and fall foliage is outstanding. The undersides of the leaves are purple, and the top sides are a mix of pink, green, and white. When newly planted, give it some protection from the hot afternoon sun to prevent the leaves from burning. This tree will have visitors extolling the virtues of its colorful variegated foliage and demanding to know its name.

## *Michelia maudiae/ Magnolia maudiae*

Just like people, sometimes trees have their names changed. Years ago, I saw a business planted with street trees on N.E. Fremont St. in Portland that Sean Hogan, (Cistus Design Nursery), had planted with *Michelia maudiae*. These trees were in full bloom with fragrant white flowers.

Shortly after seeing these trees, I >>

## What I'm Hearing

planted one in my garden! It is an ever-green tree with flowers that appear along the stems in early spring. Their fragrance permeates the surrounding area.

However, since the time of my planting this tree, the name has changed. Taxonomists and botanists sometimes reclassify plants based on new evidence. There are, of course, rules to follow that are set by the International Code of Botanical Nomenclature and the International Association for Plant Taxonomy. My *Michelia maudiae* is now known as *Magnolia maudiae*. Regardless of the name, it is a favorite early blooming tree in my garden.

### Olive

Sometimes when we hear people talk about plants and make certain statements about them, we begin to believe them, especially when we hear other plant people espouse the same "facts." For many




Golden oak gets its name from the color of the underside of the leaves. PHOTO BY MIKE DARCY

years, I was told that olive trees would not grow here.

Fast forward to today, when there are even commercial olive orchards in Oregon and there is research being done to help select those trees that are cold hardy and adaptable to our climate. In my own garden, I have three *Olea europaea* 'Arbequina' olive trees that are performing quite well and seem to thrive with our recent hot dry summers.

Trees certainly offer us so much that we need to be thankful and appreciative for because we could not live without them. I think that Thomas Jefferson summed up the significance of trees with this quotation from 1793. "I never before knew the full value of trees. My house is entirely embosomed in high plane trees, with good grass below, and under them I breakfast, dine, write, read and receive my company." ©



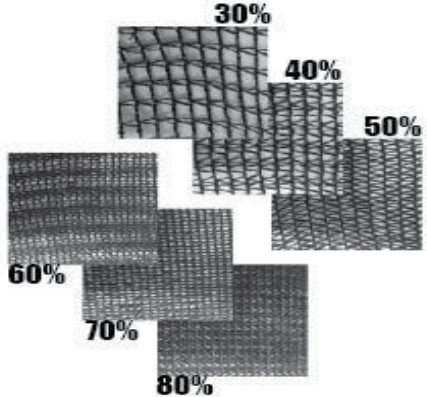
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# Always in style

Collectors and new developments mean Japanese maples are still one of the hottest sellers

Moonrise® Full Moon Maple (*Acer shirasawanum* 'Munn 001'). PHOTO COURTESY OF J. FRANK SCHMIDT & SON CO.

BY ERICA BROWNE GRIVAS

Japanese maples are having a moment — again. Compact size, four-season interest and a collector following rivaling hostas have made them one of the hottest sellers in the trade.

One of the most iconic trees in the landscape, Japanese maples have been cultivated for centuries, known in garden design since at least the Heian period of Japan (794-1185).

Breeding accelerated during the Edo period (1603-1868), the first specimens reached England in 1820, most likely in the form of the straight species, *Acer palmatum*.

“In many ways they are the perfect small garden tree, relatively trouble-free and disease resistant,” said Guy Meacham, new plant development manager for **J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co.** in Boring, Oregon. “They come in all shapes and sizes — upright, weeping, dwarf, tall — and they are well suited to container production, both in the nursery and the garden or landscape.”

“There are so many options, from tried-and-true classics to an ever-expanding list of new cultivars to choose from,” agreed Roby Babcock, marketing director at **Iseli Nursery** in Boring, Oregon. “They fit into any number of landscapes with ease and lend themselves well to our increasingly small yards.”

And they just get better with age.

“I think that the older they get, it gives it more of a character and people really like kind of the architecture of the branching,” said Wayne Staehely, founder of **Columbia Nursery LLC** in Canby, Oregon.



Ed Wood Full Moon Maple (*Acer japonicum* 'Ed Wood #2'). PHOTO COURTESY OF J. FRANK SCHMIDT & SON CO.

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Always in style



Top: Arctic Jade® Maple (*Acer × pseudosieboldianum* 'IsIAJ'). PHOTO COURTESY OF ISELI NURSERY

Bottom: Crimson Queen Japanese Maple (*Acer palmatum dissectum* 'Crimson Queen'). PHOTO COURTESY OF J. FRANK SCHMIDT & SON CO.



*Acer palmatum* 'Mikawa yatsubusa'. PHOTO COURTESY OF ISELI NURSERY

Oregon is the number one state for growing Japanese maples, selling \$61.1 million worth in 2024, good for 70.9% of the U.S. market, according to the newly released USDA Census of Horticultural Specialties.

### The family of Japanese maples

The umbrella term “Japanese maples” encompasses several closely related species. The group is made up of three core Asian species, native to Japan, China, Korea and Mongolia.

*Acer palmatum* — The name references its palmate, hand-like leaf shape. Height ranges from 10–25 feet tall and wide, with a spectrum of fall color from yellow to bronze.

*A. japonicum* — Its somewhat airy rounded leaves earned it the nicknames full moon or downy maple. It reaches 20–30 feet tall and turns gold and red in autumn.

*A. shirasawanum* — It was formerly classified under *A. japonicum*, and is confusingly also called full moon maple or Shirisawa maple. Reaching 15–20 feet high, its leaves are smaller and the shoots are hairless. Older trees boast silver-white bark. The golden-leaved cultivar ‘Aureum’ is the most well-known and earned the Royal Horticultural Society Award of Garden Merit.

In addition, several closely related maples offer similar characteristics and are being hybridized with the core species, such as *Acer sieboldianum* (Siebold’s maple), *Acer pseudosieboldianum* (Korean maple), and Pacific Northwest native *Acer*

*circinatum* (vine maple).

### Classics that don’t quit

While Meacham said, “Japanese maples have always been a somewhat cyclical crop with peaks and valley in demand,” there are some varieties with strong staying power in the overall market.

