

Digger[®]

MAY 2026



Nature vs. nature

**Biofungicides are weapons
in plant disease battle**

PAGE 27

**New tools improve
irrigation efficiency**

PAGE 23

**Native plant demand
provides opportunity**

PAGE 17

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Printed in Oregon on domestic recycled paper when available.

On the cover: *Trichoderma harzianum* T-22 strain parasitizing a strand of *Rhizoctonia*, a common soilborne plant pathogen. *T. harzianum* T-22 is one of two active strains in BioWorks' RootShield PLUS WP and G formulations, and the sole strain in other RootShield products. PHOTO BY HANNA SHATOKHINA OF BIOWORKS.

On this page: Left: Biofungicides being sprayed into potted plant material at Van Belle Finished Plants. PHOTO COURTESY OF VAN BELLE FINISHED PLANTS
Right: *Tiarella* 'Sugar and Spice' PP16738 has distinctive leaves and a creeping habit. PHOTO COURTESY OF TERRA NOVA NURSERIES

FARWEST

PORTLAND 2026

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29751 S.W. Town Center Loop West
Wilsonville, OR 97070

PH 503-682-5089 PORTLAND
PH 888-283-7219 NATIONWIDE
FAX 503-682-5099 MAIN OFFICE
FAX 503-682-5727 PUBLICATIONS
info@oan.org EMAIL
www.oan.org OAN WEBSITE
www.diggermagazine.com DIGGER WEBSITE

STAFF

Jeff Stone JStone@OAN.org
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR 503-582-2003

Tess Chapman TChapman@OAN.org
MARKETING COORDINATOR 503-582-2004

Stephanie Collins SCollins@OAN.org
DIRECTOR OF FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION 503-582-2001

Beth Farmer BFarmer@OAN.org
DIRECTOR OF MARKETING & MEMBER SERVICES 503-582-2013

Curt Kipp CKipp@OAN.org
DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS & PUBLICATIONS 503-582-2008

Tana Klum TKlum@OAN.org
OFFICE COORDINATOR 503-582-2012

Cammi Landry CLandry@OAN.org
JR. STAFF ACCOUNTANT 503-582-2011

Connie Lindsay CLindsay@OAN.org
TRADE SHOW MANAGER 503-582-2005

Jamie Moore JMoore@OAN.org
EVENTS AND EDUCATION COORDINATOR 503-582-2010

Vic Panichkul VPanichkul@OAN.org
PUBLICATIONS MANAGER 503-582-2009

DIGGER

Curt Kipp CKipp@OAN.org
EDITOR & DISPLAY ADVERTISING 503-582-2008

Vic Panichkul VPanichkul@OAN.org
MANAGING EDITOR & ART DIRECTOR 503-582-2009

Tess Chapman TChapman@OAN.org
E-DIGGER PRODUCER 503-582-2004

Dr. Lloyd Nackley Lloyd.Nackley@OregonState.edu
GROWING KNOWLEDGE SERIES COORDINATOR Oregon State University

Jon Bell, Mike Darcy, Erica Browne Grivas, Emily Hoard, Mitch Lies, Kym Pokorny, Debbie Teashon CONTRIBUTING WRITERS

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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.

2025-2026 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Patrick Newton PRESIDENT	Powell's Nursery Inc. 5054 S.W. Boyd Road Gaston, OR 97119 PowellNursery@gmail.com 503-357-0631
Ben Verhoeven PAST-PRESIDENT	Peoria Gardens Inc. 32355 Peoria Road S.W. Albany, OR 97321 BenV@PeoriaGardens.com 541-753-8519
Darcy Ruef PRESIDENT-ELECT	Al's Garden & Home 1220 N. Pacific Hwy. Woodburn, OR 97071 DRuef@Als-GardenCenter.com 503-981-1245
Chris Robinson VICE PRESIDENT	Robinson Nursery Inc. PO Box 100 Amity, OR 97101 Chris@RobinsonNursery.com 877-855-8733
Jesse Nelson TREASURER	Hans Nelson & Sons Nursery Inc. 31020 S.E. Waybill Road Boring, OR 97009 JNelson@HansNelson.com 503-663-3348
Tyler Meskers SECRETARY	Oregon Flowers Inc. PO Box 311 Aurora, OR 97002 Tyler@OregonFlowers.com 503-678-2580
Andrea Avila-Aragon MEMBER AT LARGE	Smith Gardens 23150 Boones Ferry Road. N.E., Aurora, OR 97002-9461 Andrea.Avila-Aragon@ SmithGardens.com 503-678-5373

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Patrick Peterson ASSOCIATE MEMBER	Simplot Turf & Horticulture Patrick.Peterson@Simplot.com 541-214-5802
Greg Elwell CONTAINER GROWER	Iseli Nursery GEllwell@IseliNursery.com 503-663-3822
Blake Nelson CONTAINER GROWER	Bountiful Farms Nursery Inc. Blake@BountifulFarms.com 503-981-7494
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Jason Burns FIELD / B&B GROWER	Patterson Nursery Sales Jason@PattersonNurserySales.com 503-668-6000
Sam Barkley FIELD / BARE ROOT GROWER	J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co. SamB@JFSchmidt.com 503-663-4128
Vladimir Lomen FIELD / BARE ROOT GROWER	Sester Farms Vladimir@SesterFarms.com 503-663-4844
Noah Fessler GREENHOUSE	Woodburn Nursery & Azaleas Inc. NoahF@WoodburnNursery.com 503-634-2231
Jonathan Jasinski GREENHOUSE	Microplant Nurseries Inc. Jonathan@MicroplantNurseries.com 503-792-3696
Barb Iverson RETAIL	Wooden Shoe Tulip Farm Iverson@MonitorCoop.com 503-634-2243

The 'little things' are the foundation

Mother's Day always sneaks up on me a little. Not because I forget it's coming, but because it makes me stop and think in a way most days don't.

My mind drifts toward where I came from and who helped shape me.

For me, that always comes back to my mom.

I've been lucky. My mom didn't just raise us boys — she was present in all the ways that mattered. She showed up. She volunteered in our classrooms, not because she had extra time to burn, but because she wanted to be part of our lives in a real, hands-on way.

When you are a kid, you do not fully grasp that. You might even roll your eyes once or twice. But looking back, it meant everything. It told us we were worth her time, and that what we were doing mattered.

One of the things that stands out, the older I get, is how she talked about my dad. She made a point of telling my brothers and me, over and over, what a great husband and father he was. She didn't assume we'd just figure it out. She said it out loud.

That shaped us more than we probably realized at the time. It set a standard. It gave us something to measure against, something to aim for in our own lives. As a husband and a father myself, I find myself coming back to that example.

She was also our biggest supporter. No matter what we were chasing or where we thought we were headed, she encouraged us to go for it. Not in a loud or over the top way, but in a steady, consistent way that built confidence over time. She believed in us before we believed in ourselves.

That sticks with me. It carries into adulthood — into the decisions I make and the chances I'm willing to take.

And then there's her personality — the part that you cannot miss. My mom has never been one to sit quietly in the corner. She is the one cracking the dirty



Patrick Newton

jokes, usually at just the right moment to catch people off guard. And I have always loved that about her. No matter where we are, I have never hesitated to point and say, "Yeah, that's my mom."

There is a lot to be said for someone who is completely comfortable being themselves. It makes the people around them more comfortable too. Usually, 🤗.

As I've gotten older, I've started to realize that the little things she did, weren't little at all. They were the foundation. Showing up. Speaking positively about the people she loved. Encouraging us to take chances. Being real and genuine in every setting. Those things add up over time, and they stick.

Mother's Day isn't complicated. It's just a chance to recognize someone who's been in your corner from the very beginning. Someone who put in the time, the energy, and the love without asking for much in return.

If you're lucky enough to still have your mom around, take a minute and tell her what she means to you. Chances are, she's been showing you your whole life. This is just your opportunity to say it back. Happy Mother's Day! ☺



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*.

MAY 28

CLAY SHOOTING SOCIAL

Join the Oregon Association of Nurseries' Willamette Chapter for its annual Clay Shooting Social 12:30-4 p.m. May 28 at Mid Valley Clays and Shooting School, 6181 Concomly Road N.E. in Gervais, Oregon. For more details and to RSVP, go to OAN.org/Events.

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. The deadline for submitting applications is May 31. Interested students can access the application and find more details at TinyURL.com/HRIScholarships.

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, 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/DuffersSponsor26.

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 at the Holiday Inn Portland South, 25425 S.W. 95th Ave., Wilsonville. For more information or to register, go to ConiferSociety.org.

JULY 7

OREGON ASSOCIATION OF NURSERIES OPEN HOUSE

Save the date for the next Oregon Association of Nurseries Open House at Swan Island Dahlias, 995 N.W. 22nd Avenue in Canby, Oregon. Come and learn more about the OAN and the benefits its members receive, network to create new relationships and strengthen



OAN FILE PHOTO

AUGUST 26-28

FARWEST SHOW

Business relationships take root at the biggest and greenest industry trade show in the West. Farwest is where the nursery and greenhouse industry comes together to set the year in motion. Connect face-to-face with the people who power your supply chain. Source new plants, products and services. Strengthen the partnerships that you rely on and spark new ones that move your business forward. From hands-on, interactive components to technical sessions for growers, retailers, landscapers and business professionals you'll leave prepared to tackle new opportunities and challenges in the year ahead. Explore Oregon's renowned Nursery Country through three highly-sought-after bus tours that give you exclusive behind the scenes access. For more information or to register, go to FarwestShow.com.

existing ones, and tour Swan Island Dahlias beautiful grounds in bloom. Check back at OAN.org/Events for more information.

JULY 8

ALL THINGS POLITICAL

Mark your calendars. Oregon Association of Nurseries Executive Director Jeff Stone is putting himself on the spot again and taking all shots and questions on July 8 for "All Things Political." It's a Zoom call where members can ask him questions about legislative priorities for the OAN and any other political question you've got a burning desire to hurl at him. Check back at OAN.org/Events for more details.

