

Digger

OCTOBER 2026

**Oregon's
'can do'
nursery
women**

PAGE 23

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OREGON
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NURSERIES™

Amanda Staehely of
Columbia Nursery LLC

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Celebrating the Year of the Woman Farmer

Here are five OAN leaders who exemplify the important role women play in Oregon's nursery industry.

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New plant breeding developments are keeping pansies at the top of color annuals.

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Lloyd Nackley Ph.D., of Oregon State University reflects on how seeing old students at Farwest and IPPS gatherings is a sign that horticulture keeps marching forward into the future.

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On the cover: Amanda Staehely of Columbia Nursery LLC (Canby, Oregon) is one of five women highlighted in this issue focused on the Year of the Woman Farmer. Here, she is rendered by AI as "woman power" icon Rosie the Riveter.

On this page: Left: Leigh Geschwill, owner of F&B Farms and Nursery Inc. PHOTO BY VIC PANICKUL

Right: Isao Sato's Elegance Antoinette Collection pansies. PHOTO COURTESY OF TAGAWA GREENHOUSE

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An unforgettable experience

It's hard to believe my year as president of the Oregon Association of Nurseries is already coming to an end.



Patrick Newton

When I started this year, I knew I was taking on a big responsibility. After 25 years in this industry, I've seen plenty of ups and downs, but I don't think I fully understood how different it would feel to be sitting in the president's chair. There's a lot that comes with it, and there were definitely days when I wondered what the hell I had gotten myself into.

Looking back, I can honestly say I'm extremely proud of the year we had.

The Japanese beetle was probably the biggest scare I've experienced. It was a serious threat to our industry, and I'm proud of the way OAN, our members and everyone involved came together to deal with it. It was a tough situation but we found a way.

One of the best parts of this year was getting out and visiting our members. We set a goal of visiting 50 nurseries, and we got there. I really enjoyed getting out of the office and seeing what people are doing around the state. Every nursery is a little different, and every owner has a different story. It was a great way to spend my year as president, and I'm really glad we made the effort to get out and see so many of our members.

I also made several trips to Washington, D.C., this year and had the chance to meet with our representatives. We also spent time meeting with people at the state level here in Oregon. One of the things I'm especially proud of this year was having my wife, Jaime, and I host a reception for gubernatorial candidate Christine Drazen in our backyard. That's something I never would have thought I'd be doing when I started in this industry. It was a pretty special moment for me and something I'll always be proud of.

Those are the kinds of things I'll remember from this year. Not just the meetings or the travel, but the people I met and the relationships that came from it.

I'm proud that we showed up.

We showed up when the Japanese beetle became a serious threat. We showed up in Washington, D.C. We showed up at the Capitol. And we showed up at our members' nurseries. We made sure people knew who we were, what we do and why this industry matters.

I also want to take a minute to thank the OAN board. Thank you to Darcy, Andrea, Barb, Ben, Blake, Chris, Greg, Jason, Jesse, Jonathan, Noah, Sam, Tyler, Patrick and Vladimir for trusting me with this position and supporting me throughout the year. I appreciate the conversations, the ideas and, most of all, knowing that we were working toward the same goal.

And of course, none of this happens without the OAN staff. They put in the work every single day, and I'm grateful I had the chance to work alongside them.

I also want to thank everyone who has reached out to me about the columns I've written this year. The nice messages mean more to me than you know. It's been a lot of fun putting my thoughts down each month, and knowing that people actually take the time to read them and reach out makes it even more worthwhile.

Now it's time to hand the reins over to Darcy Ruef of Al's Garden & Home. Darcy, congratulations. I'm excited to see what you do with the job, and I'll be rooting for you every step of the way.

Thank you to everyone who gave me the opportunity to serve as your president. It's an experience I'll never forget. ☺



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*.

OCTOBER 7

TREES AND SHRUBS FOR URBAN POLLINATOR CONSERVATION

Urban landscapes can be important refuges for native bees and other pollinators. This AmericanHort tHRive talk from 10–11 a.m. on Wednesday, October 7 covers why bees are critical for biodiversity and food security, why bee populations are declining, and how the gardening public can help by incorporating woody landscape plants to provide nectar, pollen, nesting sites and materials, and other resources. Following a brief overview of pollination ecology, we'll "meet the bees", and then discuss recent HRI-funded research that identified top native and non-native "bee magnets" amongst woody ornamental plants. The talk also explains why artificial bee "hotels" can become death traps and suggests better ways to create bee nesting sites through ordinary gardening practices. Attendees will receive PDF handouts and other information helpful for teaching others about the best trees and shrubs for bee conservation. For more information and to register, go to TinyURL.com/AMHortBees.

OCTOBER 14

'ALL THINGS POLITICAL'

Join OAN Executive Director for a candid discussion on 'All Things Political' at 8 a.m. on Wednesday, October 14. October is a big month. As ballots are coming out for the November general election, the direction of the state and nation hang in the balance. What does your executive director think? Well, he'll tell you with high-velocity candor. Nothing is off the table for this hour-long discussion of issues facing the industry. For more information or for the Zoom link, go to TinyURL.com/AllPolitical.

OCTOBER 27-29

CALIFORNIA NURSERY CONFERENCE

Join the UC Nursery and Floriculture Alliance, CANERS Foundation, and IPPS Western Region of North America, for the 2026 California Nursery Conference, October 28-29, 2026, at the Modesto Junior College Ag Pavilion. For more than 30 years, the California Nursery Conference has brought together nursery growers, academics, policymakers, landscape professionals, students, researchers, and allied industry partners to explore the latest developments shaping California horticulture. Register at TinyURL.com/CANurseryConference.

NOVEMBER 3, 5, 10

AG SAFETY SEMINARS

The Oregon Agricultural Chemicals and Fertilizers Association is hosting a series of in-person and online agricultural stewardship and safety seminars in November. Earn an



PHOTO COURTESY OF SUNRIVER RESORT

NOVEMBER 6-7

OAN ANNUAL CONVENTION AT SUNRIVER

Make plans to attend Raiders of the Lost Bark: The 2026 OAN Annual Convention, November 6-7 at Central Oregon's spectacular Sunriver Resort and reconnect with friends, celebrate our industry, and making memories together. Gather your team for a weekend filled with laughter, recognition, great conversations, and the relationships that make OAN and Oregon's nursery industry stronger. Join OAN for fresh ideas, new connections, and opportunities that will help shape the future of our businesses and our association. Complimentary childcare will be available during these events: Hospitality Suites, Annual Meeting, and President's Awards Banquet. Registration and full schedule are available at OAN.org/Convention2026. All attendees must register. Discounted room rates are available to members who are pre-registered to attend the convention. Room reservation information will be provided after your event registration has been completed. Room rates start at \$159 plus taxes. OAN's room rate group discount deadline is October 6 for guestrooms. The discount deadline for homes/condos already passed.

anticipated 8 hours of pesticide relicensing credits. Pendleton, Oregon, Pendleton Convention Center, 1601 Westgate, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. November 3, \$160. Wilsonville, Oregon, Wilsonville Holiday Inn, 25425 S.W. 95th Avenue, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. November 5, \$160. Webinar, 8 a.m.-5 p.m. November 10, \$150. For more information or to register, go to OACFA.com/#Safety-Seminars.

NOVEMBER 8-11

ELEVATE: THE NATIONAL CONFERENCE & EXPO

Elevate brings landscape and lawn care professionals together for practical learning, peer conversations, new solutions and the kind of industry connections that continue long after the event ends. Elevate education is built for landscape and lawn care professionals who want ideas they can actually use. Learn from industry leaders, hear what is working inside companies like yours and join peer conversations designed around your role, specialty and stage of growth. Every part of the program is designed to help you solve

business challenges, strengthen your team and return with clearer next steps. Get a feel for the energy, people and experience waiting for you in Tampa, Florida Sunday-Wednesday, November 8-11. For more information and to register, go to LandscapeProfessionals.org/ELEVATE.

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: October 14, November 18, December 16. Spanish: 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.



'Sunset Horizon'

Portland Rose Society names Portland's Best Rose

For more than 25 years, Portland's Best Rose event has celebrated and promoted the horticultural accomplishments of world-renowned International Rose Test Garden in Washington Park.

The garden was founded in 1917 and is the oldest continuously operated public rose test garden in the United States.

At this year's Farwest Show, three awards were given by Rachel Burlington, curator of the International Rose Test Garden.

'Sunset Horizon' floribunda rose (hybridized by Alan Meiland and introduced by Star Roses & Plants) won Portland's Best Rose award.

'Violet's Pride' (a floribunda hybridized by Christian Bedard and introduced by Weeks Roses) won Most Fragrant.

'Forever Amber', an English-style floribunda rose (hybridized by Christian Bedard and introduced by Weeks Roses) won the Gold Medal Award.



'Violet's Pride'



Prior to implementing the Lommers autonomous pruner, Woodburn Nursery & Azaleas in Woodburn, Oregon, spent around \$260,000 a year to hand prune plants. Today, its pruning costs are minimal. PHOTO COURTESY OF WOODBURN NURSERY & AZALEAS

ROBOTS, DRONES ARE TRANSFORMING OREGON NURSERIES

Oregon nurseries are deploying autonomous equipment and utilizing drone technology, dramatically improving plant quality, efficiency and reducing labor costs, according to Farm Progress, an online publication.

How?

At **Woodburn Nursery & Azaleas Inc.** (Woodburn, Oregon), an autonomous pruner does the work of 30 workers at a fraction of the cost and the pruner trims plants more uniformly, improving product consistency.