At J. Frank Schmidt, Meacham highlighted *A. palmatum* var. *atropurpureum* ‘Bloodgood’, *A. palmatum* ‘Tamukeyama’, ‘Emperor 1’, ‘Crimson Queen’, ‘Twombly’s Red Sentinel’, (a columnar red) ‘Viridis’, (a cascading green dwarf), and ‘Northern Glow’ as some of the top sellers across the country.

For Iseli, Babcock highlighted both workhorses and specialty selections: *Acer palmatum* ‘Shishigashira’, *A. palmatum* ‘Mikawa yatsubusa’, *A. shirasawanum* ‘Aureum’, *A. palmatum* ‘Osakazuki okame’, and *A. palmatum* ‘Sharp’s Pygmy.’

For seasonal color, Babcock recommended *Acer* × *pseudosieboldianum* First Flame® and *Acer palmatum* ‘Tsumagaki’ for spring color, *Acer palmatum* ‘Bloodgood’ and *Acer palmatum dissectum* ‘Crimson Queen’ for summer color, and *Acer palmatum* ‘Tobiosho’ or *Acer* × *pseudosieboldianum* Final Fire® for fall color.

Beyond foliage, he noted Japanese maples can provide structural interest in the garden even in winter, such as many of the cascading varieties as well as *Acer* × *pseudosieboldianum* ‘Origami.’

### Regional challenges

Japanese maples are so popular >>

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that customers want to grow them outside their hardiness zones.

“The customers desire the delicate textures, varied colors and different shapes that Japanese maples can bring to their yards, but they must plant them in locations that are strategically considered for protection from heat, cold and wind,” said Pete Brentano, owner of **Brentano’s Tree Farm** in St. Paul, Oregon. “With these conditions in mind, our customers generally stick with the names that have been around for a long time, as they have proven over the years that they can live in these locations. As such, we find that cultivars like ‘Bloodgood’ are essential to our market.”

### The collector effect

In addition to the classics, there are increasing numbers of collectors who want the newest varieties. Like potato chips, it’s hard to grow just one Japanese maple, as specialty societies and websites attest.



*Acer palmatum* 'Sharp's Pygmy'. PHOTO COURTESY OF ISELI NURSERY

Demand for new and unusual cultivars spikes popularity and drives sales.

“There are Japanese maple collectors and groups that continue to share their enthusiasm and knowledge which also helps to keep these maples in fashion,” Staehely said.

For growers, this might mean stocking

both proven classics for mainstream customers and limited-run specialty cultivars for the enthusiast market — a strategy that maximizes sales across customer types.

Right now, he said, collectors are snapping up varieties with tight nodes, like *A. palmatum* ‘Mikawa Yatsubusa’,



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*Acer* × *pseudosieboldianum* ‘Wabi sabi’. PHOTO COURTESY OF ISELI NURSERY

a highly popular dwarf with an irregular habit and chartreuse leaves turning vivid red. Such branching lends a mature bonsai-like appearance more quickly.

Many of these are not readily available, but he is watching autumnal toned ‘Sonya Yatsubusa’ and variegated *A. palmatum* ‘Lily Pad.’ Another to look for is ‘Caperci’s Dwarf’, which tops out at 1-2 feet tall, spreading 5-6 feet wide in 10 years, with lime leaves edged in red.

#### New cultivars to watch for

The next generation of Japanese maples is being engineered for extremes. As hardiness zones shift and weather becomes less predictable, breeders are crossing *palmatum* cultivars with hardier species that can handle deeper cold and hotter summers.

*A. pseudosieboldianum* increases hardiness and has been central to many new hybrids.

“Our hybrid collections have been keeping us busy fulfilling demand,” said Babcock. North Wind® Maple (*Acer* × *pseudosieboldianum* ‘IslNW’), Arctic Jade® Maple (*Acer* × *pseudosieboldianum* ‘IslAJ’), and Alpenglow® Maple (*Acer* × *pseudosieboldianum* ‘INAG-E61’ PP35,081) are a few that Iseli sees steady demand for.

These maples are part of the “Jack Frost” series, boasting stellar fall color and distinctive foliage, and are hardy to Zone 4.

“The temperature tolerance that our hybrid maples demonstrate has also expanded the customer base that can enjoy them,” added Babcock.

J. Frank Schmidt created *Acer pseudosieboldianum* × *palmatum* ‘Hasselkus’

Northern Glow Maple® hardy to Zone 4, with deeply cut foliage that emerges coppery bronze, shifts green for summer, and morphs to a blend of vintage shades for fall.

Meacham called out ‘Morton UW’ / ‘Morning Starburst’®, a Morton Arboretum hybrid between *A. circinatum* × *A. pseudosieboldianum* as “exciting,” delivering Zone 5-9 hardiness.

J. Frank Schmidt isn’t stopping there. “We are working on hybrids of *A. circinatum* × *palmatum* and *A. pseudosieboldianum* × *palmatum* for future introduction,” Meacham said, signaling the next wave of climate-tough maples is already in the pipeline.

Maples for compact gardens are in high demand, too. Babcock said, “There has been a trend of developing smaller plants that will do well in containers and small garden spaces and that trend is continuing.”

He is excited about *A. palmatum* ‘Sir Damon,’ a rare cultivar of the coral bark maple with brighter stems that hold color longer than most and foliage edged in pink, and *Acer* × *pseudosieboldianum* ‘Wabi Sabi’, a dwarf green dissected weeping introduction featuring contrasting stems, petioles and seedheads.

#### Cultivation and production tips

Japanese maples demand patience. Most cultivars are grafted, grow slowly, and require intensive monitoring, especially in the first few years.

While some growers root cuttings for bonsai or for slower-growing cultivars, Staehely said, most Japanese maple cultivars, are grown via grafting.

As a group they tend to be slow-to-mature, adding from one to two feet a

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year on average. While you can grow them faster, said Staehely, you'd lose that architectural quality customers are looking for. "You could grow a Japanese maple incredibly fast, like to six feet if you wanted to," he said. "But that's just a single whip and there's no character. There's no branching."

"Some people will overfertilize the plant because they want it to grow faster, but a heavier branched tree is the better option, especially for a customer," Staehely said

Babcock agreed, saying, "You want to look for a Japanese maple that has a good structure and at Iseli we spend the time to make sure that our maples are pruned correctly to provide a good foundation for future growth."