JULY 11-14

CULTIVATE'26

Join AmericanHort for Cultivate'26 July 11-14 in Columbus, Ohio, and discover the trends, tools and technologies that fuel growth, spark innovation and build stronger businesses. Attend any of the more than 160+ educational sessions, half- or full-day workshops, or industry production tours to learn new skills and network with your peers. For more information and to register, go to CultivateEvent.org.

JULY 17

PITCH N PUTT

Join Oregon Association of Nurseries' Mount Hood Chapter on July 17 for the annual Pitch n Putt at McMenamins Edgefield Golf Course, 2126 S.W. Halsey St., in Troutdale, Oregon. Registration opens at 1 p.m. and shotgun start time is at 2 p.m. For more details and to RSVP, go to OAN.org/Events.

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.



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.



Oregon restarts Japanese Beetle Program

With funding from the Oregon Legislature secured, the Oregon Department of Agriculture has re-launched its Japanese Beetle Program. The National Plant Board committee also recently voted to retain Oregon's Category 1 status.

ODA's IPPM program is hiring personnel and preparing to complete pre-flight season work. Barring any setbacks, ODA says it should have traps in place and treatments started along the same timeline as the 2025 flight season.

ODA has also contacted property owners in confirmed infested areas and is obtaining consent to treat. The private contractor who handled treatments previously will continue to work with ODA to apply treatments. The 2026 proposed treatment area map may be viewed online at [ODA.Direct/JBMap](https://oda-direct-jbmap.com).

With Oregon's Category 1 status retained and the ODA Japanese Beetle Program re-launched, nearly all states who had previously placed quarantine conditions on Oregon growers have dropped those requirements. Exceptions include Colorado, Nevada and New Mexico.



At Woodburn Nursery & Azaleas alone, more than 30 trucks a day are being loaded. OAN FILE PHOTO

RIISING FUEL PRICES HIT NURSERIES AT HEIGHT OF SHIPPING SEASON

Pump prices have been going up as a result of war in the Middle East, and diesel prices are now above \$6 a gallon, according to KOIN 6 TV in Portland, Oregon. This increase is having a big impact on thousands of businesses that rely on transportation to get out their product, and it's hitting Oregon's nursery industry at the height of shipping season.

Springtime is go-time in the Oregon nursery business, but getting on the road right now is getting more difficult with those gas prices. At **Woodburn Nursery & Azaleas** (Woodburn, Oregon) alone, more than 30 trucks a day are being loaded. A 75 cents/gallon surcharge is adding thousands of dollars in cost to cross-country deliveries.

"We had a truck ... we were figuring on it costing around \$6,000 a couple of weeks ago, and I just signed off on it costing us \$8,200 this morning," said Noah Fessler of Woodburn Nursery & Azaleas. "So [a] massive, massive difference. But we have the order here ready to go and we have to get that product to market."

Oregon has more than 2,000 nurseries and greenhouses feeling the impact of higher diesel prices and it's not an option to wait out the pump prices.

2026 FARWEST SHOW REGISTRATION NOW OPEN

Don't miss out! Register now for the 2026 Farwest Show, August 26–28 at the Oregon Convention Center in Portland.

Your industry. Your people. Your relationships. Farwest is where relationships take root and grow into real opportunities. It's where conversations turn into connections, and connections turn into lasting business.

Connect with 4,300+ industry professionals and decision-makers. Explore 350+ exhibitors showcasing plants, products, and services. Discover new ideas, trends, and solutions you can put to work right away.

Plus, OAN members get unlimited free 3-day trade show passes. Use code OAN26 at checkout. Register now at FarwestShow.com/Register.

HRI AWARDS \$564,521 FOR 18 RESEARCH PROJECTS IN 2026

The Horticultural Research Institute (HRI), the research affiliate of AmericanHort, has awarded \$564,521 in research funding for 18 projects in 2026, supporting new work designed to strengthen every stage of the horticulture supply chain.

The projects address a wide range of >>

Northwest News

industry priorities, including plant propagation and production efficiency, pest and disease management, landscape plant performance, and consumer engagement with horticultural products. Three of the projects are from Oregon State University.

Less Suckers, More Profits:
Advancing Sucker Management Tools for Ornamentals — Marcelo Moretti, Ph.D., Oregon State University.

Ploidy, Pollinators, and Plasticity:
Do Polyploid Cultivars Maintain Higher Quality Under Deficit Landscape Irrigation While Still Attracting Pollinators? — Ryan Contreras, Ph.D., Oregon State University.

Magnet Plants: Increasing Pollinator Biodiversity Via Use of Non-Native, Ornamental plants in gardens — Gail Langellotto, Ph.D., Oregon State University.

Read more about the all of the projects at TinyURL.com/2026HRIAwards.

OREGON LOSING RESIDENTS IN PRIME EARNING YEARS

Oregonians in their peak earning years — when they can contribute most to the state's economy — are moving out of the state faster than their age 30–50 peers are moving in, according to Oregon Journalism Project, a nonprofit investigative newsroom.

This finding is based on an OJP analysis of the most recently available U.S. Census data, released in January. Oregon relies more heavily on income taxes than most states, so it suffers more from this outflow, ECONorthwest researcher Aditya Gadkari said. The exodus of workers in their prime earning years means less revenue for the state. “We’re losing the ability of our jurisdictions to provide high levels of services,” Gadkari said.

The largest influx of new Oregon residents are young adults, either college-age or relatively early in their careers, typically earning far less than those leaving.

Read more at TinyURL.com/ORPrimeEarning.



Seventy nine percent of rented farms are owned by non-farming landlords, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture. PHOTO COURTESY OF USDA

MOST OF RENTED FARMLAND IN U.S. OWNED BY NON-FARMERS

More than 2 million landowners rented out 348 million acres of farmland, according to the U.S. Department of Agriculture's National Agricultural Statistics Service. Of these, 79% are owned by non-farming landlords, reports Morning AgClips, an agricultural news website.

Non-operating landlords include entities who rent out agricultural land under a variety of ownership arrangements (privately owned, trust, family entity, non-family entity, or other). Of the land rented out by non-operating landlords, over 251 million acres were rented out by private landowners, trusts, or family entities.

Rented farmland acres, combined with buildings on this land, are valued at more than \$1.6 trillion. In 2024, landlords combined received \$34.1 billion in rental income while incurring \$12.0 billion in total operating expenses.

SEED YOUR FUTURE RELEASES INTERNSHIP DATA FOR HORTICULTURAL EMPLOYERS

Seed Your Future has released its latest Internship Research Report and Employer Resource Toolkit designed to strengthen the horticulture workforce pipeline and help employers build high-impact internship programs, according to *Greenhouse Management* magazine.

As the horticulture industry faces increasing workforce shortages, internships have emerged as one of the most effective strategies for attracting and retaining

early-career talent. Seed Your Future's comprehensive report provides data-driven insights into internship trends, compensation benchmarks, program structures and student expectations across the industry.

The 11-page Internship Research Report and a companion webinar recording from the GIE Media Horticulture Group are available free of charge to the industry at TinyURL.com/SeedFutureReport.

Announcements

SYNGENTA PROFESSIONAL SOLUTIONS NAMES NEW NORTH AMERICAN LEADER

Dave Ravel, currently head of sales for **Syngenta Professional Solutions**, will assume the role of head of Syngenta Professional Solutions North America effective June 1, 2026, the company announced. Scott Reasons, head of Syngenta Professional Solutions North America, will retire effective May 31, 2026, concluding a 40-year career with Syngenta and its legacy companies.

Ravel brings over 30 years of experience within the turf, ornamental and pest management industries and has spent more than 25 years with Syngenta and its legacy companies, having held leadership roles across sales, marketing and key accounts. Since becoming head of sales in 2012, he has played a pivotal role in strengthening customer relationships, advancing the Syngenta solutions-based approach and supporting growth across golf, lawn care, ornamentals and professional pest management.

BIOWORKS APPOINTS INTERIM GENERAL MANAGER

Chris Rose has been appointed interim general manager of **BioWorks**, a North American supplier of biological solutions for horticulture, the company said in an announcement.

BioWorks, founded in 1993, has built a strong legacy under the leadership of Bill Foster. As part of a planned leadership transition, Foster will remain closely connected to the company during the transition period until the end of May, ensuring continuity and alignment.

Rose, a biologist by training, has been with BioWorks since 2013. Over the past decade, he has held leadership roles across operations, research and development, and marketing, combining technical depth with commercial acumen and a deep understanding of growers' needs. He will assume the role of interim general manager,

with clearly defined objectives and strong organizational support. Rose will now lead the organization into its next stage of growth.

OHP EXPANDS SALES TEAM

Alfredo Lara and Joe Grippi have joined **OHP's** sales team.

Lara joins OHP as technical sales manager, covering California, Nevada and Arizona. A native of California's Central Coast and now based in the Central Valley, Lara holds a bachelor's degree in plant health from California State University, Fresno. In his new role, Lara will be responsible for building and maintaining customer relationships, driving demand with distribution and end-user accounts, and supporting OHP's growth in the greenhouse and nursery segments across his territory.

Grippi has been promoted to key

accounts manager, joining fellow Key Accounts Manager Duffey Clark in managing OHP's national distributor relationships. Together, the two will divide responsibilities across key accounts, working to develop and execute strategic commercial plans that drive growth across OHP's nursery, greenhouse, CEA and cannabis markets. Grippi joined OHP as southeast technical sales manager and previously served as key account manager for specialty products at UPL Environmental Solutions and, prior to that, as business development key account manager at Bayer Environmental Science/Envu.

OSU TESTS NEW WATER MONITORING TOOL

At Oregon State University, Alec Kowalewski, Ph.D., and graduate researcher Samantha Leffler are redefining how growers understand and manage >>



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Northwest News

plant stress — using SAGE, a soil water monitoring tool developed by **Stevens Water Monitoring Systems**.

According to the developer, SAGE delivers what growers need most: clarity and speed. Powered by two AA batteries, it connects a gypsum block sensor in the root zone to a simple, coin-based visual display. With a quick glance, growers can see soil water potential and make immediate irrigation decisions, no interpretation, no guesswork. It's a practical, affordable alternative to traditional tensiometers and Watermark, Stevens said.