At **Bountiful Farms & Nursery Inc.**, also based in Woodburn, GPS-guided equipment prunes, digs, plants, sprays and fertilizes plants.

Monrovia Nursery Company in Dayton, Oregon is moving plants around its 550-acre complex with autonomous vehicles and documenting inventory with software in drones.

More: Read how tech can improve profit margins from the Automation Summit at the Farwest Show at DiggerMagazine.com/AutomationSummit.

EMERALD ASH BORER FOUND IN THREE MORE OREGON CITIES

The tree-killing emerald ash borer (EAB) invasive insect has been confirmed in at least three new Willamette Valley, Oregon, communities, the Oregon Department of Forestry announced. The pest was found in a shopping center parking lot just east of Interstate 5 in Tualatin, in a parking lot right outside Newberg, and at a private residence in Silverton.

The new detections are within the existing EAB quarantine zone covering the five counties where this pest has been found so far. Counties within the quarantined zone are Clackamas, Marion, Multnomah, Washington and Yamhill.

By order of the Oregon Department of Agriculture, tree material from ash, olive, and white fringe trees must remain within quarantined counties, along with firewood from any hardwood tree.

EAB was first found in Forest Grove in Washington County in June 2022, making Oregon the first state on the West Coast to report an infestation.



Oregon's plastics recycling law was drafted and approved to advance a policy goal of shifting recycling costs from governmental entities to producers. ADOBE STOCK PHOTO

JUDGE UPHOLDS OREGON PLASTICS RECYCLING LAW

Oregon's 2021 recycling law has been upheld by a federal judge, rejecting claims by the wholesale-distribution industry that it violated federal law or interfered with interstate commerce, *The Oregonian* newspaper (Portland) reported.

The law was drafted and approved to advance Oregon's policy goal of shifting its recycling costs from governmental entities to producers, U.S. District Judge Michael H. Simon wrote in a 71-page ruling.

The National Association of Wholesaler-Distributors, a trade organization representing an \$8.6 trillion industry, sued the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality in 2025. It argued that the recycling law imposed arbitrary and excessive fees on businesses and interfered with interstate commerce. The association members import, distribute or supply packaged goods to Oregon and are subject to the law's requirements. The association won a preliminary injunction from Simon in February, temporarily halting the law pending the outcome of the

association's trial.

Under the Oregon law, which took effect in 2022, the producers of packaging must bear some of the costs of collecting and recycling certain packaging materials. These companies must report the quantity of packaging they distribute in Oregon and pay fees based on weight.

"This is disappointing, and the OAN will work to amend the underlying legislation in 2027," said OAN Executive Director Jeff Stone.

Stone moderated an OAN roundtable on plastics recycling and the producer responsibility law at the 2026 Farwest Show. You can read the coverage here: DiggerMagazine.com/PlasticRecycle.

CANADA TARIFFS IMPACT U.S. HORTICULTURAL SUPPLY CHAINS

A 50% tariff on a wide range of Canadian goods has been levied by the United States against Canada after talks broke down on August 22.

For the horticulture industry, AmericanHort estimates the tariffs will affect approximately \$158 million in

annual imports from Canada including orchids, cut flowers, flower bulbs and propagative plant material.

The impact extends well beyond finished products, according to AmericanHort. Horticulture supply chains across the United States and Canada are deeply integrated, with plant material frequently crossing the border as part of production and distribution. For U.S. growers, importers, retailers, and companies operating on both sides of the border, the new tariffs could significantly increase costs and disrupt established sourcing and production plans.

Canada has since announced retaliatory tariffs on \$27.6 billion worth of U.S. goods, beginning September 8. However, propagative plant material was not included in Canada's current retaliation list, avoiding another direct tariff impact on plant movement from the United States into Canada.

AmericanHort has asked to hear directly from affected businesses. If your company imports products from Canada, relies on Canadian plant material in its supply chain, or is experiencing increased

costs or business disruptions due to the Section 338 tariffs, please contact KamronN@AmericanHort.org.

CROCUS NAMED BULB OF THE YEAR

The National Garden Bureau and Flowerbulb.eu have each named *Crocus* as the 2026 Bulb of the Year, giving the spring-blooming bulb dual recognition from two horticultural organizations.

The selections highlight *Crocus* as an early-season flowering bulb known for its ability to bloom in late winter and early spring. *Crocus* are generally hardy in USDA Zones 4-8 and grow in well-drained soil in full sun to partial shade. Their early blooms can appear while temperatures remain cold, and some *Crocus* species produce natural antifreeze proteins that help protect their cells from freezing temperatures. »



The National Garden Bureau and Flowerbulb.eu have each named *Crocus* as the 2026 Bulb of the Year. PHOTO COURTESY OF NATIONAL GARDEN BUREAU



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40% TAX CREDIT FOR INSTALLING SOLAR IS EXPIRING

The budget reconciliation bill passed by Congress eliminates the 40% tax credit for commercial solar upgrades, at least for those which are installed after Dec. 31, 2027. Although this seems distant, permission for interconnection can take three months to a year, depending on the utility. Those with an interest in solar might consider beginning the process by mid-2027, according to Rob Aldridge at OAN member **Pure Energy Group**. These tax credits can be used over a 25-year period or sold upfront for (non-taxable) cash.

Experts predict that PGE and Pacific Power may double their rates over the next decade as they deal with rapidly increased grid demands, wildfire mitigation costs, and the “no carbon by 2040” Oregon mandate, Aldridge said. Every net \$1 invested in behind-the-meter solar can save \$25 or more on future power bills. The lifetime cost of energy is under \$.03 kWh, compared to the average in Oregon of \$.16 kWh (and climbing).

Is solar feasible for you? Pure Energy has worked with a hundred ag businesses in the Northwest. “There are never any costs or obligations for us to conduct a solar feasibility study and discuss the economics,” Aldridge said. Contact Aldridge at **Rob@PureEnergyGroup** or 503-510-5206.

DIESEL HITS NEW HIGH, SQUEEZING FARM PROFITS

Skyrocketing diesel costs are threatening to squeeze farm profits, just as U.S. crop growers were starting to catch a break, reports Agri-Pulse, an agricultural news website.

The average price of U.S. diesel reached a new all-time high of \$5.94 a gallon on September 9, up four cents from the prior record set on Labor Day over the travel-heavy holiday weekend, according to automobile club AAA. Prices are up 61% from a year ago. Crude oil, which is used to make diesel, on September 9 climbed over \$101 a barrel for the first time since July. Heightened violence



Those with an interest in solar might consider beginning the process by mid-2027. ADOBE STOCK PHOTO

between Iran and the U.S. is raising fears that energy exports through the Strait of Hormuz will soon plummet.

Why it matters: Prices are spiking as farmers prepare to fire up fuel-hungry equipment for round-the-clock harvest work this fall. Soaring costs for crop inputs like fertilizer have bedeviled farmers over the last few years, helping trigger grain-market slumps. Ag economists are predicting another downturn for key crops this year as Congress struggles to get billions of dollars in federal aid to growers on top of roughly \$12 billion in payments from the Trump administration.

No resolution in sight: “Unless and until the war in Iran is resolved, and Middle Eastern crude and refined products exports approach pre-war levels, diesel prices will continue to march higher,” the Atlantic Council (an American international affairs think tank) said.

Announcements

BIOWORKS LAUNCHES BIORAIN AX TO HELP MITIGATE LIMITED-WATER CONDITIONS

BioWorks, a provider of biological crop protection and plant health solutions, has launched BioRain Ax, a microbial inoculant designed to mitigate the effects of limited water environments while improving overall plant health and potential yield.

In environments where water is limit-

ed, BioRain Ax helps plants maintain crop growth, vigor and productivity through increased water access and retention, the company said. BioRain Ax supports commercial production in outdoor specialty crops, ornamentals, greenhouses, nurseries and other high-value crops. BioRain Ax is powered by a targeted consortium of beneficial microorganisms that colonizes the rhizosphere of the plant to improve soil structure, increase water retention and enhance nutrient availability. This creates a stronger, deeper root system that enables more efficient water and nutrient uptake, the company said.

MONROVIA NAMES NEW CFO

Celeste Porter has been named as the new chief financial officer for **Monrovia Nursery Company**, the national grower announced in a statement.

Porter brings a wealth of knowledge gained in the agriculture industry, most recently with Grimmway

Produce Group and Tasteful Selections LLC, where she served as CFO. She studied at Boston University and holds a Master of Business Administration from Indiana University and a Master



Celeste Porter

of Science, Agricultural Economics from Purdue University.

Porter takes over for Frank van Straalen, who retired in July after 16 years with the company.

TOM BREWER RETIRES AFTER 16 YEARS AT GROWSCAPE

Tom Brewer, who spent 16 years as a horticultural container sales manager and director with Myers LGG, HC Companies and **Growscape**, has retired.

Brewer earned a Bachelor of Science degree from the University of Oregon and worked as a bank teller, shipping clerk and paint store manager after graduating.

He spent 17 years as a greenhouse shipping manager and greenhouse plant sales manager with Tanasacres Nursery and the Iwasaki family. He spent three years as a horticultural supplies distribution sales manager with McConkey Company.



Tom Brewer

He is a longtime member of the Oregon Association of Nurseries and has served on its Board of Directors. "Since joining OAN in 1991, I have taken great pride in being part of this organization and the outstanding people who make it such a valued community," Brewer said.

Brewer said his retirement plan includes "travel, golf and skiing with [his wife] Heidi, the kids and grandchildren."