Solid branching structure is critical for regions getting regular ice and snowstorms.

Maples take a lot of attention, Staehely said, particularly until they reach the three-gallon size. "A lot of is hand watered," he said. "A lot of is monitored

multiple times a day. There's a lot of after-care that goes into it."

"One of the biggest challenges is a crop can take three to eight years to produce — depending on the size you are selling — is matching production with demand," Meacham said.

Iseli is working to keep up with demand. "We are expanding our production numbers and our need for space to grow them has increased as well," Babcock said. "It is important for us to maintain the top quality we are known for even as we expand our operation to meet market demand."

### What customers need to know

Armed with better information, customers make better choices — and have fewer returns. Here's what growers wish more buyers understood.

"Japanese maples are more climate adaptable than they are often given credit

for," Meacham said. "They are not bullet-proof, but they can take hot summers with little-to-no supplemental irrigation once established. The introduction of newer hybrid cultivars with *A. pseudosieboldianum* and *A. circinatum* should help mitigate some of the changes in climate."

Japanese maples can also thrive in containers with consistent watering and periodic root pruning or transplanting, Staehely said.

Customers can tend to over prune Japanese maples, Meacham said.

However, just like any grafted plant, do watch for understock reversions and prune any green growth below the graft union. ©

*Erica Browne Grivas is an award-winning journalist and gardener pushing zone boundaries in Seattle, Washington. She can be reached at [EricaGrivas.com](http://EricaGrivas.com) and *A Gardener's Path* on Substack.*



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# Measuring up

Bare-root grading among the most challenging tasks in nursery production

Bailey Nurseries Production Manager Esteban Herrera checks bare-root trees in cold storage at the nursery's refrigerated warehouse in Dayton.  
PHOTO COURTESY OF BAILEY NURSERIES

BY MITCH LIES

**A**t Bailey Nurseries in Dayton, Oregon, properly grading bare-root plants in a timely manner is critical.

Between seedlings, shrubs and trees, Bailey's hand grades more than 3.5 million bareroot items in its West Coast operations, all of which have to be dug and processed in a timely manner. Sit on material too long and plants can dry out and risk contracting diseases and molds.

According to Production Manager Esteban Herrera, having experienced graders is key to Bailey's success.

"I can't discount how important it is to have the same graders that are setting the standard for your company," he said. "We have some graders who have been here 30 years. They have a keen eye for what we expect of our trees."

Grading bare-root trees is both a subjective and an objective process, according to sources. When it comes to measuring caliper size, branching and height, the process is fairly cut and dried, said Vladimir Lomen, finance manager at **Sester Farms** in Gresham, Oregon. "Generally speaking, there are no leaves on the tree, and there's

no soil on the roots, so that sucker is buck naked and everybody can get on the same page," he said.

In other cases, subjectivity comes more into play.

"There is some subjectivity in terms of how much scarring is acceptable, how much bend in the trunk is acceptable, and so on," Lomen said.

Sester Farms analyzes a tree's root or branching structure in quadrants. "If it is supposed to have branches, we look at whether there are branches on each side or if it is lopsided," Lomen said. "And the same thing for the root structure. We look at its uniformity.

"Often, it is a fine line. You don't want to throw away a product that is quality, but you don't want to ship a customer something that should have been thrown away. Then you've got longer-term problems."

Lomen added that it is rare for a tree to be perfect. "A tree is a living thing. It's

**"Nothing is perfect. You can be close, but you really can't tell until you strip them down and they're naked and you kind of see what is what."**

— Esteban Herrera  
BAILEY NURSERIES  
PRODUCTION MANAGER

not like a widget. There are going to be some characteristics that aren't perfect but that are acceptable, and only a trained production person would know what that is."

In some cases, customers will take a #2 tree, said Joshua LaPoint, owner of **Standard Nursery** in Lafayette, Oregon. But, he said, in his experience, moving those trees is not a good business model.

"In my experience, for the most part it's pretty much a liability for the nursery, because if you go ahead and spend the labor to store it in hopes that someone

will buy it, you're already in the negative," LaPoint said. "And if they don't buy it, then you're really in the negative. And if they do buy it, maybe you cover your costs or you get a little bit back from it. It's really not a model to plan on."

## Spring estimates

Grading essentially starts in the **>>**

## Measuring up



From left, above: Rocio Felipe, Jesus Diosdado and Production Manager Esteban Herrera grade bare-root trees at Bailey Nurseries. Below: Trees are graded and bundled by size and grade and stored in refrigerated warehouses. PHOTOS COURTESY OF BAILEY NURSERIES

spring, when growers take a birds-eye view of their bare-root production and use historical averages to estimate production.

“And then in the fall, when certain things are done growing and they’re not going to caliper up, what we do is a 50-count,” Herrera said. “And we do some estimates based on that, where you take sample sizes of different areas of a crop to make sure that you’re in line with your spring estimates so that they reflect one another loosely. Nothing is perfect. You can be close, but you really can’t tell until you strip them down and they’re naked and you kind of see what is what.”

Herrera added that at times it can be deceptive to grade in a field in part because the proximity of plants to one another can distort the perceptions of tree sizes and a grader can get the impression a tree is more full-bodied than it is.

“Once you get them inside, they can look a lot different,” he said, “and that is where it gets hard, because in my opinion, grading can be very subjective. You have to meet the [American Standard for Nursery Stock] standards, but you also have a standard that you’ve created within



the company that is an accurate representation of what you produce year in and year out. There are often crops where you have trees that have multiple branches, but if they don’t appear to be balanced or if they have large gaps between each set, you start to venture into light-branch

territory, regardless of the tree having far more than the minimum needed.

“You have to always remember that not every genus is going to have the same appearance,” Herrera said. “I would never expect a *Ginkgo* tree to have the same standard as a two-year red maple. They



Workers grade bare-root trees at John Homlund Nursery in Boring, Oregon. OAN FILE PHOTO

## NURSERY STOCK STANDARDS

The American Standard for Nursery Stock is accredited by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI), and published by AmericanHort, the national trade group. It covers many types of nursery and greenhouse material, including Christmas trees, and was last revised in 2025. Download it at [TinyURL.com/NurseryStockStandards](https://www.tinyurl.com/NurseryStockStandards)

are different animals. You can throw away a lot of trees if you are not acknowledging the differences of natural growth between different genera. So, allowances need to be made to befit the crop you are grading. It's not the case with every genus, but it's important to note that they can be unique-

ly different.”