The OSU research focuses on mugo pine, a drought-tolerant ornamental widely grown in nursery containers. While resilient in the landscape, container-grown conifers present a challenge: they often show no visible signs of stress until it's too late. SAGE bridges that gap by providing real-time visibility into plant water status



SAGE is a soil water monitoring tool developed by Stevens Water Monitoring Systems. PHOTO COURTESY OF STEVENS WATER MONITORING SYSTEMS

before damage occurs.

This matters in a \$5.34 billion U.S. ornamental nursery market. Precision irrigation during early production stages can reduce shipping weight, minimize disease pressure, improve shelf life, and promote stronger root systems — all while conserving water, according to Stevens.

In controlled greenhouse trials, researchers are evaluating four irrigation levels over a four-month period. SAGE readings are benchmarked against HydraProbe

sensors and traditional tensiometers, while plant performance is measured using NDVI and visual quality assessments.

Early results are compelling. All non-irrigated control plants failed, while every irrigated treatment guided by SAGE remained healthy. NDVI values consistently reached 0.9 or higher, confirming strong plant vigor.

The takeaway is simple and actionable: irrigating when SAGE readings reach 60–80 kPa—indicated by one to two coins



See Soil Moisture at a Glance

SAGE is a visual indicator of soil moisture conditions - even from a distance. Growers instantly assess plant specific root-zone water availability, detect plant stress early, and make timely irrigation decisions.

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on the display — is sufficient to sustain mugo pine during greenhouse production.

SAGE transforms complex soil data into instant insight, empowering growers to act sooner, reduce risk, and optimize every drop of water, Stevens said.

SYNGENTA ADDS SALES STAFF TO SUPPORT WESTERN CUSTOMERS

Frank Santiago was appointed district sales manager and Lorabeth Catterson assumes the territory manager role for the West district at **Syngenta** following the retirement of Greg Fukumitsu, *Nursery Management* magazine reports.

Santiago, based in Tucson, Arizona, most recently served as a senior sales representative with BASF in the southwestern U.S. He previously held roles across the Southwest and Pacific Northwest with Corteva and Simplot. He holds bachelor's and master's degrees in agricultural education from the University of Arizona.

Catterson joined Syngenta in 2023 and previously served as a digital platform sales specialist. Prior to Syngenta, she spent nearly a decade in golf course management as assistant director of Agronomy at Hillcrest Country Club and in agronomy roles at Los Angeles Country Club, both in Los Angeles, California. She holds a master's degree in data science from the University of Colorado Boulder and a bachelor's degree in plant sciences from Rutgers University.

In memoriam

JIM HEATER

The Oregon Association of Nurseries is sad to report the death of James Maurice ("Jim") Heater, who served in various agricultural leadership roles includ-



Jim Heater

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ing as executive director for the Oregon Association of Nurseries.

He passed away March 18, 2026.

A memorial service was held April 10 at The Oregon Garden in Silverton, Oregon.

Heater was born March 21, 1940 in Salem, Oregon, the first son of Maurice Heater and Lucille (Rolow) Heater. He was later joined by brothers John and Jerry. Jim grew up on the family farm in the Union Hill area, attending Macalopin School for first grade and then Victor Point School for the rest of his elementary years. He attended Silverton Union High School, graduating in 1958.

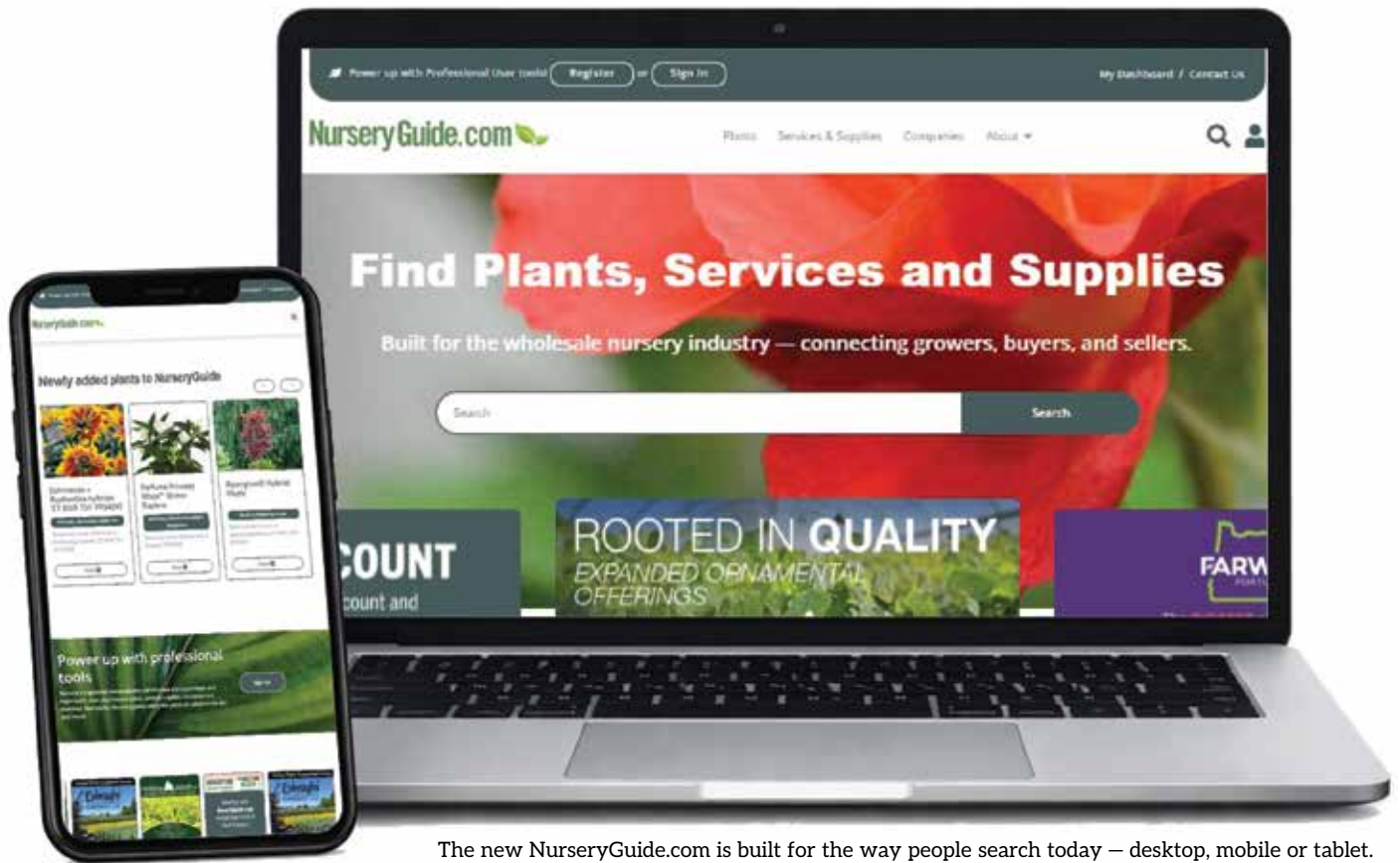
Heater was active in 4-H activities, where he met the love of his life, Shirley Eggiman. They started dating in 1957 and were married in 1961. Jim graduated from Oregon State University in 1962 and returned to the family farm. Jim and Shirley soon began their family with daughter, Joan, then son, Tim, and then daughter Amy.

In 1967 Heater began working as an agricultural field consultant for First National Bank. Then he became the executive director for the Agri Business Council of Oregon. As the executive director for the OAN, he organized the Farwest Show, also held in Portland, which became one of the largest nursery shows in the nation. Jim and Shirley were inducted into the Oregon Nurseries' Hall of Fame in 2006.

Heater began Silver Mountain Christmas Trees in 1968 and it soon became one of the largest growers in the nation. Needing a reliable source of good quality seedlings, he began Silver Mountain Conifer Seedling Nursery. He grew all of his own seedlings in addition to supplying many other Christmas tree growers and forestry companies.

Heater was preceded in death by his parents, brothers John and Jerry, son in law, Robby Merrell, and foster son, David Gray. He is survived by wife, Shirley, children: Joan Merrell, Tim (Michelle) Heater, Amy (Mike) Patrick, nine grandchildren and four great-grandchildren. ©

The new NurseryGuide.com powers up with new features



The new NurseryGuide.com is built for the way people search today — desktop, mobile or tablet.

Buyers can find more and growers can sell more with enhanced site

Looking to find more plants? Or sell more of them?

In mid-April, the Oregon Association of Nurseries launched an all-new **NurseryGuide.com** — a powerful plant, service, supply and vendor search engine built for the wholesale nursery industry.

NurseryGuide.com was initially launched in 2013. The new version of the site is a giant leap forward. It offers enhanced tools for finding plants as well as selling them, all in a new site that is much faster and easier to use. It's also built for the way people search today — desktop, mobile or tablet.

“We listened to input from our members and from retailers and others using

the site to find plant material,” said Curt Kipp, director of publications and communications for the OAN, who spearheaded the project. “The new site makes it much easier as a buyer to find exactly what you want, and much easier as a business to have people find your offerings.”

Enhanced features

For growers and vendors, the new NurseryGuide.com offers enhanced profile tools. All OAN member businesses get a free profile for their company. Now they can add videos. They can also list multiple physical locations for their business and multiple contacts (ideal for listing regional sales reps). It's also still possible, and easier than ever, to list availabilities and add photographs.

For buyers, the new NurseryGuide.com offers tools to help focus their search. They can instantly filter results by region, by state shipped to, and many

other parameters — lightning fast.