In memoriam

KEN HECTOR

The Oregon Association of Nurseries is saddened to report the passing of Ken Hector, the former Silverton mayor who helped spearhead the creation of the showcase Oregon Garden in Silverton, and later served as its board chair.

A celebration of life was held at »

For more than 50 years, Marion Ag Service has been defined by a simple yet powerful commitment:

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Ken Hector

the Oregon
Garden
Pavillion.

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Sheltering Silverton in lieu of flowers.

He passed away in June following a
recurrence of cancer.

Hector was deeply invested during
the garden's early years, both advocating
for its success as mayor and serving on
a number of committees. As part of the
Contribution and Endowment Committee,
he diligently worked to raise funds for
garden operations. He was appointed
as board chair in late 2020. In this role,
he played a critical role in locating and
repaying more than \$600,000 to garden
note holders.

He also was fundamental in rekin-
dling the garden's relationship with the
OAN. In recognition of his efforts, the
OAN honored him with the OAN Special
Services Award in 2024.

Hector was born May 21, 1945 in
Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada to Jacob
Frank Hector and Thelma Florence (Hayes)
Hector. He was the oldest of three kids, fol-
lowed by sister Susan and brother Bob.

His family moved to Southern
California when Ken was 7. He attended
St. Monica Catholic Elementary and St.
Monica Catholic High School, graduating
in 1964. He attended several junior colleges
and finished his college career at University
of Portland, graduating in 1971.

His career was primarily focused on
workers compensation, risk management
as well as working in governmental affairs
at Silverton Hospital.

Ken had a long history of public
service. He was a city councilor for many
years; he served as mayor of Silverton
for 16 years; he served on many boards
including the WESD Board and has been
a trustee on the Board of Education at
Chemeketa Community College for over
12 years.

He is survived by his wife Darby of
48 years, his four children: sons Michael,
Josh and John and daughter Sarah; grand-
daughters Kailey Espinosa (Xavi), Riley
and Samantha; great grandchild Leo; and
three nieces/nephews. ©

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Golden foliage simulates sunshine



For brilliant leaf color from summer to frost, it's hard to beat *Fuchsia 'Autumnale'*. PHOTO BY MIKE DARCY

Garden centers often organize plants in groups according to a variety of different categories, all with the intention of helping the customer find the specific kind of plant they might be looking for. Signage of these diverse groups can be very helpful. You'll often see signs indicating categories such as shade trees, conifers, ground covers, native plants, and others.

Perhaps customers would be intrigued by categories based on foliage color.

Some years ago, golden foliage was often associated with a plant in evident need of help. Maybe the plant needed more nitrogen. Maybe it had iron chlorosis and needed a dose of iron to make it green again. Whatever the situation, something was clearly wrong. Yellow-colored plants were generally not considered an asset.

However, as someone who lives and gardens in Oregon, the yellow foliage color has taken on a new meaning. We have so many deciduous and evergreen

plants making up a sea of green foliage that the color yellow makes a garden bed really stand out.

Many times in life, we can be surrounded by things that we rarely notice and probably pay little attention to. The color of foliage can be one.

Glowing examples

In my garden, there are many plants with yellow foliage and others that are partially yellow. Now that I have been looking for yellow plants, it is somewhat overwhelming to see the diversity of color that is now commonly planted.

There is certainly no way to list them all, but here are some plants that are regularly seen, or perhaps should be seen more often:

Jasminum officinale 'Fiona Sunrise' — There are many different cultivars of jasmine, but for yellow foliage, this one is a knockout. It can take sun and some shade, although in the shade, the leaf color may not be as brilliant.

It is usually trained as a vine, and does



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.

need some support, such as a trellis or fence. It is often considered as semi-evergreen, but it seems like an oxymoron to call it "ever-green" when it is actually yellow! In a very cold winter, the plant in my garden will lose its leaves, but not to worry. New leaf buds appear in early spring,

Aralia cordata 'Sun King' is hard to beat to brighten up a shady spot in the garden. It shows off best when given some sun. With too much shade, the yellow leaf color will fade. It is an herbaceous perennial — and so dies to the ground in the winter — but it makes an excellent container plant for summer. Spikes of white flowers appear in summer, and they are followed by purplish black berries that are a treat for birds.

Choisya ternata 'Sundance' A broad-leaf evergreen shrub, has golden yellow foliage and white fragrant flowers. It grows well here in the Pacific Northwest and can be planted in full sun. It should be considered as a permanent shrub that will reach 5–6 feet in height and become equally as wide. For someone starting a yellow foliage garden, this would be an ideal plant to begin with because it is attractive and very easy to grow with no pest problems.

Fuchsia 'Autumnale' is hard to beat for brilliant leaf color from summer to frost. In addition to the leaf color, it also produces red and purple flowers. A wonderful plant for a hanging basket or planter box to let the long stems hang downward. Give this plant part shade to shade and it will thrive. Considered an annual, this past winter I had two plants in a container, and while they died back to the crown, they survived. This would ➤

What I'm Hearing

be a striking plant in a container with yellow foliage plants around it and would be excellent for giving customer plant combination ideas.

A welcome surprise

Visiting another garden is usually a treat — and seeing a new plant that immediately becomes a ‘must have’ is even a better treat.

Recently, I was part of a group visiting a Beaverton garden. We encountered a plant that looked like a juniper, but it was very soft to the touch and was golden yellow.

No one knew the name, so some horticulture research was necessary. It has been in the garden for three years and is growing like a low shrub, just like many junipers do.

Soon, the common name was discovered and then the Latin name. The common name is Breath of Heaven, and



The author discovered Breath of Heaven (*Colonema pulchrum* 'Sunset Gold') on a garden tour and was awed with its splashy, golden yellow color. PHOTO BY MIKE DARCY

the Latin name is *Coleonema pulchrum* ‘Sunset Gold’. I do not know much about it, but it is growing in a sunny location and made a stunning statement against a background of green shrubs.

Bringing some needed attention

Mentioning the yellow foliage plants above is like a tiny tip of an iceberg when considering what is available. If a garden center created categories of plants based on foliage, they could create a special section devoted to golden yellow foliage

which would surely attract attention. Even a customer not particularly looking for a gold foliage plant might be intrigued enough to check it out.

Displays of plants with various colors of foliage could spark interest and give gardeners some ideas for plant combinations for their own garden. In 1908, noted British horticulturist and garden designer Gertrude Jekyll said it best when she wrote, “Suddenly entering the gold garden, even on the duller day, will be like coming into sunshine.” ☺

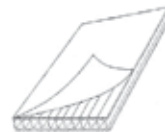
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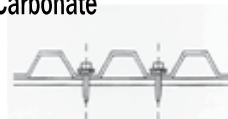


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Full spectrum, full throttle

Japanese breeder Isao Sato's Twilight collection has bolder colors of red, purple, and pink, with strong contrasts between light and dark across each petal which creates an impressive supernova effect on the blossoms. PHOTO COURTESY OF TAGAWA GREENHOUSE

New developments from breeders are keeping pansies at the top of color annuals race

BY JOSHUA LAPOINT

In the world of color annuals, pansies have been a top performer for many years, their popularity buoyed by their cold tolerance.

But plant breeders have kept them at the forefront of the marketplace with breeding that has extended the range of colors, improved flower structure, broadened the range of colors and varied plant structure.

This has helped keep them on the top of gardeners' and landscapers' must-have lists.

Cold tolerance

Pansies have a cold tolerance that sets them apart from virtually every other plant because they will bloom throughout the winter in many regions.

"One year in the early '90s, it was down to 4-5 [F]" reminisced Don Kondo, owner and president of greenhouse grower **Yoshitomi Brothers Inc.** (West Linn, Oregon). "We'd left a few flats outside in the wind and the cold and they survived when a lot of other things didn't."

Pansies actually prefer cold weather, and it will cause them to create tighter, more vibrant blooms. Even snowfall and temperatures in the single digits will not stop them from blooming.

The typical pansy season is from early October through May, while many other annuals and perennials only have color starting in April or >>



In 2027, the breeder is launching a brand-new collection called Dawn to Dusk. Dawn to Dusk took the stark contrasts of the Twilight collection, then removed the reds and pinks from the color palette. It has bright gold or sharp blue-white colors in the ruffles with purple or blue accents, and a dark face to highlight the contrast. PHOTO COURTESY OF TAGAWA GREENHOUSE

Full spectrum, full throttle



Pan American Seed's Pansy Top Wave™ Blue Blotch and Top Wave™ Rose Blotch trails and mounds, making them great for containers. PHOTO COURTESY OF PANAMERICAN SEED

May and going through the summer.

It cannot be overstated how important these cold-hardy color annuals are to the annual growers' business model. "Pansies are a season extender for color annuals because of the cold tolerance," said Ron Newble, small plant sales manager at Tagawa Greenhouse (Brighton, Colorado). "Pansies can carry you over the winter months."

Annuals are an extremely seasonal business by nature. The busiest months occur in spring, when garden centers are humming with business and landscapers are going full speed ahead. Pansies are one of the few plants that allow growers to extend their season. This product line gives them increased revenue and momentum to help carry through the winter months until the next spring shipping season.

Pansies have been bred to bloom in virtually every color imaginable — red, blue, purple, yellow, brown and even black. "If you need a color, there are pansies that come in that color," said Brenna Estrada, owner of Three Brothers Blooms (Camano Island, Washington) and AHS Book Award winning author of *Pansies: How to Grow, Reimagine, and Create Beauty with Pansies and Violas*.

Pansy flowers can be ruffled, soft, giant or even have smaller blossoms that

are common with a trailing growth habit. Trailing habits are the preferred choice for hanging baskets because they create a waterfall of color. Dense, mounding habits are the most widely grown because their larger bloom size and thick form makes them ideal for mass plantings.