Once a tree is inside the warehouse, graders evaluate it in its entirety, Herrera said. “Each tree is picked up and given the full 360 to make sure it looks good top-to-bottom. During the growing season, you were just evaluating the top, but

once they come into the building, you are checking out what they had underneath (the roots), as well. All of those factors have to be weighed before we say, ‘This is what we want to represent our company.’

“Our customers have become accustomed to what we would call branch- >>

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## Measuring up

full and throughout on certain varieties,” Herrera said. “Even though you could take a lot of these plants and say that’s branched, because it has the minimum ANLA standards, but it might not meet our internal standard.”

### Historical averages

Older nurseries — those with historical records dating back, in some cases, decades — typically have better odds of aligning their spring estimates with their actual production, said LaPoint.

“They’ve got all the records, they’ve got the skill,” he said. “When they do their estimates, they pretty much know where it’s going to be later in the year. If you are a new nursery, just starting up, the barrier to entry is enormous, because you really don’t know from your estimates what your production numbers are going to be.”

Still, even for established nurseries, zeroing in on estimates can be difficult.

“You just don’t know how the growing season is going to go during the summer,” Herrera said. “You don’t know if it’s going to get real hot and shut things down or what is going to happen.”

“You build in your traditional shrinkage factor, because things die,” Lomen said. “And then as you get closer to shipping and harvest and grading is completed, you either call some neighbors, and you buy to fill in the sizes that you thought you had back when you made your projection, or you adjust orders and contact customers.

“You want to be the customer service vendor of choice,” Lomen said. “When you’re getting ready to ship, you will find the product to make sure that your customer gets what they need for their production, because they are depending

on you.”

Customers typically will allow for substituting up or down one caliper size, LaPoint said, but have limited tolerance for substituting up or down two sizes. “At that point, you are really asking them to change their program,” LaPoint said. “Now it is a different pot they have to put it into.”

### Grading and tagging

Some nurseries have started grading and tagging trees in fields a month or so prior to harvest to try and eliminate some of the guesswork and speed the grading process.

“It does seem to speed up the process, but it requires labor on the front end,” LaPoint said. “The upside is they don’t need that historical forecast. The only thing they have to account for at that point is the cull factor, which you can usually guess at.”

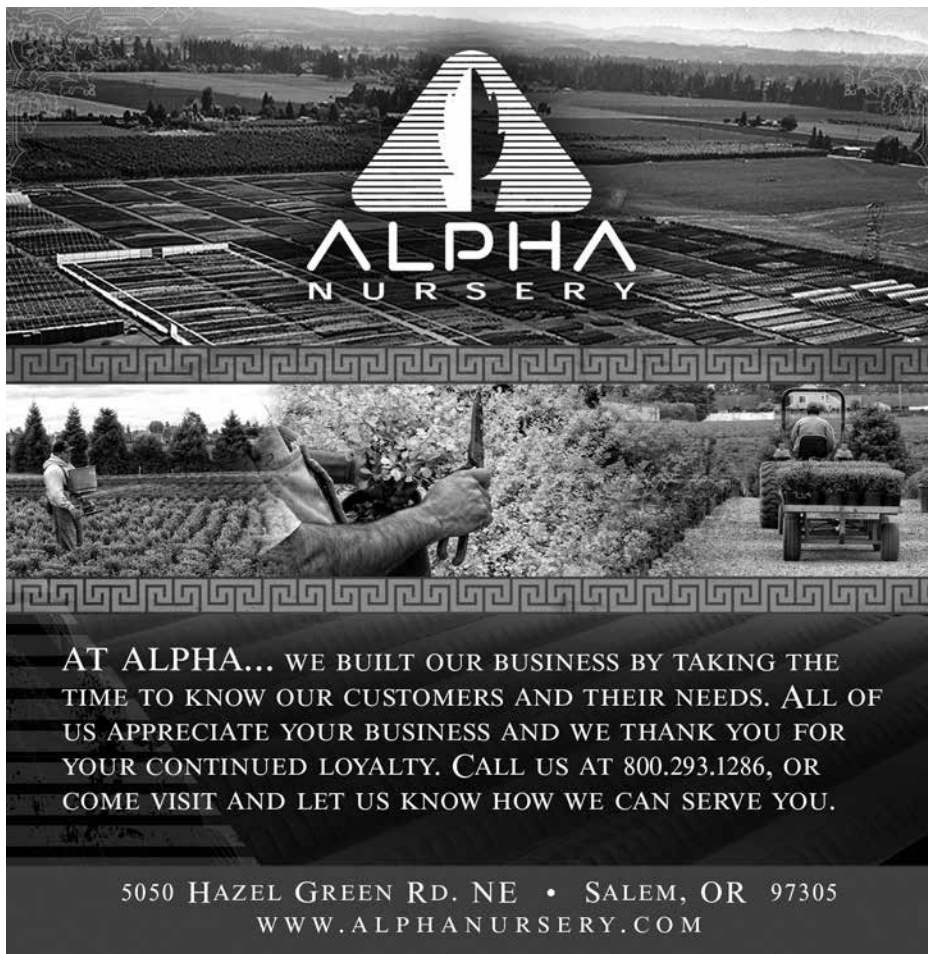
In the method, trees are tagged by grade and bundled accordingly during the harvest process.

“So, what happens is as the machine pops them out, the guys who are harvesting and working behind the machine, those are your graders,” LaPoint said. “So, if they see a J root, they just chuck it away behind them and they keep moving. The trees are already separated and isolated, so when they come out in a pallet on the grading room floor, they’re kind of all bundled together. So, you can actually see the height and the caliper right there and you can just bang out a whole row pretty quickly.”

LaPoint noted that he has worked in bare-root, container and field-grown nurseries. Bare-root, he said, presents perhaps the biggest challenge, and he ranks grading as among the most critical parts of the production processes.