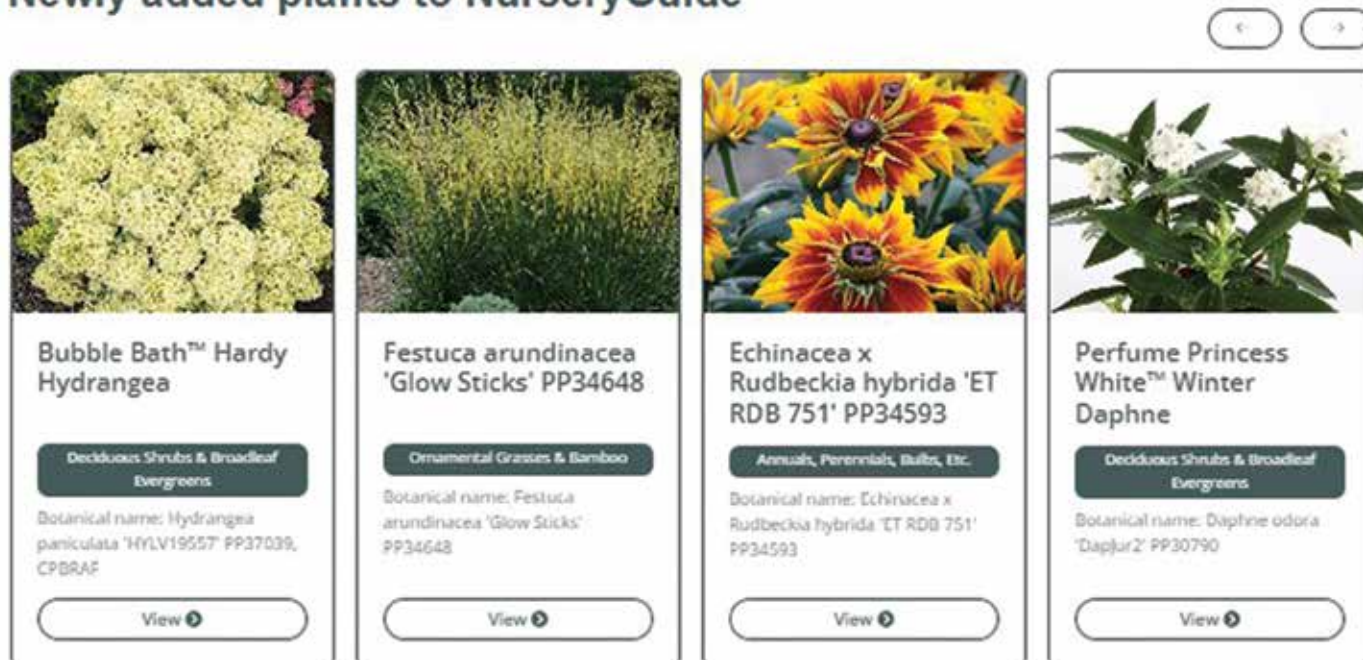
Want to power up for free? With a new Professional Account (registration required), industry professionals can save favorite plants, services, supplies, companies and searches and return to them later.

Better listings management

For members listing plants, products and services on NurseryGuide.com, it's now easier and faster to manage listings. They can search for what they might want to list in a fast-filtering interface, then add it to their account with one click. If there's something they don't offer right now, they can archive that listing with one click, then bring it back when they have it available again.

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Newly added plants to NurseryGuide



The new NurseryGuide.com has updated plant data to reflect any botanical, common or branded name that might apply for each plant.

listing to upgrade it.

Plant data upgrades

As part of the new product launch, NurseryGuide is upgrading its plant data to reflect any botanical, common or branded name that might apply for each plant. Use any of these in a search, and there's a great chance you'll find what you're looking for.

Growers are encouraged to submit new plants not found on the site, and to help enhance the information and photos already available there. The process is easy for anyone with a registered professional account — member or not.

"We will be showcasing new plant material for our site," Kipp said. "We will be reaching out to growers and breeders to make that happen. We will be sharing new plants with our site users so they know they can find or list them immediately."

Print book continues

NurseryGuide.com has a companion print book, the 300-page OAN Nursery Guide. It is published in late July and is available for free to industry members. It is a great, portable reference for industry pros that they can keep on their desk or in their vehicle. It has all of the same listings, and also serves as a handy

OAN member directory. Any listings received by the Nursery Guide print deadline (May 1) will appear there as well.

A national resource

According to the most recent USDA statistics, Oregon is the #1 producer of woody nursery stock in the country. It tops several product segments, including conifers, deciduous shade trees, deciduous shrubs, flowering trees, and Christmas trees. This means people look to Oregon for product and know they will get quality as well as value.

While NurseryGuide.com has a concentration of Oregon growers, any company may join the OAN and list their plants, products and services. New members get 25 free listings the first calendar year, and they always get one free listing, as long as they remain a member. An OAN membership also provides access to discounted Farwest Show booths, as well as discounted advertising in OAN publications, including the *Nursery Guide* book and *Digger* magazine.

Explore and discover

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With a new Professional Account (registration required), industry professionals can save favorite plants, services, supplies, companies and searches and return to them later.



Only OAN members may list plants, products and services on the site — and new tools allow them to power up their profiles more than ever.



Capitalizing on natives

Tiarella 'Sugar and Spice' PP16738 has distinctive leaves and a creeping habit. PHOTO COURTESY OF TERRA NOVA NURSERIES

Growing demand for native plants creates challenges and opportunities for nurseries

BY ERICA BROWNE GRIVAS

Consumer interest in native plants over the past few years has been steady and growing, but capitalizing on this interest presents several challenges for nurseries and landscapers.

There's often a consumer misperception that natives are unkempt or unattractive. "Frequently folks think of native plants as 'messy' and 'disheveled' and also worry about being all-or-nothing to qualify as ecologically healthy," said Bethany Rydmark, owner of **Bethany Rydmark :: Landscapes**, a landscape architecture studio in Portland, Oregon. "We like to remind folks that plants of all sorts of shapes and sizes can be

combined artfully into combinations that read on a spectrum of formal to informal, and it's possible to design combinations of shapes, materials, and native and non-native plants into landscapes that are pleasing to the eye and soul and broadly supportive of a healthy environment."

Natives are a complex issue generating controversy and confusion.

There are three basic camps in the world of natives and nativars, said **Terra Nova Nurseries** Director of New Product Development Chuck Pavlich:

"Camp #1: If the genus and species didn't evolve in my county, it's not a native and I won't accept it."

"Camp #2: Natives are great, but hybrids between species aren't natives."

"Camp #3: I don't care — this is a government project; just give me what it says on the paper."

Growing interest

The interest in native plants is coming from residential, commercial and municipal sectors. "The demand is pretty even between the sectors, though municipal might be edging out the other two. I'm not surprised," Pavlich said.

And over the years the size of the slices of the pie haven't changed much, but "I think the pie has gotten bigger," Pavlich said.

What's driving the interest? "I feel that it is mostly driven by genuine concern for ecology," Pavlich said. "A good landscape designer or landscape architect can also make the planting aesthetically pleasing."

According to research from the National Gardening Association, 28% of consumers buy plants to help native pollinators.

Blooming Nursery in Cornelius, Oregon, has grown its own native plants ➤

Capitalizing on natives

offerings and has had good success. “They have been very well received by our retail garden centers,” said Grace Dinsdale, the nursery’s founder who is selling the business to her employees. “Good sales at wholesale, and good sales to the end consumer.”

“Mostly, we are trying natives that will lend themselves to pot culture,” Dinsdale said. “Many get too rangey and won’t be attractive at all in a pot, so they are just not good candidates for garden centers. So we try anything that is a Pacific Northwest native that we feel can make a good showing in a pot, basically. If we can grow it successfully, we add to our selections.”

Nationally, industry statistics show that 10–17% of nursery stock is native plants.

Challenges and opportunities

But Dinsdale sees opportunity for the industry — growers, breeders, retailers,



Heuchera 'Changeling' is named for the unique characteristic of changing colors every week or so. New foliage starts off blushing peach and cherry and changes to champagne and taupe, finally ending up several shades of celadon green, pine, and moss. PHOTO COURTESY OF TERRA NOVA NURSERIES

and designers — to work together to bring natives further into the mainstream.

For retailers, suggested planting designs, photographs of how you can expect a native garden to look in order for

a gardener to have realistic expectations can help, she said.

There are also challenges on the grower/supplier side. “Consistent sources of supply will help,” Dinsdale said. “In



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the past they have been hard to find and a lot of them have been fairly unattractive. [We need] growers doing a better job of producing a visually appealing, healthy plant, retailers taking good care of the display at retail (sometimes the native section tends to look a bit weedy), and maybe more actual garden designs using native plants. [That] would help gardeners achieve a better, somewhat more cultivated and appealing garden appearance.”

John D. Miller, president of **Mahonia Nursery** in Salem, Oregon, said he faces the same challenges.

“From a sales standpoint, people often don’t understand the advantages that some natives have in terms of minimal care, drought and cold tolerance, as well as their natural beauty,” he said. “Many natives can meet or exceed the benefits of non-natives: vine maple is a wonderful small tree that can handle poor soils, dry or wet feet, has great branch structure and wonderful fall color.”

And there are other examples.

“Pacific wax myrtle is a fast grower and is easy to maintain as a broadleaf evergreen screen,” Miller said. “Evergreen huckleberry is a compact plant with tiny, delicious berries and reddish tinges in winter.”

But it’s unwise, Miller noted, to focus too narrowly on natives, however they are defined. They aren’t necessarily a silver bullet.

“For example, climate change is making some Northwest natives a poor choice for the long haul and non-natives from warmer areas are sometimes a better choice,” he said.

Miller speaks on this from experience.

“Our Mahonia Nursery is part of a family of companies that includes Wildwood Inc., our urban design and development firm,” he said. “This duality gives us great opportunities to provide educational and experiential exposure to native plantings.

“In Salem, our 64-unit Woodscape Glen rental development includes walking paths, community gardens and a native plant garden,” he added. “The vacancy rate is zero, average tenancy is over eight years and there is a long waiting list. Our most valuable feature is the Northwest feel

created by preserving native oaks, evergreens and using lots of native plants.”

In demand

Nurseries currently growing natives are finding strong demand for a wide variety of plants.