"A lot of people use either clear mix, which is a solid color without a blotch, or a blotch mix," explained Steven Engel, regional account manager at PanAmerican Seed.

With so many different colors, breeders have undertaken great effort to ensure that each of the colors within a given pansy series will bloom at the same time. "The most important trait is the evenness of bloom," said Jon Venzke, general manager of **F&B Farms & Nursery Inc.** (Woodburn, Oregon). "If I plant them all at the same time, they should be ready at the same time."

If the bloom times are not synchronized, the intended effect will be thrown into disarray. Thankfully, after years of careful breeding, the blooming times are now very consistent, with all the colors within a given series opening within a week of one another.

Deep-seeded traditions

Several of the most popular series currently in production are the Matrix

and Delta series for mounding habits, and the Cool Wave series for spreading pansies. These three lines represent a fantastic amount of pansies sold across the country and are responsible for countless installs every year.

Newble, with Tagawa Greenhouse, noted that they ship over 50 million units of pansies annually, with the majority of these being the Matrix series. It is an important part of their color annual mix.

Although both Matrix and Delta series have a tremendous amount of production power and market demand, there is no clear winner between them. Growers favor both and appreciate the value they each bring. "We grow some of Delta and Matrix," said Jennifer Martin, the program development administrator at **Walla Walla Nursery Co. Inc.** "We do a catch all to grab all the main colors with clear face and blotch."

For Kondo of Yoshitomi Brothers, consumer demand guided their decision to start producing Matrix. "Our customers demanded that we did a larger flower pansy and we started the Matrix line," Kondo said. "It's been very important for their breeders to come up with a series that are timed very well so you could grow a crop and have everything in full bloom within a week, rather than two and a half weeks."



The trailing nature of Top Wave™ makes it easy to spread. PHOTO COURTESY OF PANAMERICAN SEED

“Our go-to series is the Matrix from PanAmerican,” said Venzke of F&B.

Although PanAmerican Seed produces a plethora of annuals, “Matrix has been our biggest seller,” Engel said. “It’s our series with the largest color range in it.”

Delta has its fans as well.

“The Delta series has been very successful for us,” said Ben Verhoeven, president of greenhouse grower **Peoria Gardens Inc.** (Albany, Oregon). “They mature and come to market looking the same and at the same time.”

The Delta series by Syngenta is very popular, with their Delta Pro flowers marketed to be very short with large flowers and nice uniformity.

“The Delta series has been a strong workhorse,” said Estrada, adding that she admires the series for their big, beautiful faces and jewel tones.

Spreading and trailing

While the retail market has adopted both series of clumping pansies, perhaps the most quintessentially “color annual” items they carry are hanging baskets. These are often a combination of different annuals, colors, and textures.

The Cool Wave series of spreading pansies by PanAmerican Seed has impressed customers in this application for years. Their spreading habit allows them to trail down from the basket to create a waterfall effect. Their blossoms tend to be smaller and tighter, but they still showcase many brighter gem colors and softer pastel tones so there is a pansy for every application.

PanAmerican Seed, in concert with Ball Horticultural Company, has improved on this and launched a new series called Top Wave. Top Wave is like Cool Wave’s big sister. “This is a spreading pansy with large flowers that also mounds so you get color throughout the entire plant,” Engel said.

Kondo of Yoshitomi Brothers agreed. “It’s another dimension to be able to have them fill out a basket and drape over the edge,” he said. “These new Top Waves have 25% larger flowers, which is significant at close to a 2-inch flower.”

Between the combination of mounding/spreading habit and the increased flower size, Top Wave promises to make a huge impact in hanging baskets this year. >>

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Although PanAmerican Seed produces a plethora of annuals, Matrix has been its biggest seller with the largest color range. PHOTO COURTESY OF PANAMERICAN SEED

Nature finds a way

Because pansies have experienced such overwhelming demand as bedding plants and hanging baskets for over half a century, further development efforts have focused on developing the characteristics that made them so attractive to begin with. These include their color, bloom size, and form. A retail market for semi-double ruffled pansies has also been quietly gaining prominence.

In markets around the world, such as those in Japan and Italy, pansies are often used as cut flowers in beautiful bouquets. Growers train spreading varieties to grow upright, resulting in stable, long stems that are ideal for small and medium-sized bouquets. This has driven specialty breeders to focus on developing pansies with color that will capture the eye from across a room, then get more aesthetically complex and beautiful from a closer distance.

The classic series sold in the U.S. is called Frizzle Sizzle. “We’ve sold a fair amount of a seeded variety called Frizzle Sizzle for years,” said Kondo of Yoshitomi Brothers.

In Italy, breeders and growers have been producing beautiful varieties like Chianti and Moulin Rouge. These have ruffled petals, interesting color, and an understated beauty that has been popular

in Europe for years but is just gaining traction here.

“Their fragrance goes back to that original *Viola cornuta* and tricolor,” said Estrada of Three Brothers Blooms, “with a beautiful, intense chocolate fragrance with a hint of honey.”

Ornate botanical elegance

Just when the genus seemed improved to the maximum, a radical new introduction from across the Pacific made a big splash at the California Spring Trials (CAST) earlier this year. Isao Sato, a specialty breeder from Japan who spent years breeding Japanese pansies, made a breakthrough with one of the most visually stimulating pansy series ever created, aptly named Elegance.

In 2026, Elegance had two distinct collections. The Antoinette collection features a beautiful mix of smoky pastel and light-colored petals of soft elegance, reminiscent of Enlightenment era paintings. The Twilight collection has bolder colors of red, purple, and pink, with strong contrasts between light and dark across each petal which creates an impressive supernova effect on the blossoms.

Sato is continuing to build on these new introductions. In 2027, the breeder is launching a brand-new collection called

WHAT THEY'RE GROWING

In addition to pansies mentioned in the story, here's a sampling of what nurseries are growing.

Wall Walla Nursery Co. Inc.

- *Viola Elegance* 'Antoinette Collection'.
- *Viola Elegance* 'Twilight Collection'.
- *Viola wittrockiana* 'Frizzle Sizzle Blue'
- Matrix® Midnight Glow Pansy (*Viola wittrockiana* 'Pas736727')

Peoria Gardens Inc

- *Viola wittrockiana* Cool Wave® Mix
- *Viola wittrockiana* Frizzle Sizzle® Mix
- Matrix® Midnight Glow Pansy (*Viola wittrockiana* 'Pas736727')

F&B Farms and Nursery

- Cool Wave® Blue Skies Spreading Pansy
- Cool Wave® Fire Spreading Pansy
- Cool Wave® Frost Spreading Pansy
- Cool Wave® Golden Yellow Spreading Pansy

Yoshitomi Bros. Inc.

- Pansy Top Wave™ 'Purple White'.
- Pansy Top Wave™ 'Marina'.
- Pansy Top Wave™ 'Elevation Mix'.

Dawn to Dusk. Dawn to Dusk took the stark contrasts of the Twilight collection, then removed the reds and pinks from the color palette. It has bright gold or sharp blue-white colors in the ruffles with purple or blue accents, and a dark face to highlight the contrast. “They’re pretty wild,” said Verhoeven of Peoria Gardens. “I’ve seen them in person. They’re very eye catching.”

“Elegance pansies brings that value and that more premium option and level to the pansy market,” said Newble of Tagawa Greenhouse, noting that they are exclusively available to consumers through independent garden centers. Tagawa Greenhouse is the U.S. licensee for propagation so growers who supply independent garden centers can buy Elegance plugs from Tagawa Greenhouse through their Ball Seed sales rep via WebTrack.

As Elegance captures market share and attracts new customers, those independent retailers are in a unique posi- »



Walla Walla Nursery Co. Inc. is one of the Oregon nurseries growing Elegance Antoinette Collection pansies which showcase pastel colors. PHOTO COURTESY OF WALLA WALLA NURSERY CO. INC.



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tion to use their expertise to create lifelong plant-lovers. “We need to have them go to garden centers,” Martin said, “where they can tap into that knowledge of the garden center employees so they become confident in their gardening.”

Walla Walla Nursery Co. Inc. is one of the Oregon nurseries growing Elegance pansies.

Momentum in the market

For color annual growers nationwide, demand for pansies remains consistently strong. “They’ve always been an important part of our mix,” Verhoeven said. “They’re one of the few annuals that is not just a spring annual but can be a fall annual as well.”

There are very few plants that perform well in the winter and provide vibrant, early spring color.

“Pansies are such a diverse plant, they can be used in containers, landscape plantings, cut flowers, and even for culinary practices too as the flower is edible,” said Josh Dick, marketing and project manager with Tagawa Greenhouse.

In 2026, several colors emerged as clear favorites. “Yellow has been the most popular color last year for us,” said Verhoeven. “Citrus colors are always really popular, yellow, orange, and white,” said Kondo. But the popularity of colors can also shift with the season.

“Yellow is a strong color but in November, you’re thinking more whites and blues,” Venzke said.

For her cut flowers business, Estrada said the Chianti shade has been the number one top-selling variety. With so many colors to choose from in fall of 2026 and spring of 2027, the color plant of choice

will certainly be pansy.

Pansies get more beautiful as temperatures drop and fill a critical gap in the color calendar. They are also diverse enough to create new colors, forms and uses. While the heavy-lifting mounding varieties brighten landscapes by the millions and hanging baskets draw enthusiastic customers, specialty series open new markets and spark the imagination for what is possible. After earning its place as a staple of the color market over many years, this tough little flower still has plenty of growing left to do. ©

Joshua LaPoint owns Standard Nursery and has a passion for writing as well as plants. Contact him at Josh@StandardNurseryCompany.com.