“With bare-root, it’s all process, process, process,” LaPoint said. “And your employees need to have extensive experience. It’s a challenge. One of the most challenging to manage and be successful.” ©

*Mitch Lies is a freelance writer covering agricultural issues based in Salem Oregon. He can be reached at [MitchLies@Comcast.net](mailto:MitchLies@Comcast.net).*



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# More than words

Nurseries find ways to overcome workforce language barriers



At Peoria Gardens, the nursery tries to meet the staff where they're at instead of teaching them a new language. At training sessions and staff meetings, information is presented in Spanish as well as English, owner Ben Verhoeven said. PHOTO COURTESY OF PEORIA GARDENS

BY JON BELL

Like a lot of people, Ben Verhoeven, owner of **Peoria Gardens** in Albany, Oregon, took two years of Spanish in high school — but it didn't really stick.

"I'm pretty sure I goofed off most of the time," he said.

Years later, as he first worked on his family's nursery and eventually took the reins, Verhoeven might have wished he'd paid a little more attention. As is the case at many nurseries across the Pacific Northwest, a good portion of the workforce at Peoria Gardens speak languages other than English as their native tongue.

There's lots of Spanish, of course, but there's also been some indigenous languages and even some Pashto, which is spoken in places like Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran.

And while that often might make communication a little less fluid sometimes, Verhoeven — who's continued to work on polishing up his Spanish over the years — said the benefits of the language differences present at the nursery far outweigh any

kind of challenges they may pose.

"I don't think it's a negative issue at all," he said. "I like to put it as an opportunity. We definitely have people who speak different languages, and absolutely it's challenging sometimes to overcome language barriers. But it's also an opportunity, because you can build connections and trust. If you are willing to try, to communicate as best you can, that really shows something, and it can be really valuable."

The agriculture workforce in Oregon — and across the U.S. — has long been made up of a diverse array of workers, many of whom come from different countries and speak different languages. According to information from the Oregon State University Extension Service, 83% of farmworkers nationally identify as Hispanic or Latino; in Oregon, that percentage is likely even higher. And a study from Iowa State University found that 20% of the entire horticultural workforce in the U.S. are Latin individuals whose preferred language is Spanish.

With that kind of a demographic mix, there are bound to be linguistic bridges that need to be crossed to ensure that

important information isn't lost in translation. At nurseries, managers need to be able to communicate with laborers; workers often need to understand complicated nursery processes related to pesticides, irrigation, plant diseases and more. There are cultural differences that can be better exchanged through communication. And then there's simply the need to be able to communicate to make a workplace enjoyable and welcoming for everyone.

It's not always easy, but Oregon nurseries find ways to bridge the gaps.

"A language barrier isn't just about words. It can be a cultural barrier too," Verhoeven said. "You might have a hard time being a teammate with someone you can't communicate with, but if you start to work toward overcoming that language barrier, you're not just understanding words, but you start to respect them more as an individual — and vice-versa. You don't have to be a linguist to reap those benefits."

## A common understanding

At **Robinson Nursery**, a wholesale grower of shade and ornamental trees, a fair amount of the 100 or so employ- ➤

## More than words



Luisa Santamaria (in glasses without yellow vest) conducts frequent trainings in Spanish for nursery workers. She said one of the important things to focus on beyond the language is concepts like sanitation that workers need to understand. PHOTO COURTESY OF LUISA SANTAMARIA

ees speak Spanish and varying levels of English. Diana Ceja, office and human resources manager for Robinson, said the company takes several steps to help ensure that communication works for everybody.

For starters, Robinson conducts annual Occupational Safety and Health Administration trainings in Spanish and English. They also provide OSHA training materials, including videos, printed and digital assets, in both languages.

“If we find any other resources that we need and they’re only available in English, I take the time to translate them,” Ceja said.

She also said that most managers at Robinson are fluent enough to communicate with both language groups. If there is ever any confusion or a misunderstanding, managers and employees will come to Ceja for clarification. That includes anytime there may be a subtle difference in Spanish dialects that don’t translate effectively even among Spanish speakers.

“Different regions have their own slang,” she said. “Some words are normal in the northern part of Mexico but offensive in the south. I try to make all those work out.”

Though Robinson doesn’t offer English language classes itself, nearby Chemeketa Community College does. Ceja says some of the nursery’s employees have taken classes there and been reimbursed by Robinson so long as they meet a certain grade point average.

“I think they do it because they want to advance a little more in the company,” Ceja says.

### Including everyone

At Peoria Gardens, Verhoeven said no one is required to go and learn a new language, though some have.

“Our focus at Peoria is not on teaching you a second language,” he said. “What we have done is try to meet people where they are and also to focus on core training functions.”

A good example of that is Peoria offering a training session for new employees on the fundamentals of Lean management practices, which Peoria uses to conduct its operations. One day the training was offered in English; the next it was in Spanish.

When Peoria has an all-company meeting, Verhoeven — who also isn’t

afraid to use technology like Google Translate — has a translator from the staff translate the meeting into Spanish so that everyone is getting the same information.

“It doubles the length of the meeting, but the alternative is that a good portion of your workforce would not know what’s going on, and that’s bad,” he said. “Our goal is to make everyone feel included.”

Another benefit of having an employee translate during the all-company meeting? That employee becomes a leader and can experience growth in their career.

“That’s an opportunity for that person to grow in their public speaking capabilities and their leadership capabilities,” Verhoeven said. “I’m saying to them, ‘I’m the owner of the company. I need your help.’ So that person is not just translating. They are participating and people see that. They are being seen as leaders.”

### The science behind it

For the past 16 years, Luisa Santamaria has been working to help Spanish-speaking workers in Oregon’s agriculture workforce get the training they need to flourish in their work. A professor at OSU and an extension plant pathologist at OSU’s North Willamette

Research and Extension Center (NWREC), Santamaria has developed training materials, workshops and presentations in English and Spanish for nursery workers around the state.

She said one of the most important areas she focuses on is not necessarily the language, but the concepts that nursery workers need to understand, whether that's the importance of sanitation or the proper way to apply pesticides. She also has to be able to explain those concepts simply, not only because they can be complicated topics, but because some nursery workers might have had only a limited amount of formal education.