“We have had fairly good success with most all that we have tried,” Dinsdale said. “Camas is one we have grown for a long time, have good success with and the demand has been robust. Everyone loves a blue flower! Gentians are popular but can be tricky. Mahonia is reliable and sells well. Really a broad selection is important in order for people to make an appealing and attractive garden of natives.”

Terra Nova’s native best sellers are *Heuchera*, *Echinacea* and *Agastache*. “Although *Echinacea* aren’t native to Oregon, they are very well adapted to the Oregon climate, on both sides of the mountains,” Pavlich said. “*Polemonium* loves Oregon, too.”

At Mahonia Nursery, “Our current best-selling trees (from small containers to large specimens) include Oregon white oak, Pacific madrone, mountain hemlock, murrayana pine, alpine fir and Pacific wax myrtle,” Miller said. “Smaller sized best sellers include several mahonias (including compact Oregon grape), evergreen huckleberry, strawberry madrone, and a variety of native wildflowers. We are excited that the larger specimens in both groups are in high demand.”

Supply

The short supply of natives also presents challenges for landscapers with clients interested in incorporating natives.

“When a client asks for design with native plants, we want to help them understand the range of realistic options around style and size,” Rydmark said. “There are many, many terrific native plants with excellent ecological and aesthetic value, and they can suit a variety of design styles, but often there are real limits to the quantities and mature sizes available for installation.”

“My wish list is for more nurseries»

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Capitalizing on natives

to expand their offerings both in terms of size (older, larger) and in terms of species (we have so many useful natives that don't seem to be available in broad production)," Rydmark said.

"When a promising 5–6-foot evergreen native shrub is only findable in a 4-inch or #1 pot, or at 12 inches in height, it's very hard to specify and install," she added. "We need material that can go in the ground at scale. We need plenty of robust #5s and #7s, at 30–36 inches heights at installation, if we're going to make convincing swaps of evergreen natives for traditional exotic shrubs."

The lack of adequate production creates downstream impacts, Rydmark noted — and those impacts aren't just affecting her personally.

"I'm a member of the Pacific Design Collective, a group of women running diverse landscape architecture practices around the region," she said. "Together we frequently wish for higher production of our favorite native trees, shrubs, grasses, perennials, and groundcovers. We're very eager to communicate with growers around our wish lists. We're perhaps not working on enormous projects with massive contract-grown lists, but together we represent millions of dollars in installations around the Pacific Northwest, and we're confident in the future of native plantings."

With more production, the available plant palette for designs would improve. For now, availability is driving design decisions more than Rydmark would like.

"There's a mix between the favorites we specify often because we can get our hands on them, and then the favorites that we wish we could specify if they were available at size and scale," she said.

She went on to name some favorites.

"We love our native silk tassel bush (*Garrya elliptica*) and can never get enough," Rydmark said. Also sizeable manzanitas (*Arctostaphylos columbiana*, *A. canescens* and *canescens* ssp. *sonomensis*, *A. viscida*, *A. pajaroensis*, *A. coloradensis* 'Chieftan', and *Arctostaphylos* 'Greensphere', 'Pacific Mist', 'Sunset', 'Dr. Hurd', 'St. Helena', 'Howard McMinn', 'Louis Edmonds', and 'Ghostly'), snow-



One of Bethany Rydmark :: Landscapes' projects featured a mixed native meadow bed featuring spring blooming native Camas with native annual wildflowers as green mulch in and among native and ornamental plantings. PHOTO COURTESY OF BETHANY RYDMARK :: LANDSCAPES

brush *Ceanothus* (*Ceanothus velutinus*), and Oregon boxwood (*Paxistima myrsinites*).

Rydmark also said there are generously-categorized Pacific coastal state natives heralding from nearby California that she would love to use more often in Oregon. These include matilija poppy (*Romneya coulteri*), bush anemone (*Carpenteria californica*), and coffeeberry (*Frangula californica*), and Mexican daisy (*Erigeron karvisinkianus*).

And her list doesn't stop there.

"Grasses like California fescue (*Festuca californica*), Roemer's fescue (*Festuca roemerii* var. *roemerii*), and foothills sedge (*Carex tumulicola*) all work wonders in Pacific Northwest gardens," Rydmark said. "We'd love more trees like Western redbud (*Cercis occidentalis*), and nursery grown mountain hemlock (*Tsuga mertensiana*).

"For colorful masses and cheerful blooms, we'd love more California fuchsia (*Epilobium canum*), showy fleabane (*Erigeron speciosus*), and pearly everlasting (*Anaphalis margaritacea*)."

Sourcing, supply and provenance can also present real challenges at scale to nurseries.

Blooming Nursery has had to search far and wide. "We use several different seed suppliers, some bare root providers and we have stock in the ground as well," Dinsdale said.

Plant development and nativars

The interest in natives with better and more attractive growth habits, climate adaptability, and flowers has spurred

development of cultivars of natives or "nativars."

Natives that are being bred are first done so for aesthetics, the phenotype, Pavlich said. "If it's ugly it will never catch on. Even the most bulldozer-prone developer wants their project to look good. Next is breeding for plant adaptability to use natives in dryland and wetland applications, sun and shade, [and other conditions]."

Pavlich said some of the plants ripe for development include:

Vaccinium ovatum: Improve habits to make a smaller version for home and commercial landscapes. "It could serve as a substitute for *Buxus* in some applications."

Arctostaphylos spp.: Best in summer drought situations make them valuable for low water use landscaping and many species have beautiful architecture.

Oregon grape species (formerly classified as *Mahonia aquifolium*, but now classified as *Berberis aquifolium* or *B. japonica*): Evergreen, ornamental foliage, attractive early spring flowers are manna for resident populations of hummingbirds. Purple berries are edible and used for dyes.

Eriophyllum lanatum, Oregon Sunshine: Silvery foliage and masses of bright yellow flowers but needs a better habit and a range of flower sizes.

At Mahonia Nursery, "Two cultivar selection priorities for us include either a demand in the marketplace or a need to help species that are challenged," Miller said. "An example of the former is the



Mahonia Nursery President John Miller, right, inspects an Oregon white oak dug up and being moved by nursery manager Batla Lopez. PHOTO COURTESY OF MAHONIA NURSERY

variety of wildflowers we grow: camas, fawn lily, trillium, iris etc. that are simply great plants; the latter includes wetland preservation and restoration that is increasingly recognized as critical for our planet's survival."

There's also argument from purists who will only accept natives and not 'nativars' that have been cross bred or developed.

"Nature itself creates cultivars, as do growers. Our compact Oregon grape is a good seller because it stays small instead of growing quite tall and like the normal *B. aquifolium* does. The dwarf version occurred in nature and many years ago someone found it and began growing it. It's hard to grow, but we figured out how to propagate it successfully and it's very popular," Miller said.

There's tension between the push for straight native species and the market reality that cultivars often drive adoption. Could that gap be closing?

"Yes, I see that gap closing, especially those that were overzealous in planting natives that have now overtaken outdoor living spaces and garden beds," Pavlich said. "Improving existing species is a long and expensive pathway and consumers (homeowners and commercial developers) are going to have to pay a premium for suburban friendly plants."

In the view of Pavlich, any extra cost is worth it. ➤

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Capitalizing on natives

“Nativars are a solution (not the only) to using plants that are from similar ecosystems that provide benefits through abiotic stress tolerance — drought, extreme heat or cold and sometimes salinity of soils, pollinator attraction, and attractive habits or other aesthetics valued by humans,” he said. “We live in a world that values beauty. Some plants that offer pollinator benefits, fix nitrogen or other important aspects are just plain ugly — and no, I’m not plant shaming.”

Terra Nova specializes in native American perennial development. “Our complex hybrids do well in almost every corner of the nation because we combine the best, most adaptable species found,” Pavlich said. “We build our hybrids from the bottom up. We start with select species and make generations of crosses for years before they are released. They’re trialed in zones 3–10 and we give our recommenda-

tions from there.”

“Until a new generation of homeowners move into a Boomer’s home and clears out the twelve-foot-tall Mahonia eating the front door, we will not have a new audience. Education takes time, and old beliefs die hard,” Pavlich said. “But I have to say, without the old guard standing sentry at the fields, forests, lakes and streams, we’d be a poorer nation, with fewer parks, forests and an unhealthy ecology. People still shop at nurseries for aesthetics. Some natives aren’t too pretty, but very useful. If we improve the aesthetics, that’s half the battle.”

Future promise of natives

Rydmark predicted that interest in native plants isn’t waning — it’s poised to continue growing.

“I believe we’re growing more grateful and grounded in our connections to

the soil and the lives growing from it,” she said. “With the changing temperature and rainfall patterns in our region, I foresee growing reliance on plants strongly suited and adapted to survive and thrive along with us. People’s use of natives will continued to be on a spectrum, but the numbers will skew toward more and more demand and integration.

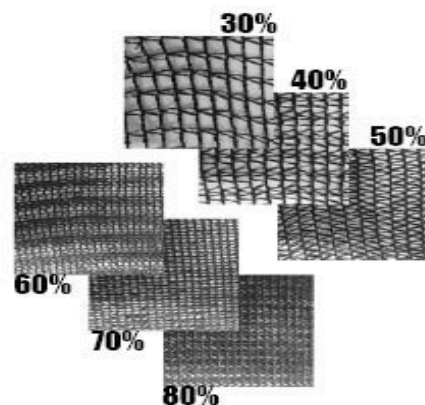
“We will also be thankful for regionally and climate adapted non-natives and complementary species that can make themselves at home in our Pacific Northwest gardens.” ☺

*Erica Browne Grivas is an award-winning journalist and gardener pushing zone boundaries in Seattle, Washington. She can be reached at EricaGrivas.com and *A Gardener’s Path* on Substack.*



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Irrigating smarter

New technology allows nurseries to water more efficiently while saving energy

In greenhouses, fine-tuned irrigation and improved system controls help growers deliver the right amount of water at the right time, supporting plant health while reducing energy use. In 2026, Energy Trust of Oregon is expanding incentives for greenhouse upgrades, including high-performance materials and efficient heating strategies to help make these improvements more accessible. PHOTO COURTESY OF ENERGY TRUST OF OREGON

BY MITCH LIES

With energy and labor costs at or near record highs, it has never been more important for nurseries to strive for efficiency. And with suppliers, researchers and cost-share programs working to address this need, multiple opportunities are available to do so.