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A woman with short blonde hair, wearing a white sleeveless top with a black abstract pattern, stands in a greenhouse. She is smiling and looking towards the camera. The greenhouse is filled with long rows of young green plants in black trays, stretching into the distance under a translucent plastic covering supported by metal arches.

Highlighting women farmers

OAN spotlights essential roles that women play in the nursery industry

BY ERICA BROWNE GRIVAS AND JON BELL

The Oregon Association of Nurseries is proud to celebrate 2026 as the Year of the Woman Farmer, a designation from the United Nations, spotlighting the essential roles that women play in the nursery industry and the OAN.

“These women have helped shaped not only their businesses, but their leadership has helped shape the OAN and the Oregon nursery industry as well,” said OAN Executive Director Jeff Stone.

The United Nations designation underscores the roles that women play across agriculture around the world, from production to trade, while often going unrecognized. Woman farmers are central to food security, nutrition and economic resilience, the U.N. states. The U.N. hopes to raise awareness and promote actions to close the gender gaps and improve women’s livelihoods worldwide.

Meet five nurserywomen who exemplify the best that the Oregon nursery industry has to offer. »

Highlighting women farmers

Previous page: Kathy LeCompte is owner of Brooks Tree Farm (Brooks, Oregon) and was OAN president in 2000–01. Brooks Tree Farm specializes in conifer seedlings. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

Kathy LeCompte, Brooks Tree Farm

Kathy LeCompte didn't plan to spend a dime at the equipment auction. She'd come with her husband, Dave, for an overnight getaway. She planned to sit out the bidding in her truck — until she saw the perfect conveyor belt at a price too good to pass up.

By the end she bought nine more conveyor belts, plus a root-pruning table and processing equipment to outfit a new building they were building for their nursery, **Brooks Tree Farm**. Most farm buyers had little use for such specialized equipment, so she had little competition. She paid \$1,800 for a conveyor belt she estimated to be worth \$30,000.

One man, eyeing the belts afterward, asked if she'd sell him just one. "You mean one conveyor, or one set?" she asked — they only worked in teams of three. He hadn't known that.

LeCompte and her husband Dave started Brooks Tree Farm in 1980 after years as long-haul truckers moving mobile homes. When their son was ready to start school they needed steady hours — and roots.

Her parents, Delbert and Barbara Hupp, owned **Drake's Crossing** in Silverton and loaned them the equipment needed to launch the farm. The wholesale nursery specializes in conifer seedlings and shrubs native to the Pacific Northwest, used for Christmas tree operations as well as reforestation and restoration projects.

Growing tree seedlings required sourcing several sets of European field digging equipment, which can take weeks to months just to get replacement parts. Winter harvesting necessitated sandy soil

to keep tractors from getting stuck. In the Willamette Valley, this is hard to find, often in old stream beds, so they bought farms to secure the right conditions.

Now they sell between 5–7 million plants a year across eight "inconveniently located" farms.

Kathy has served as Oregon Association of Nurseries president, as well as other executive positions, and on numerous committees, winning numerous awards for her contributions to the industry. A two-time winner of the President's Five Star Award, she also won Young Nursery Grower of the Year and the Political Awareness Award. The nursery itself has received Outstanding Stewardship awards as well.

Yet in the early years, she was often underestimated. While at Oregon State University, a guidance counselor told her, "There really isn't room in the horticultural industry for women."

Early on, LeCompte called in a large fertilizer order — enough for the year — and recalled the rep asked if she had her husband's permission to place an order.

"I said, 'I don't think I need that.'"

Today, however, she said the picture for women in the green industry is much more promising.

"I honestly think it's neutral," she said. "There are so many talented women in our industry."

"It really is a perfect industry for women," she added. "There's so much automation now. There's so much need for technical knowledge. There's so much need for understanding of the physiology of plants — everything from being good at running an Excel spreadsheet to understanding, how lighting affects your plants. Women can do all that. That's a completely neutral experience." LeCompte's political involvement started with a simple observation: no legislator can know everything about every issue they vote on, from

taxes to the environment. If a decision was going to affect her business, she decided, it was on her to make sure lawmakers knew how. In 1986, immigration reform became a focus.

"I realized that the choices they're making were impacting me directly as a business owner. So, I decided, 'Well, I need to make sure that they know how their pending choice might be affecting me.' I would stay current on whatever I saw they were talking about, and if it looked important to me, I'd go down and testify."

She testified locally and in Washington D.C., providing President George Bush information on the issue.

"When no one else would do it," she ran for the Oregon House of Representatives in 2010 and 2012, each time losing by narrow margins.

"I always joke that the same people who didn't want me the first time still didn't want me two years later."

She urged every grower to get involved in their community. "If you care about your environment, if you care about your business, if you care about your taxation, if you care about any of the issues that legislators have to face — it's worth your while to tell them how it impacts you."

No political credentials are needed, she said — just a willingness to speak up.

"You don't have to be an expert. You can just say, 'I'm Susie from the block, and I'm concerned about how much my gas taxes are. I realize my roads need to be fixed, but I want you to know that you're hitting the spin button a little too often. And I'd like to see another solution be found to keep the potholes filled that don't involve raising our gas taxes any higher.'"

She found that just by persisting, she began to gain momentum.

"Anybody who shows up has an outsized influence. They really do."

"There are so many talented women in our industry. It really is a perfect industry for women."

— Kathy LeCompte
Brooks Tree Farm

Leigh Geschwill, F&B Farms and Nursery

After working in the “cutthroat” industry of lumber sales, Leigh Geschwill was delighted to discover the “warm and fuzzy” nursery industry when she married her husband, Fred, a nurseryman on a third-generation family farm.

Today, she is both owner and wholesale sales manager, along with Fred, his brother Bill and wife Heidi of **F&B Farms and Nursery Inc.** in Woodburn, Oregon.

Originally focused on field-grown strawberries and peas, the nursery shifted with the addition of the first greenhouse in 1997, selling retail. “Every generation has to add something,” she said. “This was a way to have our own income stream.”

The work was backbreaking at first. “It was everything by hand,” she said. “We were literally filling pots out of a wheelbarrow.” While they got started, she held another full-time job.

“About three years in we started to break out and do a little wholesale,” she said, where her lumber sales experience came in handy. Now, the nursery sells approximately 95% wholesale annuals, perennials, vegetables, herbs and potted flowering plants and hanging baskets.

Her role encompasses “all the mini hats you wear in a small business,” from sales management and logistics to production forecasting and variety/basket selection.

“So next year will be 30 years,” she said, “and while I wasn’t born into it, I think I can safely call myself a nurseryman.”

Geschwill said she finds the industry to be highly collaborative and never saw being female in the green industry as an issue — at least in Oregon. “I was driving our delivery truck until I was 5 months pregnant,” she said. “The only reason I stopped wasn’t because I felt that I physically had to stop, but I felt it could make people feel uncomfortable, you know, to see like some big pregnant lady get out of a truck.”

She said she has seen “rather interesting behavior ... that would not be acceptable here” in other parts of the country, but is impressed with the strength of networking >>

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Previous page: Leigh Geschwill is owner of F&B Farms and Nursery Inc. (Woodburn, Oregon) and was OAN president in 2015-16. Geschwill is also a past president of the Horticultural Research Institute.

PHOTO BY VIC PANICKUL

support for women in the industry.

Geschwill highlighted AmericanHort's programming at trade shows like Cultivate, offering a sit-down luncheon with a guest speaker, and Farwest's Women in Horticulture networking event.

She pointed to a recent, deliberate push in Oregon to widen that circle further — inviting more Hispanic members of the industry's workforce into the conversation, given the state's large Hispanic agricultural workforce.

"It's important to also make sure that we are representing some underserved communities, and getting them involved in that group," she said, noting F & B has several women in management and supervisory roles.

Geschwill served as OAN president from 2015-16, and this year, she concluded her term as president of Horticultural Research Institute, the research arm of AmericanHort. There, she remains active in reviewing research proposals —like a recent one exploring edible mucilage plants like chia and salvia to see whether effects on the soil microbiome are reflected in the human microbiome.

Looking ahead, she said, "There's a real acknowledgment among people in the industry that we need to have flexible tools for dealing with future problems — in particular, future pest and disease issues."

"I'm very concerned for our urban canopies," she added, believing they're at serious risk. Yet the approach, she said, needs to consider all the variables. "How do we manage these issues across our country so that we mitigate spread, but we don't negatively impact commerce?" she asked.

Likewise, she noted, "We don't want to bring a predator in for a pest that then becomes an invasive pest itself."

She also pushed back on blanket rules that ignore regional differences — even native plants can behave aggressively within their own range without posing a true ecological threat. "That all-or-nothing thinking," she said, "rarely benefits anyone in any part of society."

She's lived through the vagaries of the market, from recessions to the boom of the pandemic — and the lessons they offered.

"There's always some issue to be dealt

with," she said, "but what I remember more is that we always get through it."

If there was a positive to the pandemic, she said, "People like a victory garden, right? It was kind of like a rebirth, where we could grow our own food. I think it's empowering for people to know they are in

control of their own health and livelihood."

While she loves the work, it may be one of the best kept secrets in the employment world.

"We do an absolutely terrible job selling our industry. Like we're just not 'toot your horn' kind of people ... I think >>

The advertisement features a background image of a lush garden with various plants and flowers. At the top, there are three logos: Regence (a blue cross and shield), OREGON ASSOCIATION OF NURSERIES (a green circular logo with a plant), and LEONARD ADAMS INSURANCE (a blue circular logo with a building and the text 'EST. 1933').