"It's one thing to learn the language, but it's another thing to understand the science-based concepts," Santamaria said. She added that incorporating hands-on activities and visual materials comes in handy. "So it's not necessarily about helping them learn English," she said. "It's about helping them understand nursery concepts and what's important."

One of Santamaria's current offerings is a five-module course called "Disease Prevention and Diagnosis for Nursery Crops." Available in both English and Spanish, the course offers training on basic plant health and disease prevention. In addition to the knowledge gained through the course, those who complete it also receive four Oregon Department of Agriculture Core Credits for pesticide certification as well as preparation needed to get ready for their pesticide licensing exam.

Santamaria also plans to hold interactive plant health workshops at her office in Aurora this spring. They include "Symptom Detective (April 9)," "Check Your Plants' Moisture" (May 7) and "Scout Like a Pro (June 18)." She is also available to come to a nursery in person and conduct training sessions in Spanish or English – or both.

For more information, Santamaria can be reached at [luisa.santamaria@oregonstate.edu](mailto:luisa.santamaria@oregonstate.edu).

*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](http://JBellink.com).*



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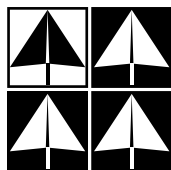
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# GROWING KNOWLEDGE

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



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



## Managing powdery mildew with biological fungicides

Once powdery mildew becomes established within a crop, control becomes much more difficult. PHOTO BY SCOT NELSON

### Interest in natural treatment methods is being driven by concerns over resistance and desire for reduced-risk pest management

BY BRENT W. WARNEKE, CLINT TAYLOR, AND JAY W. PSCHIEDT

It has been a dry and relatively mild winter across much of the region. Rainfall totals are behind normal and temperatures have trended above long-term averages. But winter is slowly giving way to spring, and with budbreak approaching, many crops will soon begin producing new

juvenile tissue that requires protection.

That shift in the season is often when powdery mildew begins to show up.

Powdery mildew (PM) can seem to appear almost overnight. What starts as small, inconspicuous colonies on leaves or stems can quickly spread through a crop as spores move easily through the air. Under favorable environmental conditions, infections can increase rapidly and move through a planting faster than many growers expect.

In recent years, managing powdery mildew has become more complicated. Some PM species have developed resistance to commonly used fungicides, limiting the effectiveness of certain products. At the same time, many growers are trying

to reduce reliance on conventional chemistries and incorporate lower-toxicity tools into their crop protection programs.

That combination of resistance concerns and interest in reduced-risk pest management has increased attention on biological fungicides as part of integrated disease management programs.

### Conditions that favor powdery mildew

Powdery mildew fungi are highly specialized pathogens that form a close association with their host plants. Unfortunately, many of the environmental conditions that promote plant growth also favor disease development.

Powdery mildew outbreaks are >>

## Growing Knowledge

### SYSTEMIC RESPONSE AFTER PATHOGEN INFECTION

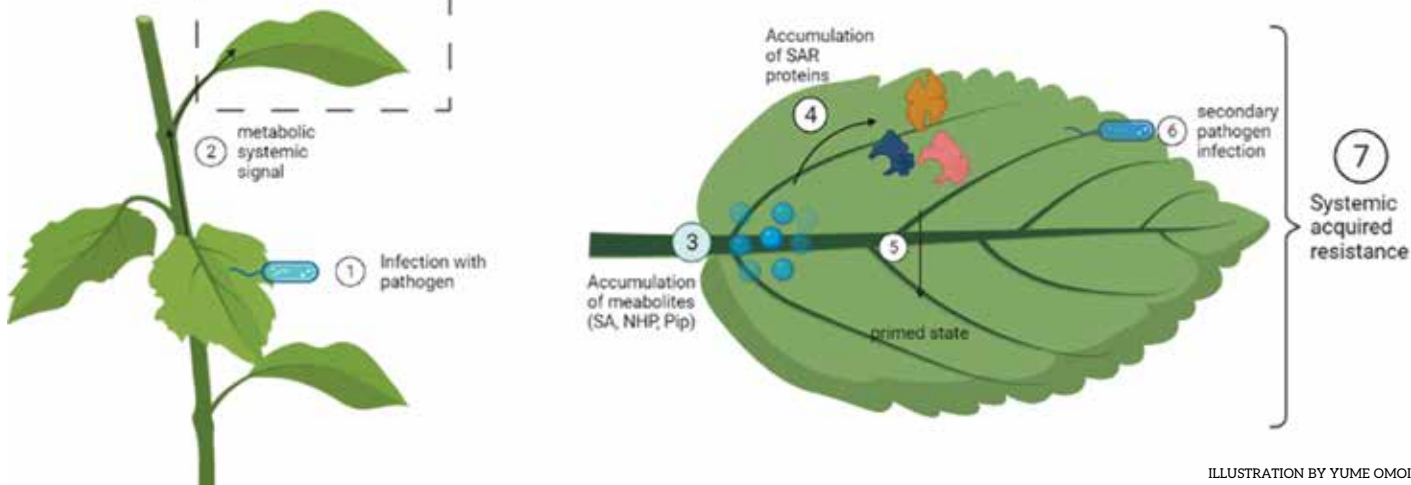


ILLUSTRATION BY YUME OMOI

commonly associated with moderate temperatures, typically between 60–80 F, combined with cool nights and relatively low-light conditions. Dense plant canopies, overcrowded plantings, and poor air circulation can further increase disease pressure by creating favorable microclimates around plant foliage.

Unlike many fungal pathogens, powdery mildew does not require free water on leaf surfaces to infect plants. As a result, disease development can occur even during relatively dry periods.

Repeated outbreaks can weaken plants, reduce growth, and ultimately impact production quality. For growers managing large plantings, even moderate levels of disease can translate into significant economic losses.

#### A management tool

A number of effective fungicides are available for managing powdery mildew, including both conventional and biological products. Like most disease management tools, fungicides are most effective when used preventatively, before visible symptoms develop.

Once powdery mildew becomes established within a crop, control becomes much more difficult.

Successful programs depend on good spray coverage and consistent application intervals. Most products should be applied at 7–14-day intervals, with shorter intervals when environmental conditions strongly favor disease development.