Scott Brault of **Ernst Irrigation** in St. Paul, Oregon, said several of his suppliers have introduced advancements in irrigation technology in recent years that have helped growers improve irrigation efficiency, conserve water and reduce energy costs — and more are on the way.

“They all have their place,” Brault said. “It is all about that remote management, remote monitoring, less checking on fields and keeping the labor doing other things and not working overtime. I’m seeing a lot of systems go from all hand-operating valves to electric control valves, where growers are only irrigating when they need to.”

The first big key to irrigation efficien-

cy, according to sources, is utilizing soil moisture sensors to help determine when and how much to irrigate. According to Irrometer, a leading supplier of soil moisture sensors, monitors provide visibility into the root zone by measuring the percentage of water by volume in a given amount of soil and/or measuring soil water tension, which is the physical force holding water in the soil.

A second key involves proper interpretation of the data, interpretations that can be improved over time by monitoring plant performance under different soil moisture levels and adjusting levels as needed.

“At the end of the year, they can take that data and use that data in the following year, as far as their water management,” Brault said.

Many growers are finding irrigation efficiencies by switching to pumps with variable-frequency drives and adopting low-pressure systems, Brault said. The combination has helped some reduce energy costs by 25% or more in some cases, and is contributing to improved

plant health.

“You want to keep a plant in that sweet zone of that full moisture profile, where it is getting the oxygen it needs and the nutrients are being taken up and it is not being drowned,” Brault said.

Uniformity is key

In many respects, irrigation efficiency comes down to uniformity, said Steve McCoon of **Nelson Irrigation**.

“Efficiency means that the plant is able to beneficially use the water that is applied,” he said. “That is a very high goal, and it can’t be achieved if the system is not uniform. And so, high uniformity is our goal.”

High uniformity in an irrigation systems involves applying the right droplet size at the right pressure and at the right mounting height, a combination that when dialed in enables water to penetrate a plant’s canopy, whether that be in a field, container or greenhouse setting.

“If we do this in uniform manner, then we can achieve high efficiency,” »

Irrigating smarter

McCoon said.

McCoon noted that Nelson sells several sprinklers that offer high uniformity, including a new multi-streamed model, the MS-10. The MS-10 features multiple trajectories and droplet size variabilities. “The net effect is that the water gets to where it’s supposed to be, and that is helping us have higher efficiencies,” he said.

“We are just getting better at producing higher uniformities all the time,” he said. “We have learned a lot over a lot of years, and it’s been exciting to see the growth of that.”

Ernst works with multiple suppliers, Brault said, including Nelson, Toro Tempus and AgSense, a remote control and monitoring system from Valley Industries that works well with center pivots and linear systems. All have their places, he said.

“We tailor it to what the farmer needs and what they want,” he said.

Cost-share programs

Growers looking to upgrade irrigation systems may be able to mitigate a significant portion of their cost by tapping cost-share programs through the nonprofit

Energy Trust of Oregon.

Energy Trust offers two general categories of incentives, according to Brad Moore, agriculture program engineer. There are rebates, and there are calculated incentives that are based on the amount of energy savings a program is expected to deliver.

“We have a team of engineers that help estimate energy savings for a given project,” Moore said.

The programs are available for everything, from whole system upgrades to replacements for parts like sprinklers, nozzles and gaskets.

Under the rebate program, growers can apply after purchasing and installing upgrades. “We made this program very simple to where if someone wants to replace nozzles or sprinklers, they can just go ahead and do that and then send in the application after the fact, and they get a check from Energy Trust,” Moore said.

The calculated incentives program



Researchers at Oregon State University are building and testing an affordable soil moisture monitoring system that utilizes open-source electronics. PHOTO COURTESY OF OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

is available to cover the cost of energy-saving upgrades that aren’t eligible for rebates. “It’s more like a custom-type incentive, so we calculate the energy savings and then Energy Trust has an amount of incentive it pays per unit of energy saved,” Moore said.

Energy Trust also offers no-cost, on-site support to help identify energy-saving opportunities.

“A lot of times farmers aren’t really fully aware of what to bring up with us,” said Kegan Craig, a contractor who works with Energy Trust. “So, we go out into the field with them, have them give us a tour of their irrigation system and talk about the project they’re thinking of, and we can

in real time be gathering information for the engineers to do the calculations but also suggesting things that we either can give incentives for or just good practices that we know of.

“Oftentimes, there are a lot of hidden small components that they can upgrade that they weren’t really thinking about,” Craig said.

For many projects, such as retrofitting a pump with a variable frequency drive, swapping out sprinklers and gaskets and other common upgrades, Energy Trust incentives can cover about half of the cost, Moore said.

And, he noted in nearly all cases, upgrades help growers save money on their

energy bills and can lead to improved irrigation performance and better plant health.

Research project

Another potential upgrade that growers might want to keep an eye on is being hatched in a research project coming out of Oregon State University. Udayakumar Sekaran, Ph.D., an assistant professor of crop and soil science in Malheur County, is working on an affordable soil moisture monitoring system that uses open-source electronics.

“We are building this unit so that farmers can use this unit to monitor their soil moisture real time and make irrigation decisions,” Sekaran said.

The project is a collaboration between Oregon State University and Clemson University, where Sekaran did his postdoctoral research. It is funded in part by the Oregon River Basin Water Initiative Project, a legislative initiative. »



Across nursery fields, technologies like soil moisture sensors, automated valves and efficient pumping systems are helping growers irrigate more precisely and cut energy costs. Energy Trust of Oregon works alongside growers with on-site support and cash incentives to help make these upgrades achievable. PHOTO COURTESY OF ENERGY TRUST OF OREGON

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“There are many commercially available soil moisture units out there, but they are a little costlier than this and they need subscriptions and maintenance,” Sekaran said. “This one that we’re building is more affordable. And we are generating a manual so that growers can build these units on their own.”

The system can operate with Wi-Fi, cellular and also radio signal data if no network is available. It uses watermark sensors to take moisture reading and soil water potential, and a data logger sends the data directly to the cloud, where it can be stored online, Sekaran said.

Farmers will be able to use an app called ThingView to see the readings from individual sensors and see soil moisture potential in real time on a cell phone, Sekaran said.

“They are able to see that and make irrigation decisions,” he said. “So, it avoids



Growers looking to upgrade irrigation systems may be able to mitigate a significant portion of their cost by tapping cost-share programs through Energy Trust of Oregon. PHOTO COURTESY OF ENERGY TRUST OF OREGON

them going to the field all the time to dig up the soil to see whether it is dry or not. You can download data online and see soil moisture levels throughout the season.”

In the system, soil moisture sensors are placed at different depths in the soil

and left in place throughout a growing season. The system uses solar panels with batteries as backup energy to gather data and send it to the cloud, he said.

The system also enables growers to measure how their water use is coinciding with soil moisture data, which can help further refine irrigation management decisions.

The units are being designed to be compatible with irrigation automation technology, which is another piece of technology under development by the university.

The system, now two years in development, is probably another two years from being ready for commercial introduction Sekaran said.

With new technology on the horizon, energy-efficient options now on shelves, and with cost-share programs available to help mitigate equipment and installation costs, nursery growers have multiple opportunities to embrace energy efficiency and improve their irrigation systems now and into the future.

And with energy costs rising, the benefits of embracing the technology can be substantial. ☺

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



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The bio blend

Biofungicides can be a big boost for nurseries' fighting disease and pests

Plants are drenched with biofungicides at a production nursery at Van Belle Finished Plants. Some biofungicides address foliar diseases. Some take on soil-borne diseases. Some are sprayed on plants, while others get applied to the roots at propagation or soon thereafter. PHOTO COURTESY OF VAN BELLE FINISHED PLANTS

BY JON BELL

If you don't exactly know what biofungicides are and how they work, Michael Brownbridge has a clear and simple way to describe at least some of them.

Picture a plant as if it were a hotel. Say a part of that plant — a leaf or a petal — has died. That site on the plant can essentially be seen as an open hotel room, available to two kinds of guests.

One guest type might be a pathogen like *Botrytis*. It could move in, establish a foothold, dine on all the nutrients and eventually kill the plant.

The other type of guest might be a horde of beneficial microbes, like those in certain biofungicides. They could check in, keep the nutrients for themselves and occupy all the rooms so the *Botrytis* has

nowhere to go.

"It's 100 percent preventative," said Brownbridge, senior technical services manager for **BioWorks**, an integrated plant health products company that makes biological control products to help fight diseases and pests. "They're not allowing any space at a site for any of these noxious organisms to come in. The hotel is kind of the simplest analogy that I can use."

It's an analogy that works well to describe how some biofungicides work. And work they do. While not a brand-new approach, biofungicides have become part of more and more pest and disease management programs at nurseries, farms and other agricultural operations. They have proven effective at fending off diseases, stopping the progression of established pathogens, and producing healthier,

higher-yield crops.

And because they rely on natural organisms rather than chemicals, they can be better for the environment and nursery workers.

"I think it's more important than ever that growers consider utilizing some of these materials," Brownbridge said. "I really think it's the future of agriculture."

Biofungicide basics

According to the University of Massachusetts Center for Agriculture, Food and the Environment, biofungicides are blends of living organisms — fungi and bacteria — that "control the activity of plant pathogenic fungi and bacteria." They do so naturally by producing antibiotic substances, parasitizing and competing with other fungi and even helping ➤

The bio blend



A side-by-side comparison of azelea grown in media amended with RootShield PLUS granules (*Trichoderma harzianum* T-22 plus *Trichoderma virens* G-41) on the left, and those grown in the grower's 'standard' medium (right). Same medium, nutrition and watering regime for both sets of plants. PHOTO COURTESY OF BIOWORKS

some plants develop systemic resistance to various pathogens.