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Previous page: Amanda Staehely is owner of Columbia Nursery (Canby, Oregon) and was OAN president in 2023-24. Staehely is also the GOP candidate to represent Oregon House District 18. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

nurserymen tend to be fairly humble.”

What keeps her at work every day? “You get a real connection with nature. You just feel like you’re part of the ecosystem.” And, she added, “There are very few industries where you really are in a unique position to, generally speaking, be part of a solution.”

Amanada Staehely, Columbia Nursery

If anybody has truly had the nursery industry as part of their destiny, Amanda Staehely is it.

Born and raised in Canby, Oregon, Staehely comes from a long line of family farmers. She had vegetable farmers on both sides of her family, and she grew up on a nursery owned by her father and grandfather. Her family lived in a home on the farm, as did her grandparents, and though she didn’t really work in the nursery growing up, it always surrounded her.

“We rode bikes through the greenhouses,” Staehely said. “I would help with the annual sales they had. I went to the Farwest Show. I even remember being really little and I would play in the lab while my mom was tissue culturing. That’s definitely how I grew up.”

Her fate was further sealed when she met her future husband, Wayne Staehely, in high school.

He’d grown up on a dairy farm in the area, loved plants and always wanted to have a nursery. Today, the couple owns and runs **Columbia Nursery LLC** in Canby, specializing in larger maples and conifers.

Yet despite all the signs pointing Staehely in the direction of nurseries along the way, another pursuit took her down a completely different path for a good part of her life: ballet.

From a young age, Staehely was a committed and highly successful ballet dancer. It was her passion, and it found her dancing with the New York City Ballet, the Houston Ballet and the Pacific Northwest Ballet. When she was a senior in high school, Staehely landed a professional contract with Oregon Ballet Theater, who she danced with for four years.

Then, during a practice, Staehely, 22 at the time, injured her ankle badly. She had to have reconstructive surgery. Her professional days were done.

“That ended the career,” she said. “It was something that was, obviously, devastating at the time. But looking back now, I was able to really help focus on getting things started here at the nursery, which led us to where we are now.”

Her ballet career sidelined, Staehely can still satisfy her creative cravings by teaching ballet at a local studio her aunt owns. After the injury, she fully committed to the nursery, the lifestyle and the industry. She and Wayne grew Columbia Nursery from a rented greenhouse to a rented piece of property to their current location, a former nursery they purchased in 2013 — the same nursery that had

inspired her husband to want his own someday.

“We had a newborn baby at the time and just jumped right into this,” Staehely said. “It was really fun to kind of come full circle and help make my husband’s ultimate dream from when he was little become a reality.”

At the same time Columbia Nursery was

coming into its own, Staehely began to get more involved with the nursery industry, including with the Oregon Association of Nurseries. She already knew people from other nurseries and made even stronger ➤

“I want to be able to advocate for and support a community that is so important to me.”

— Amanda Staehely
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Highlighting women farmers



Previous page: Darcy Ruef is chief financial officer of Al's Garden & Home (Woodburn, Oregon) and is president-elect of OAN. Al's Garden & Home is a retailer with 4 locations, but it also grows much of its own plants. PHOTO BY VIC PANICKUL

connections with folks who were eager to help other farmers any way they could.

"I believe that Oregon has the most superior plant products, and I think everyone here recognizes that and so they're willing to better the nursery stock and product around the state by helping everyone else," Staehely said. "Everyone is willing to put out a hand and help people."

After many years in the industry, including a stint as president of OAN, Staehely began to realize that many of the political powers that be weren't really in sync with nurseries. She felt that concerns over issues like labor, taxes, water rights, funding to fight Japanese beetles and others weren't being heard. She started to speak up across many levels.

"I just felt like it was one thing after the other that we were fighting or advocating for, and it was just like no one was listening," Staehely said.

Then, news came out that the state representative in Staehely's district, Rick Lewis, would be retiring. Seeing the opportunity, Staehely threw her hat into the primary ring last spring and won the Republican nomination. She's facing independent Roy Kaufman in the November general election.

"This is an opportunity to kind of be in there day in and day out and have a seat at the table," Staehely said. "I want to be able to advocate for and support a community that is so important to me."

Only November will tell if Staehely will prevail in her latest endeavor. In the meantime, she'll continue plowing ahead, focusing on her campaign, her nursery and the family she and her husband are raising on the farm.

They have three kids now, and already there are signs, as there were in her early days, that farming may be in their future. One daughter loves to help with pruning, and their oldest son, who's 12, has his own business where he grows blueberries on the farm and sells them at the local farmers' market.

"I think they love living on the farm," Staehely said, "and I can definitely see farming in their blood."

Darcy Ruef, Al's Garden & Home

"We enjoy, as Dad would always say, the 'bleeding edge,'" said Darcy Ruef, chief financial officer of **Al's Garden & Home**. "We are one of the vertically integrated grower retailers. We grow about 60% of the green goods that we sell through our four retail locations. We do wholesale some on the side, but mostly what we produce runs through our own retails."

That means growing two years ahead — a bet that doesn't always pay off. However, she said, "...we have a chance to affect the outcome on the retail side. If we're long on something, we can push it through the retail with a sale or some other form of promotion. It gives us the illusion of being in control when we're not."

Ruef, great-granddaughter of Al Bigej, founder of Al's, was actively looking for other work when life intervened. After college, "while I was looking for a job, my dad needed help with the business itself." Her father, Jack Bigej had bought out his brother and was short on employees.

"So, I just jumped on staff to help him out, and by the time I was offered another job, I no longer wanted it."

Her siblings, Dorothy Russo and Mark Bigej, lead growing and retail operations respectively.

As OAN's president-elect, Ruef takes office in November. She said she is interested to "know a little bit more about how the industry operates, getting to know more members of it, but also how the industry operates politically and how we can make changes in certain things that we need to have changed for our businesses."

Regarding her platform, she said, "Instead of being out there trying to grow

and make your business better, I feel like we are always on the defense, a little bit attacked, as far as, like, 'What's next? What's coming at us next?'"

Citing issues like the corporate activity tax, paid leave and increase in the minimum wage, she said "I feel like running a business is about treading water right now."

In Oregon, "The food prices are high, the gas prices are high — higher than other states, so it's been hard doing business the last few years in Oregon."

When her father was active in the OAN, she said, "The state was much more business friendly. It was easier to work across political parties."

Yet Ruef finds comfort in the work.

"Dad used to say, 'The fun of it isn't the money at the end of the day, it's playing the game,' and it's true. It's more fun just to bring products in, have new plants, plant stands, pots, whatever, and just to make the customers happy. It's so fun for us. And my sister and brother and I all are on the retail floor. And Dorothy's at the greenhouse pulling orders and stuff, so we can see all spring, so we can see what's coming in, see what's coming out and talking to customers, figuring out what they want, where the trends are, and we really, really enjoy that."

The collaboration among fellow growers also makes a huge difference.

"The nursery industry itself is an amazing industry of super nice people," she said. "Everyone's pulling for each other. There's not a sense of competition because if one does well, everyone does well. That part I think is unique in our industry and makes it all worthwhile ... Plus, the members help each other out, you know, if they're out of product, but they know a buyer is looking for something and they know their neighbor or a friend down the road has it, they'll definitely send them that way."

Ruef traced that collaborative spirit back, recalling a story about her father.

"When dad was running the business, a rose supplier wanted to charge him more money for the rose than what Fred Meyer had to buy it for at the time. So, Dad got a group of friends together that were all >>

Next page: Kristin VanHoose is owner of Amethyst Hill Nursery (Aurora, Oregon) and was OAN president in 2010-11. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

retailers and said, hey, let's put our order together. We'll buy it at a lower price. Pay it, and then we get to, we'll divvy up the roses and take them to our places and sell. And that started a co-op buying co-op." That became the Northwest Nursery Buyers Association (NNBA). "But it's not possible for us when we're out on our own. You know, sometimes it takes a village."

In addition to her parents, she counted Kathy LeCompte and Amanda Staehely as inspiring examples of industry leadership.

A favorite part of her daily work is the excitement of bringing new plants to market — "giving customers something a little more, a little better, a littler nicer."

At home in Mount Angel, Darcy and her husband Joe tend a home garden, along with 20 acres of pumpkins for retail sale. We're definitely digging in the dirt and enjoying what comes out of it.

Ultimately, what fuels her is "absolutely the people and what you can do together."

Kristin VanHoose, Amethyst Hill Nursery

In the late 1980s and early '90s, Kristin VanHoose had been on a pretty steady business track.

A native of the Tri-Cities area of Washington, she'd earned a B.S. in statistics and an MBA from Washington State University. She went on to work in finance for a few years and transportation

for a few more. VanHoose then got her accounting certificate from Portland State University in 1999 and was just about to sit for the Certified Public Accountant exam when she and her husband, David, stumbled onto something: a nursery for sale near the bucolic city of Aurora, Oregon.

"We had been looking for a business and had kind of landed on the idea of a tree farm," VanHoose said. "We were looking at land, and we're like, 'Oh, this just seems like a lot of work to start a business from scratch.' Then David just happened to read about this nursery for sale in the *Oregonian*, [a newspaper in Portland]. We went out on February 14, 1999, and walked around with the owners. And then we just kind of jumped off a cliff and bought it on June 1 of 1999."