Biological fungicides represent a broad category of products derived from naturally occurring organisms or natural

#### COMING IN MAY'S DIGGER:

A closer look at biofungicides in nursery production

compounds. These materials have become increasingly important in many production systems, particularly where resistance management, environmental concerns, or regulatory pressures limit the use of certain conventional fungicides.

Broadly speaking, biological fungicides fall into two main groups.

The first group consists of biocontrol agents (BCAs) — products that contain living microorganisms as the active ingredient. These organisms interact directly with plant pathogens and interfere with their ability to infect host plants.

The second group includes products derived from plant or microbial extracts, often referred to as botanicals or biorationals. These materials typically contain compounds that inhibit pathogen growth or stimulate plant defense responses.

Many growers incorporate biological fungicides into their programs as part of a broader integrated pest management approach.

#### How biological fungicides work

Biological fungicides suppress plant pathogens through several different mechanisms.

One of the most common mechanisms is competition or exclusion. When beneficial microorganisms colonize plant surfaces, they occupy space and consume resources that would otherwise be available to pathogens. By establishing

themselves on leaves and stems before the pathogen arrives, these organisms can make infection more difficult.

Another important mechanism is antibiosis, in which the biological control organism produces compounds that inhibit pathogen growth. These antimicrobial compounds may be produced directly on the plant surface or may already be present in the product formulation.

Some biological fungicides also trigger plant defense responses. When plants detect certain microbial compounds, they activate biochemical pathways that strengthen their defenses against infection. These responses may include increased production of protective compounds or changes in cell wall structure that make it harder for pathogens to penetrate plant tissues.

In practice, many biological fungicides rely on a combination of these mechanisms. Because of this multi-faceted mode of action, most biological products are considered to have a low risk of resistance development, making them attractive components of long-term disease management programs.

#### Challenges in evaluating biological products

Despite their potential advantages, biological fungicides can be challenging to evaluate in research trials.

In our work with grape powdery mildew (GPM), disease pressure in small research plots is often extremely high. Under these conditions, biological fungicides used alone frequently fail to provide adequate control. This makes it difficult to distinguish among products or accurately assess their performance.

At the other extreme, disease pressure in commercial vineyards can be relatively low, making it equally difficult to measure treatment differences.

To better evaluate biological products under meaningful conditions, our research explored a different approach: integrating biological fungicides into reduced-rate sulfur programs.

### Tank mixing with sulfur

Sulfur has long been one of the most reliable tools for managing powdery mildew. However, growers interested in reducing synthetic inputs or improving resistance management are increasingly exploring ways to incorporate biological fungicides alongside traditional materials.

Our recent research examined the use of biological fungicides tank-mixed with below-label-rate sulfur in season-long spray programs. The goal was to determine whether combining these materials

could improve disease control compared to sulfur alone.

The results were encouraging.

Several biological fungicides provided improved control when used in combination with sulfur. For example, Theia tank-mixed with sulfur reduced powdery mildew severity on fruit by 31–38% compared with sulfur alone.

Similarly, Serenade® ASO combined with sulfur resulted in significantly lower disease levels.

Other treatments, including Double Nickel® plus humic acid and Serifel® tank mixes, also reduced disease compared with the sulfur-only control.

These findings suggest that biological fungicides may be particularly effective when integrated into existing management programs rather than used as stand-alone products.

### Lessons from variable-rate sprayers

Another factor influencing fungicide

performance is spray application technology.

Variable-rate sprayers are increasingly used in specialty crop production because they can reduce pesticide use and improve application efficiency by adjusting spray volume based on canopy size.

However, our research found that this technology can influence the effectiveness of certain biological fungicides.

For example, the product LifeGuard performed less effectively when applied using a variable-rate sprayer. These sprayers often apply lower spray volumes early in the season when canopy density is low. Reduced spray volume can result in fewer biological organisms reaching plant surfaces, reducing the product's effectiveness.

When LifeGuard was applied without the variable-rate adjustment — using a standard application volume — powdery mildew control improved.

A similar pattern was observed with micronized sulfur. Powdery mildew con- ➤

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## BIOFUNGICIDE PRODUCTS AND THEIR CHARACTERISTICS

Product	Active ingredient (%AI)	Formulation and manufacturer	Mode(s) of action
Amyloshield	<i>Bacillus amyloliquefaciens</i> strain PTA-4838 (74.81%)	Wettable granule, Mychorrhizal Applications (Grants Pass, Oregon)	Antibiosis, exclusion/competition, SAR activator
Aviv	<i>Bacillus subtilis</i> strain IAB/BS03 (0.08%)	Soluble liquid, Summit Agro (Durham, North Carolina)	Antibiosis, exclusion/competition, SAR activator
Double Nickel (Triathlon BA)	<i>Bacillus amyloliquefaciens</i> strain D747 (98.85%)	Liquid concentrate, Certis USA (Columbia, Maryland)	Antibiosis, exclusion/competition, SAR activator
Lifeguard	<i>Bacillus mycooides</i> isolate J (40%)	Water-dispersable granule, Certis Biologicals (Columbia, Maryland)	SAR activator
Serifel (Bacilrid)	<i>Bacillus amyloliquefaciens</i> strain MBI 600 (11%)	Wettable power, BASF (Research Triangle Park, North Carolina)	Antibiosis, exclusion/competition
Serenade ASO (Cease or Rhapsody)	<i>Bacillus subtilis</i> strain QST 713 (1.34%)	Liquid concentrate, Bayer Crop-science (Research Triangle Park, NC)	Antibiosis, exclusion/competition, SAR activator
Sonata	<i>Bacillus pumilis</i> strain QST 2808 (1.38%)	Aqueous suspension, Wilbur-Ellis (Denver, Colorado)	Antibiosis, SAR activator
Stargus	<i>Bacillus amyloliquefaciens</i> strain F727 (96.4%)	Marrone Bio Innovations (Davis, California)	Antibiosis, exclusion/competition, SAR activator
Theia	<i>Bacillus subtilis</i> strain AFS032321 (100%)	Dry flowable, Certis Biologicals (Columbia, Maryland)	Antibiosis, exclusion/competition, SAR activator

trol was reduced when sulfur was applied using the variable-rate system. However, when the concentration of sulfur in the spray tank was increased or the spray volume applied per leaf area was increased,

disease control improved to levels comparable to applications made without sensor-based adjustments.