There are multiple kinds of biofungicides. Some address foliar diseases. Some take on soil-borne diseases. Some are sprayed on plants, while others get applied to the roots at propagation or soon thereafter.

According to Brownbridge, biofungicides can be categorized by their various modes of action. Some that are used to treat foliar diseases produce biproducts that are antagonistic to pathogens. Others, like those from Brownbridge's hotel analogy, outcompete diseases for space and nutrients while causing no harm to the plant. Those can be for foliar diseases, or they can be applied to roots to help fend off soil-borne pathogens. Some of the foliar ones will even produce enzymes that break down the cell walls of disease-causing organisms after they have become established, preventing them from spreading any further.

"They can sort of utilize the bad fungi as a food source so they're not

allowed to grow anymore," he said. "It's a nice ecological function that the beneficial microbes bring in."

There's another class of natural fungicide products based on potassium bicarbonate. These destroy the cell walls of various plant diseases. And finally, there's yet another group of products that don't have any impact on the disease organisms but instead induce a resistance response in a plant.

"So the plant is actually adapting itself against infection," Brownbridge said.

In the field

Ronald Tuckett is the plant protection manager for national wholesale grower **Monrovia Nursery Company** at its large farm in Dayton, Oregon. As such, he oversees the pest control program along with irrigation and landscaping. The nursery takes an integrated pest management approach.

"It's using everything — chemical rotations, biofungicides, hand weeding and spraying — every strategy or method you can to control pests," Tuckett said.

Monrovia has had luck with biologic products like CEASE, which destroys pathogen cells and creates a natural barrier on leaves, and Triathlon, which helps control pathogens and diseases like *Botrytis* and powdery and downy mildew. Tuckett also said in the past, the nursery had *Botrytis* on its hellebores. They tried a biofungicide from BioWorks called BotryStop WP, which works by outcompeting botrytis for space and nutrients, to great effect.

"We sprayed it and we were done," Tuckett said. "That was the antidote."

Jan Moss, plant health manager at larger wholesale grower **Kraemer's Nursery** in Mt. Angel, has also found good luck with BotryStop.

"It's safe and won't affect the plant," he said. "And also, it's not visible, which is nice. There's no physical blemish for a consumer to get upset about."

Moss said using BotryStop is simple, as well, because it's obvious when it needs to be applied. With some other fungicides, whether bio- or chemical-based, getting

the application timing right can be tricky because you often can't see what a plant needs to be treated for.

"I think the reason it works well is because it is really obvious when to spray it," Moss said. "You just go out there and you look at the plant. You see the dead tissue, and you just spray it."

Brownbridge said early application is key to biofungicides. Even if you can't see signs of a disease, time is of the essence.

"The earlier we can get them on, the better," he said. "We're looking to protect the plant and prevent it from getting a disease. That's sort of contrary to how the industry has been for years, which has been — see a pest, see a disease, react to it. That's where chemistry has done such a good job. But using biologicals, it's a shift of mindset, but sometimes you don't see a whole lot of disease up front."

Kraemer's is also trying biofungicides on some of its fruit trees, which have shown signs of the bacterial disease fire blight. Moss said the one they're using is designed to out-compete pathogens by colonizing tiny wounds and keeping the disease out. The treatment won't leave any visible residue, which is important to Kraemer's, as the nursery sells ornamental trees to the likes of Home Depot and other large retailers.

"Our trees can't look all messed up from whatever spray I've put on them, so I've pretty much gone to a biologic program on that," Moss said.

Patrick Peterson is a sales specialist and fertilizer consultant with the **J.R. Simplot Company** in Portland, Oregon. He said some effective biofungicide products boast about how many spores they have in them, but they often neglect to note other beneficial properties that can be good for the health of plants, roots and spores.

"They might mention that it has millions of spores, but they don't often mention that it includes a bunch of byproducts that are good for the spores," he said. "So you're getting the spores and some of the other junk — but the junk works really well."

Peterson also noted that many biofungicides can be safer for nursery staff to use than chemical products. For example,



Many biofungicides can be safer for nursery staff to use than chemical products. For example, BotryStop has a restricted entry interval of just four hours. PHOTO COURTESY OF VAN BELLE FINISHED PLANTS

BotryStop has a restricted entry interval — the amount of time a crop is off-limits after an application — of just four hours. Many chemical-based products can range from 12 to 48 hours.

"With biologicals, there's little to no deleterious effect," Peterson said.

In the rotation

That said, biofungicides are not without their limitations, nor do they fully replace chemical products. Instead, most nurseries have found that trying a variety of different products — a mix of biologic and chemical — and different rotations reaps the best rewards.

"I think a range is the best option," said Renata Gandra, IPM manager for **Van Belle Finished Plants**, a larger wholesale grower in Abbotsford, British Columbia, Canada. She added that it's also important to know when and where to apply biofungicides based on the various climate and temperature zones.

"One of the benefits of these biological materials is that they are good in their own right," Brownbridge said, "but they're also really, really useful products to use in a resistance management program, where they can be used in a rotation with synthetic chemistry. Integrating the biology with chemistry is a really great way to help preserve the activity in chemicals, while also getting the benefits of using biology."

As for the future, research is underway to find even better biofungicides and improved formulations. Brownbridge said there have been some promising new advances in the world of pest control with products derived from essential oils — a field he once dismissed but, he said, one he has since "eaten my hat on."

He also said it's clear that biologic products are clearly the way the agriculture industry is going for all kinds of reasons, including cost, environmental impact, safety and efficacy.

Brownbridge said he was at an agricultural conference in February where a speaker asked the audience of growers how many new chemistries they'd been introduced to that day. There had only been one, and it had taken 15 years — and \$500 million — to bring the product from discovery to market. Meanwhile, at least 8 to 10 new biologicals had been introduced.

"So his point was, start integrating biologicals, get comfortable with them," Brownbridge said. "And not necessarily as standalone products, but getting them integrated, because that's where agriculture is headed." ©

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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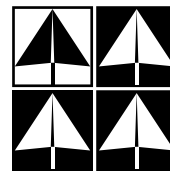
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GROWING KNOWLEDGE

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



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Slime time

Managing slugs and snails in Pacific Northwest nurseries

European red slug (*Arion rufus*) is the largest invasive slug in Oregon and can reach a length of seven inches when fully grown. PHOTO COURTESY OF OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

BY RORY MC DONNELL
AND ROBIN ROSETTA

The collective scientific name for slugs and snails, *Gastropoda*, goes a long way towards explaining the headaches that these invertebrates cause nurseries owners throughout the Pacific Northwest.

Literally meaning ‘stomach foot’ from the Greek words ‘gastér’ and ‘podòs’, gastropods feed on a large number of ornamental plants. They are also thought to transmit many damaging plant diseases such as bacterial soft rot, and there is evidence that they vector human pathogens such as *Escherichia coli*. To top things off, their unsightly mucus and feces reduce the

aesthetic quality of plants.

There are 124 different slug and snail species living in Oregon. Of these, 28 are exotic or non-native and are considered pests. Many species infest nursery plants, but these are some of the most important:

European brown garden snail (*Cornu aspersum*) — As its name suggests, this snail is originally from western Europe but was introduced to the West Coast of the U.S. in the 1850s as a source of food. In fact, this species is a beloved food item (escargot) in many parts of Europe, particularly in the Mediterranean region. In the Pacific Northwest, it currently presents a risk to nurseries given its status as a quarantine pest and its establishment in sites

around Oregon and Washington. It feeds on both living and dead plants.

Amber snails (*Succinea* spp.) — These semi-aquatic species are usually found in the damper parts of nurseries such as drainage areas but also on low areas of planting beds at the interface of wet and dry areas, on the container lip of well-watered plants and in foliage of ground-covers. Most species of amber snails found in nurseries feed on decaying plants, algae and moss but some also eat plants. The most common hosts affected appear to be hibiscus, hydrangea, and *Phormium* in Western nurseries. In the late summer/fall, amber snails have been found in the canopies of shade trees as they escape the »

heat. In addition, these snails will climb to avoid pooling or standing water and employees picking plants from these areas to move to shipping docks should inspect those plants closely. Increasingly amber snails are considered a contaminant pest species in shipments, whether direct feeding damage is observed or not.

European red slug (*Arion rufus*) — This is the largest invasive slug in Oregon and can reach a length of seven inches when fully grown. It ranges in color from orange to reddish brown and has a distinct orange foot fringe with black lines. The European red slug is an omnivore. It will happily feed on live plants, dead plants, fungi, animal feces and carrion.

Three band garden slug (*Ambigolimax valentianus*) — This medium-sized slug (up to 3 inches) has dark 'tram' line stripes on its back, often running the full length of the body. This spe-

cies is originally from Spain and Portugal but is a pest of garden centers, nurseries and greenhouses throughout North America. It is a particularly serious pest of flowers such as orchids, and is thought to be intolerant of cold climates.

Greenhouse slug (*Milax gagates*) — This one reported as an important greenhouse pest in Oregon as far back as the 1940s. It is a medium-sized slug (up to 2 inches) and is thought to live primarily underground. It continues to be common in nurseries and probably spends most of its time within the soil of potted plants and plant trays. It is known to be sensitive to frost. Consequently, the mild winters in Western Oregon likely promote its survival here.

Gray field slug (*Deroceras reticulatum*) — This is one of the most damaging and widespread invasive slugs on the planet. It lives in a wide range of environ-

ments but is most abundant in disturbed areas. It is commonly found in nurseries, garden centers, home gardens, garbage piles, urban parks, roadsides, hedges, ditches, pasture and arable land. It is a very serious agricultural and horticultural pest, targeting seedlings, leaves, flowers and bulbs. This slug is also known as the gray garden slug.

Best ways to manage

As with other plant pests, risks from snails and slugs are best managed with an integrated pest management (IPM) program. An IPM program for slugs and snails contains a number of key elements including correct identification of these pests, an understanding of their biology, consistent monitoring activities, and a multi-tactic approach that includes cultural, biological, and chemical controls.

Control begins with knowledge of

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which species are present. Some species of slugs like cool temperatures. Some like warmer temperatures. Growers must effectively schedule management activities for the whole array of damaging species present which might be active at different times of the year.