Today, more than 27 years later, that nursery has grown into VanHoose Enterprises, the parent company of the

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wholesale **Amythest Hill Nursery** and the retail-focused Hydrangeas Plus. The company specializes in hydrangeas and boasts one of the largest selections in North America.

“Hydrangeas are one of the most popular plants,” VanHoose said. “People love them. They remind them of their family or their grandmother, their mom, their dad or their grandfather. They’re kind of an emotional plant that way. I’m still buying new varieties. I don’t know why I keep doing that

... but I think we’re up to 380, 390 different varieties now.”

While her husband largely focused on his career as an electrical engineer in Vancouver, [Washington,] VanHoose ran the nursery after the purchase, initially collaborating closely with the former owners, Art and Terri Bell, who’d originally founded it as Bell Family Nursery in the 1980s.

“We were lucky enough that they would come a couple times a week,” VanHoose said. “Art would come and we’d walk around doing all the outside stuff, the chemicals and irrigation. And Terri was really the hydrangea lover. We would do the inside stuff, and she’d help me with the pronunciation. I had all these flashcards so I could pronounce all the different hydrangea names.”

VanHoose was an early adopter of online selling, as far back as 1999. As the business grew, she also got more involved with the nursery industry in Oregon. She became active in the Oregon Association of Nurseries, first serving on committees, then taking on various officer roles until she

“I think sometimes we’re expected to be running the business and running our family and doing everything else that all of that involves.”

— Kristin VanHoose
Amythest Hill Nursery



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became president in 2010.

Those times were tumultuous ones for nurseries, which like many industries, had been hit hard by the Great Recession of 2007–09. That was also when *Phytophthora ramorum*, which causes sudden oak death, was first discovered in Southern Oregon. That discovery led to significant testing at nurseries and a pre-notification requirement for nurseries shipping trees and shrubs outside the state.

“It was really a damper to free trade and getting plants to their destinations,” VanHoose said, “but being the Oregon growers that we are, I think we really stayed ahead of the problem.”

As for the United Nations designating 2026 the International Year of the Woman Farmer, VanHoose said it’s nice anytime women are honored, particularly in industries that have traditionally been male dominated.

“I think sometimes we’re expected to be running the business and running our family and doing everything else that all

of that involves,” she said. “I do think it’s nice to be recognized, but I don’t know if the woman farmer is any different than women in any other industry.”

An avid reader who, surprisingly, loves to visit garden centers on her downtime, VanHoose said what she’s always enjoyed most about the nursery industry is the people who work in it.

“It’s just such a welcoming industry compared to others,” she said. “The people are just amazing. Even though they are your competitors, they’re still your friends.”

Owning a nursery also allowed VanHoose and her husband to be present in the lives of their children — two daughters and an exchange student from Europe who lived with them — as they grew up. They were able to volunteer in the community, take their kids to dance classes and soccer practice, and were otherwise just fortunate to be available for them throughout their young lives.

The kids are grown now, with the

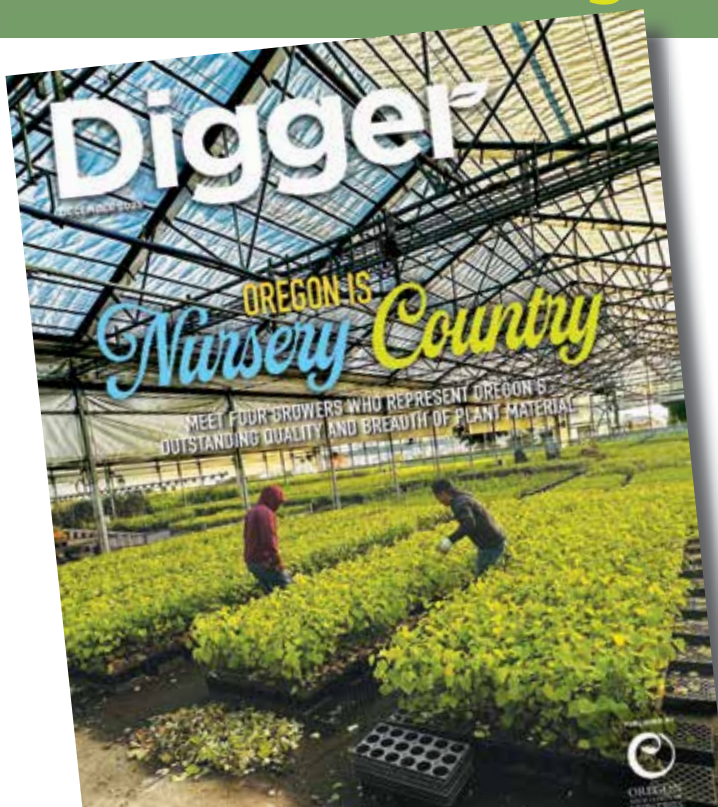
youngest finishing up college in the next year. They still come back to the nursery to help out on busy weekends, but whether any of them want to take it over in the future remains to be seen.

“I don’t think we’re going anywhere soon,” VanHoose said. “We’ve kind of built this up, and I would hate to just let it go. It’s possible one of the kids might be interested, but I don’t know if they realize how much work it is. I guess we’ve made it look so easy.” ☺

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.

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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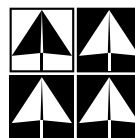
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A season of plants and people



The scale of the Farwest Show can be a little overwhelming to the uninitiated with rows of amazingly decorated booths, equipment and familiar nursery names vying for attention. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

What Farwest and IPPS reminded me about how horticulture moves forward

BY LLOYD NACKLEY

There is something fun about bringing people to their first Farwest Show.

The scale can be a little overwhelming to the uninitiated. The rows of amazingly decorated booths, oversized equipment, familiar nursery names everywhere, new introductions competing for attention,

educational sessions happening around the edges, and thousands of people who somehow all seem to know one another.

This year, watching our students take it all in reminded me of my own first walks through those aisles about a decade ago.

A lot can happen in 10 years. These days, Farwest feels increasingly familiar. I see old friends across the aisle, run into growers we have worked with on research projects, and inevitably spend more time talking than I planned.

But now I am noticing something else. Students who once came through our programs are showing up again, this

time as members of the industry. I was reminded of that when someone hollered my name across the show floor.

It was Tommy, a former Oregon State University student who had worked with us at the North Willamette Research and Extension Center four years earlier, through the ODA/OAN-sponsored internship program. I remember Tommy especially for the positive attitude he carried through a hot summer helping us establish a new research field.

The farm crew had generously left us a thick stand of pigweed and Canada thistle to begin with, and Tommy would >>

Growing Knowledge

drive up from Corvallis and diligently run the tiller, helping us reclaim the ground. His work paid off. That field went on to become home to the Climate Ready Landscape Plant demonstration garden and, today, The Great Tree Race. He came from an agricultural background, but not a nursery background. After he graduated, we lost touch.

Now here he was at Farwest. Tommy told me he had gone to work for a conifer grower in Marion County after graduation, and had since moved into a sales position with a nursery in the Washington County area. The student who had once been driving up from Corvallis to till our research plots was now walking Farwest as a nursery professional.

It was one of the highlights of the show for me this year.

And Tommy's story is hardly unusual. Walking through Farwest puts the passage of time in sharp relief. Many of the people running booths and businesses today are the children or grandchildren of people who helped build Oregon's nursery industry. Students become employees. Employees become managers. Businesses pass between generations. Once a year, much of that history ends up walking the same aisles.

Bringing in the interns

This year we brought another group of students to begin making some of those connections. Our NWREC interns — Eric, Brian and Lucy — attended their first Farwest. Their work experiences were supported by the Oregon Department of Agriculture in partnership with the Oregon Association of Nurseries through the nursery research program.

Other interns from OSU's horticulture programs were there as well, representing work in ornamental plant breeding, weed science, and landscaping. And they weren't there just to wander around looking at plants.

Students presented their internship experiences at the Solution Center and met people from across the industry. They also participated in NexGen, OAN's group for people who are new to the nurs-



Oregon State University students Brandon Spellman and Eric Whittier staff the university's booth at the Farwest Show. PHOTO BY LLOYD NACKLEY

ery and greenhouse industry or moving into the next stages of their careers. Our Ph.D. student, Zoie Yetley, participated in Career Boulevard, a newer Farwest feature designed to connect people with careers, internships, scholarships and employers across the green industry.

Zoie was able to talk with visitors about something most people outside of a university probably don't encounter very often: what it is actually like to be a graduate student studying nursery production.

Those opportunities matter. A student can learn a tremendous amount in a classroom, greenhouse or research plot, but an industry becomes much more tangible when you meet the people who make their living in it. Suddenly "horticulture" isn't a major printed on your transcript. It is growers, breeders, salespeople, researchers, propagators, equipment manufacturers and dozens of careers you might not have known existed.

Farwest also remains one of the places where our research gets out of the plots and into conversations with growers. Clint Taylor presented our work looking at arborvitae field-production optimization and how container production practices affect plant growth and water use.

Silvia Rondon, director of the Oregon Integrated Pest Management Center, discussed the work of the Oregon IPM Center and efforts to prevent pesticide resistance in nursery production. Luisa Santamaria discussed vascular streak die-

back, an emerging disease of woody ornamentals that growers and researchers are watching closely.

One thing I appreciate about presenting research at an industry meeting is that the conversation rarely ends when the slides do. Growers have observations from thousands or millions of plants that we could never reproduce at a research station. A researcher may have the microphone for 30 minutes, but often the interesting part begins afterward when somebody walks up and says, "Here's what we're seeing at our nursery."

That exchange is one of the reasons events like Farwest continue to matter.