These observations highlight an important practical consideration.

When using contact fungicides or biological products, variable-rate sprayers may require higher concentrations or greater spray volumes per unit leaf area to maintain effective disease control.

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### Tank mixing and compatibility considerations

Modern crop production often involves applying multiple products in the same spray tank. Tank mixing can improve efficiency and reduce labor costs, but compatibility among products must be considered carefully.

In some cases, compatibility between biological fungicides and other crop protection products is well documented. In other situations, compatibility data are limited or unavailable.

Our testing has shown both positive and negative effects of tank mixing on the viability of biological control organisms. Sulfur, however, appears to be compatible with many biological products in simple jar tests and in field applications.

Many biological fungicides labeled for powdery mildew management contain *Bacillus* species as the active ingredient (see Table 1). Several products used in ornamental and specialty crop production fall into this category.

### Key takeaways for growers

Biological fungicides can play an important role in powdery mildew man-

agement programs, particularly when used as part of an integrated strategy.

Based on our research and field experience, several practical guidelines stand out:

- Apply biological fungicides preventatively, before disease symptoms appear.
- Maintain 7–14 day spray intervals, shortening intervals when disease pressure is high.
- When using variable-rate sprayers, increase spray concentration or spray volume per leaf area to compensate for reduced application volumes.
- Ensure thorough spray coverage.
- Always follow label recommendations when mixing or applying products.

#### A final observation

One interesting observation from powdery mildew research is that water alone can sometimes reduce disease severity compared with untreated plants.

In certain systems, including rose powdery mildew, frequent applications of water alone — applied every three to seven days — can provide commercially acceptable levels of control.

Adding an adjuvant that reduces surface tension can further improve effectiveness by helping water spread across leaf surfaces.

This observation also highlights an important lesson: some materials that appear effective may be benefiting from improved spray coverage rather than providing strong biological activity on their own. ☺

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# The numbers confirm what we already know



Jeff Stone

**Oregon has always known how to grow things. From the misty valleys of the Willamette to the volcanic soils east of the Cascades, our state has built a reputation for cultivation.**

But new data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture makes something unmistakably clear: Oregon isn't just good at growing nursery crops — we are the best in the nation.

According to newly released figures compiled by the USDA National Agricultural Statistics Service, Oregon is the top producer of nursery stock in the United States and the third-largest grower of horticultural specialty crops overall.

In 2024 alone, Oregon growers sold \$1.3 billion in horticultural specialty crops. Of that, an astonishing \$889 million came from nursery stock — the woody backbone of landscapes across America. Those numbers place Oregon firmly ahead of traditional agricultural heavyweights like California (\$708 million in nursery stock sales), Florida (\$679 million), Texas (\$259 million), and New Jersey (\$244.7 million).

Growing elite plant material is not a quick, turn-and-burn enterprise. Years of care, investment and technical skills are required. It takes careful water management, pest control, pruning, grafting and long-term planning. And at these, Oregon growers excel across the board.

The numbers tell a remarkable story of excellence. Oregon ranks No. 1 nationally in sales of conifers at \$233.3 million, commanding 27% of the U.S. market. For deciduous shade trees, we lead again with \$197.9 million — 24% market share. In deciduous shrubs, Oregon growers account for \$149.6 million in sales, or 18% of the national total. Flowering trees? Once again, No. 1, with \$86.8 million and 20% market share.

That level of across-the-board leader-

ship isn't accidental. It reflects decades of infrastructure development, generational knowledge, research partnerships, and market relationships that extend from local garden centers to national retailers and landscape contractors.

And of course, no discussion of Oregon's nursery leadership would be complete without mentioning Christmas trees. Oregon is the top grower of Christmas trees in the United States, with \$119.2 million in sales — 25% of the national market.

While we dominate many categories, Oregon also holds strong positions in others. We rank second in broadleaf evergreens with \$105.2 million in sales, just behind Florida. We are third in fruit and nut plants at \$71.7 million, trailing California and Washington. In ornamental grasses, Oregon ranks fourth with \$8.4 million in sales, behind Florida, California and Texas.

Taken together, these figures confirm what industry insiders have long known: Oregon is not a niche producer. We are a diversified horticultural powerhouse.

When looking at horticultural specialty crops overall, there is a broader category that includes nursery stock, Christmas trees, bedding plants, potted plants, cut flowers, food crops grown under protection and other specialty products — Oregon stands third nationally. Only California (\$3 billion) and Florida (\$2.2 billion) exceed Oregon's \$1.3 billion total. Our friends in Pennsylvania (\$1.20 billion) and Texas (\$1.12 billion) round out the top five.

This leadership has tangible economic impact. The nursery industry supports tens of thousands of family-wage jobs in rural and suburban communities across the state. It drives exports, supports trucking and logistics sectors, and sustains allied businesses from irrigation suppliers to equipment manufacturers. It keeps farmland in production and strengthens local tax bases. But beyond the numbers lies something even more significant: reputation.

Oregon-grown plants are known for quality, vigor and performance. Buyers trust them. Landscapers specify them. Retailers promote them. That trust is built

on consistency and innovation. Our growers invest in improved cultivars, sustainable practices, water conservation technologies and integrated pest management systems. They adapt to changing climate conditions and shifting consumer demand.

There are still storm clouds ahead. Oregon growers face rising input costs, labor challenges, regulatory pressures and market fluctuations. Yet year after year, they innovate and compete. In an era when many agricultural sectors struggle with volatility, Oregon's nursery industry demonstrates stability and strategic growth. It blends science and stewardship, tradition and technology. It proves that agriculture can be both environmentally responsible and economically powerful.

The latest USDA figures do more than validate past success; they point toward future opportunity. Demand for trees and shrubs is rising as communities invest in urban forestry, climate resilience and green infrastructure. Consumers increasingly value landscapes that provide shade, habitat and beauty. Oregon growers are well positioned to meet that demand.

Leadership brings responsibility. Maintaining our No. 1 ranking will require continued investment in research, workforce development, water infrastructure and trade access. It will require policymakers to recognize horticulture as a cornerstone of Oregon agriculture, not an afterthought. But if history is any guide, Oregon's nursery industry is up to the challenge.

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