Identification of slugs and snails can be challenging but there are useful resources available. A good place to start is the ODA guide to land mollusks (ODAGuides.us/Molluscs-home) and the OSU Slug Portal (AgSci.OregonState.edu/slug-portal). For more detailed information on slugs and snails see *Land Snails and Slugs of the Pacific Northwest* (ISBN: 978-0-87071-685-0) and *Slugs: A Guide to the Introduced and Native Fauna of California* (ISBN: 978-1-62711-233-8). Monitoring should take place on a regular basis. Slugs and snails retreat to moist areas that are protected from the sun dur-

ing the day. Look under containers and pots, particularly the drainage holes and under the side rims. Check for slugs and snails under plant debris, wood, stones, in weedy areas, and along the edges of fields. The best time to see slugs is early in the morning or just after sunset, particularly if there is moisture from rain, irrigation, or dew. Slime, dark sausage-shaped fecal remnants, and rasping feeding damage may indicate slug activity.

Cultural management is generally aimed at reducing or eliminating moisture, a key requirement for slug and snail activity. Focus irrigation only where you need it, such as by use of drip irrigation.

Where that option is not practical, work on quick drainage by having the proper slope, tiles, or sufficient gravel to prevent surface pooling. Reduce any debris areas and standing weeds that could provide moist habitat. Sanitation

efforts such as cleaning up pruning debris, raking or blowing leaves, and reducing moss build-up can greatly reduce the food and habitat available, particularly, for amber snails.

Physical barriers such as copper strips can be used around legs of greenhouse benches and other smaller areas. Cultivation can be very effective at reducing slug numbers.

Chemical management often begins in the winter in the Pacific Northwest, as mild winters allow activity of cool temperature-adapted slugs such as the gray field slug. For many years, growers have relied on a few key active ingredients such as metaldehyde (e.g. Deadline®) and methiocarb (e.g. Mesuro®).

Metaldehyde is best used when sunny, dry conditions develop shortly after a wet period when slugs and snails have been feeding. This product may present a »



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Clockwise from top left: Amber snail (*Succinea* spp.), greenhouse slug (*Milax gagates*), Gray field slug (*Deroceras reticulatum*) and European brown garden snail (*Cornu aspersum*). PHOTOS COURTESY OF OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

risk if pets are around, particularly dogs. In fact, metaldehyde is one of the leading causes of pet poisoning in the Pacific Northwest.

Methiocarb works effectively even when cool, damp conditions are present but is a restricted-use pesticide.

The choices of snail and slug pesticides, known as molluscicides, include iron phosphate (e.g. Sluggo®) and sodium ferric EDTA products (e.g. Ferroxx®) and combination products with spinosyn (e.g. Bug-N-Sluggo®). With these products, the slugs generally stop feeding, crawl away and die from starvation. Thus, one is less likely to find a poisoned slug or snail carcass, so efficacy is determined by assessing damage reduction.

Sulfur (Bio-Sul Slug and Snail Bait) and boric acid-based (Revenge Granular Ant Bait) products are also available. Additionally, there are slug repellents on the market such as the wool-based Slug Gone, copper, cinnamon and garlic-based products.

Naturally occurring biological control agents for slugs and snails include birds, snakes, amphibians, and insects such as ground beetles, but no commercially available product is currently available for use in U.S. nurseries.

However, in Europe, nematodes in the genus *Pellioditis* (= *Phasmarhabditis*) have been used commercially as Nemaslug® products for more than 30 years to protect high value plants such as orchids from slug and snail damage. The nematodes in these products are lethal to a wide range of pest slugs and some snails, including many of the species causing damage in Oregon.

Although these products are not currently available in the U.S., there is a bright spot on the horizon! Recently, Rory Mc Donnell, Dee Denver and other colleagues from Oregon State University discovered these same nematode species in the Pacific Northwest and they are currently researching their potential as biocontrols in the region. The ultimate goal is to open up the

U.S. market for a safe, effective biological control agent.

Unlike insect pests, the chemical signals that gastropods use to find food, or communicate with each other, have largely been left unexploited for pest management purposes, despite the fact that chemistry plays a major role in a wide range of gastropod behaviors. These include feeding, homing, avoidance of predators, and a variety of social and reproductive behaviors.

To help address this need, Mc Donnell and his team screened a large number of potential food-based attractants and they have identified fermenting bread dough as a highly effective for a wide range of pest species including the European brown garden snail and the gray field slug. For information on how to use bread dough to help manage slugs and snails check out the step-by-step tutorial on the OSU Extension Service website (TinyURL.com/SlugSlurry).

Research by Mc Donnell has also shown that certain essential oils such as clove bud could be used as a pre-shipment drench treatment for potted plants that are infested with eggs and juvenile European brown garden snails. His team have also shown that thyme and spearmint oils are lethal to the highly damaging gray field slug. Essential oils and other plant extracts provide an important avenue for the development of novel molluscicides because many plant extracts (e.g. clove oil, cinnamon oil) are exempt from pesticide registration requirements and pesticide residue tolerance requirements under Sect. 25(b) of the Federal Insecticide, Fungicide, and Rodenticide Act (FIFRA).

Such an exemption will greatly reduce the cost and time required for bringing a new molluscicide containing such oils to market. In addition, plant extracts such as essential oils have a number of other advantages, for example the primary component of many oils are nonpersistent in fresh water, and in soils they are broken down to common organic acids by bacteria. Also, many essential oils are pleasant smelling and non-toxic to humans.

Although our battles with pest slugs and snails will likely continue long into the future, that future is getting brighter with the ongoing development of novel approaches to help growers tilt the scales more in their favor.

Disclaimer: Trade-name products and services are mentioned as illustrations only. This does not mean that Oregon State University Extension endorses these products or that they intend to discriminate against products not mentioned.

Rory Mc Donnell is a professor in the Department of Crop and Soil Science at Oregon State University. Reach him at Rory.McDonnell@OregonState.edu. Robin Rosetta is faculty emeritus at Oregon State University.



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Vote

When thinking about elections, Kyle Fessler of Woodburn Nursery & Azaleas said it best: The mayor from Jaws is still the mayor in Jaws 2.

In other words, it is important to vote in your local elections. (I love movie references.)

The upcoming primary in Oregon isn't just another date on the political calendar — it's a defining moment for the nursery and greenhouse industry. For growers, propagators, and the thousands of workers who keep this sector thriving, participation in the primary is not optional. It is essential to protecting the future of an industry that anchors the state's agricultural economy.

If we as agriculture treat our voting privileges as optional, we will deserve what we get.

The civics of the Oregon primary

Oregon uses a closed primary system for its major parties. This means registered Democrats vote in Democratic primaries, registered Republicans vote in Republican primaries, minor party members vote within their party's process that is often separate, and nonaffiliated voters are sidelined from partisan primaries. They can still vote on nonpartisan races (such as judges and local offices), and for or against ballot measures.

In the Oregon primary, who gets to vote can be very different from what the electorate looks like. That distinction is especially important if you're thinking about influence and turnout. Several factors are in play.

1. Turnout. It's a much smaller universe. Even though millions are registered in Oregon, primary turnout is typically: 25–35% of registered voters. That means the real electorate is a fraction of the total population. In practical terms, a motivated bloc — like growers, suppliers, and ag workers — can carry real weight if they participate consistently.

2. Demographics. Older voters dominate. Primary voters skew significantly older: voters 50 or older make up the

largest share of ballots cast, and those 65+ make up the most consistent participants. Voters under 35 are dramatically under-represented and fall into the “my vote does not matter” camp.

Tale of the tape

Recent statewide voter registration data (2026) shows a striking split in our state. Nonaffiliated and independent voters make up 46% of voters. Democrats are next with 31%, and Republicans make up 23% of voters.

So why am I raising the alarm for this cycle? The reality is, a relatively small share of the electorate determines who appears on the November ballot. What that means in practice? This creates one of the most important political dynamics in Oregon.

The largest group can't fully participate. Nearly half of voters are nonaffiliated, yet they are largely shut out of partisan primaries, which is where most elections are effectively decided. That means a minority of total voters chooses the candidates.

To really understand the Oregon primary, you have to go beyond who can vote and look at who actually does vote. That's where influence is won or lost — and where industries like nurseries and agriculture can make a disproportionate impact.

Every election and every vote counts

The Oregon economy is at a crossroads. Big issues surround the industry. Water, labor and land use are in the crosshairs. Having a healthy business climate has turned into an afterthought. It has become increasingly clear we need balance in Oregon.

Schools impact us all. Oregon has never spent more money and had less to show for it. The money is simply not traversing to the classroom. This is so much so that 20+ communities are seeking school levies. Add to this — test scores are down. We simply are not preparing our kids. The system is broken.

I have visited well over 100 nursery operations over the last year and found a striking common denominator. This state makes it hard to do business. The overriding feeling is that it seems that elected offi-



Jeff Stone
OAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

cials only care about agriculture when it suits them. Unless we set the terms of the engagement, the nursery, greenhouse and retail operations in our fertile state will be at risk of shortcut and poorly considered policies on tax, climate, and transportation. We will see a more regulation, along with labor policies that are decidedly anti-business.

Ballots are arriving now

These elections matter. Every vote matters. Your voice matters. Our member-led political action committee has made endorsements for the primary election cycle. Oregon will set the matchup for our next governor and the choice for Oregon is clear.

Meanwhile, it is almost a crime that the largest sector in agriculture does not have one of its members serving in the state Legislature. Fortunately, this year, we have one of our own (Amanda Staehely) running to represent our interests in a house district.

We need steadier, more-business-friendly hands to turn the tide. I highly encourage you to look at the half dozen or so endorsements by the Oregon Nurseries' Political Action Committee, posted at [OAN.org/2026ONPAC](https://oan.org/2026ONPAC).

Use your voice on May 19

So let me draw the bottom line. Voter turnout is typically poor in primary elections. Rural and agricultural voices — when organized — can have outsized influence, pound for pound.

So when you receive your ballot, shape your future and vote. ☺

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