Of course, there are also plants. The New Varieties Showcase is always worth a visit, and the judges had plenty to choose from this year. The official selections included a Best in Show and several Awards of Merit among the new introductions on display. But the judges had their favorites, and I had mine.

My unofficial awards went to two introductions from **Iseli Nursery**: Deja Blue blue spruce, and a variegated black mondo grass. Both were, in the technical language of plant science, *ice cold*. There were even puppies this year near Career Boulevard, available for adoption through a local animal shelter.

I told myself I wasn't going to write about the puppies. But they were very cute.

By Friday morning, after a long week, the show had relaxed a little. People were

catching up with friends, conversations lingered longer, and a few attendees were already wandering the aisles with tallboys of beer. Farwest is a trade show, an educational meeting, a marketplace and, by the end, something of a reunion. A few days later, I headed to Utah for a horticultural gathering that felt very different.

From green to gold

Traveling from Oregon's Willamette Valley to Salt Lake City for the International Plant Propagators' Society Western Region meeting felt like changing palettes. The greens and grays of western Oregon gave way to the yellows, blues and browns of the Wasatch Front.

The meeting changed scale, too. Farwest brings thousands of people through a convention center. IPPS brought together closer to a couple hundred plant people who spent several days listening

to one another, touring nurseries and gardens, riding buses together and talking about plants.

The distinction is hard to describe until you experience both. Farwest presentations often feel like teaching. IPPS presentations feel more like sharing. That's not to say one is better. They serve different purposes.

At IPPS, speakers come from within the group. Tours are woven into the meeting rather than being something that happens before it. The person speaking about propagation in the morning may be sitting beside you on the bus that afternoon. The organization's motto is "Seek and Share," and the meeting takes that pretty literally.

This year's meeting, organized by Boston Swan of Utah Valley University and others in the region, also reflected the landscape around us. Conservation, drought and plant adaptation kept surfac-

ing in conversations.

Utah is dealing with serious water challenges. We heard stories from multi-generational farmers who could remember a time when water reaching the Great Salt Lake was viewed almost as wasted water. Now the region is confronting the opposite problem: how to keep an iconic lake and unusual ecosystem from disappearing.

At the same meeting, attendees from Maryland described a completely different kind of climate stress. They had experienced early temperatures around 90 F, followed by temperatures below freezing. For some field-grown Japanese maples, the swing cost nearly an entire year of growth. Other crops had to be discarded. Different sides of the country. Different problems. Same uncomfortable reminder: plants don't get to grow under average conditions.

One presentation in particular stayed with me. Scott Skogerboe described a »



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lifetime spent searching the Intermountain West for unusual plants. He talked about traveling to isolated mountain ranges and little-explored peaks, including southern populations of bur oaks and native junipers, looking for individuals with unusual foliage, growth habits or other characteristics worth preserving. Finding an unusual plant is exciting enough for a group of plant people. But the larger idea was much more interesting.

Plant species have already survived extraordinary environmental change. Glaciers have advanced and retreated. Seas have risen and fallen. Landscapes have warmed, cooled and dried. Populations have become isolated, and in some of those refuges, distinctive genetics persisted. Those unusual populations may contain traits that helped plants survive conditions different from those experienced across most of their current range.

As we think about a warmer and less predictable climate, some of those genetics could become increasingly valuable. Horticulture has an opportunity not only to preserve that diversity, but to identify it, propagate it and bring useful plants into cultivation.

Gardens and seed

That idea followed us onto the IPPS tours. At Red Butte Garden and Arboretum at the University of Utah, our guide spoke about trees almost poetically. You could tell he didn't simply manage a collection. He cared deeply about the individual plants and the landscape they created. And what a landscape it was.

In the dry foothills above Salt Lake City, the garden felt like an oasis of large trees, flowing water, hidden benches and views across the valley. I confess to experiencing a little professional jealousy. It was the kind of university garden that makes you imagine what might someday be possible on your own campus.

Another tour showed us a completely different side of horticulture. At Granite Seed, we saw the scale of an operation required to collect, produce, clean, process, blend, sell and distribute seed across the West. The facility felt more like a fac-



In the dry foothills above Salt Lake City, Red Butte Garden felt like an oasis of large trees, flowing water, hidden benches and views across the valley. PHOTO BY LLOYD NACKLEY

tory than a nursery — warehouses, equipment and enormous quantities of seed moving through a vertically integrated system. Yet what ultimately comes out the other end are grasses and wildflowers.

If Red Butte showed what people can create with plants, Granite Seed showed some of the infrastructure required to put plants back onto western landscapes at enormous scale.

Different meetings, same industry

At Farwest, I found myself thinking about what can change in a decade.

At IPPS, I found myself thinking about what plants have survived over millennia.

The two meetings could hardly have felt more different. Farwest is big and energetic. IPPS is smaller and slower. But both reminded me that horticulture moves forward in much the same way.

A student attends her first trade show and discovers careers she didn't know existed. A former intern hollers at you across the aisle four years later, now building a career in the industry. A grower tells

a researcher what is actually happening in the field. A breeder puts an unusual plant in front of hundreds of people. Someone who has propagated plants for 40 years shares an observation with someone who has been doing it for six months.

Watching our students walk into Farwest for the first time this year, I remembered what those aisles looked like to me a decade ago. Someday, I suspect, some of these students will be the familiar faces across the aisle. They may be running nurseries, developing new plants, solving production problems or bringing their own students along for the first time.

The plants will change. The technology will change. The challenges certainly will. The important part is that we keep bringing new people into the conversation and keep sharing what we learn along the way. ©

Lloyd Nackley, Ph.D., is a professor at the Oregon State University North Willamette Research and Extension Center (NWREC) in Aurora, Oregon. Reach him at Lloyd.Nackley@OregonState.edu.



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A tale of two presidents

One of the tremendous blessings of being your executive director is to witness the emergence, growth and impact of our volunteer leaders.

OAN's leadership structure is different from those like the Oregon Farm Bureau; our president serves a single year. Prior to taking on their role, each president works their way up the seven-member executive committee serving in various roles.

The OAN will celebrate the industry, our accomplishments, meet our challenges head on at the upcoming Annual Convention, which will be held Friday–Saturday, November 6–7 at the Sunriver Resort in beautiful Central Oregon. There, we will swear in our new president, Darcy Ruef from **Al's Garden & Home**.

Darcy will be following two other family members to serve as president: her father, Jack Bigej (1993), and her brother, Mark (2017). Darcy is a terrific leader, and I am excited to see what the year brings for her.

But this column is not about Darcy and what is ahead. Rather, it is about two men who you would never think would become very close friends. This is a tale of two presidents — Ben Verhoeven (**Peoria Gardens**) and Patrick Newton (**Powell's Nursery**) — two family men who are special to me.

Paths to leadership

When leaders emerge, it is something to behold, and both Ben and Patrick have lent their personalities and skills to OAN. Within our organization, the chapters and committees serve as proving grounds for board leadership and service.

Ben and Patrick both distinguished themselves in very different ways.

Ben helped reorganize and galvanize the Retail and Greenhouse Chapters by combining their forces to lend value to those communities. His talents have been tapped numerous times, ranging from chapter revitalization to building our professional groups.

Change is often frowned upon, but Ben was resolute and inclusive, dissecting an issue and finding a solution. This is a character trait that he would continue at OAN.

Patrick took the committee route and matched his passion for the Farwest Show and the industry with his growing leadership.

We have heard chatter from members about how the show is not the same. Instead of assessing blame or throwing out excuses, Patrick went to work to take the show organizationally down to the studs and look for ways to make Farwest the best it can be. It is a great show and has value. It is also not something we deem immutable. Everything is being put on the table to rejuvenate it.

Taking on such a task can be thankless. That does not dissuade Patrick from pushing boundaries and attempting to unlock opportunities.

Differing political perspectives

To anyone who knows both men, to say that Ben and Patrick share political views would be downright laughable.

The tallest president in history and owner of Peoria Gardens in Albany, Ben is unapologetically (my definition) a progressive. He's a welcome counterweight to prevailing policy sentiments at the Government Relations Committee and board level — demonstrating how the association is solution focused and not solely partisan.

An Oregon City native and Forest Grove resident, Patrick came to the industry via marriage and has a strong conservative outlook. Here again, Patrick embraces the notion that it is better for the association to wield influence at the political level than be obstinate and be constantly angry over policy decisions by the state.

Progressive or conservative, the true middle ground that these two leaders exemplify is that they are committed to the success of the industry.

A trip to the Centennial State

Going on the road to represent Oregon is a privilege. Each year, the



Jeff Stone

western nursery associations of North America gather their executive directors and a select number of board members to talk issues, seek solutions for associations' improvement, and create relationships that transcend state or Canadian provincial borders.

Two years ago, Colorado was the destination, and both Ben and Patrick were on the trip. Sometimes you can't pick and choose when magic happens, but I can tell you that arriving five hours early on a Sunday and migrating to the nearest bar to watch NFL games did the trick.

It does not even matter what the name of the restaurant was. What does matter is seeing two leaders really get to know each other. Discussion of pet peeves, family, and making fun of their grumpy executive director yielded five hours of laughter and insight on who they are. This led to a three-day trip that built on itself from that moment and resonates today.

A friendship forged by OAN

Stop number two at the Farwest Show Pub Crawl, I witnessed the manifestation of a friendship that will be long-standing. Watching the interaction between Ben and Patrick, genuine affection and humor made this executive director well up with emotion.

This industry is special. The friendships created within our community are part of our DNA. The tale of these two presidents demonstrates friendships can go beyond the call of service of an association — it reveals the tremendous qualities of two exceptional men. ☺

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