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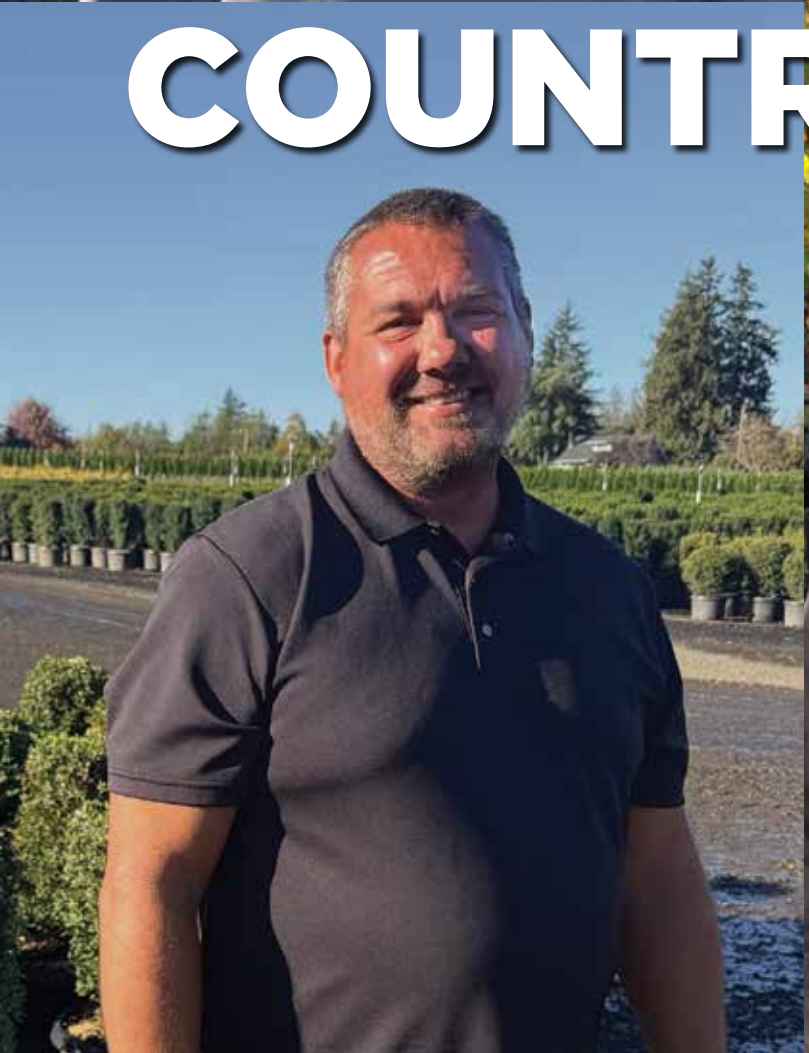
DECEMBER 2026

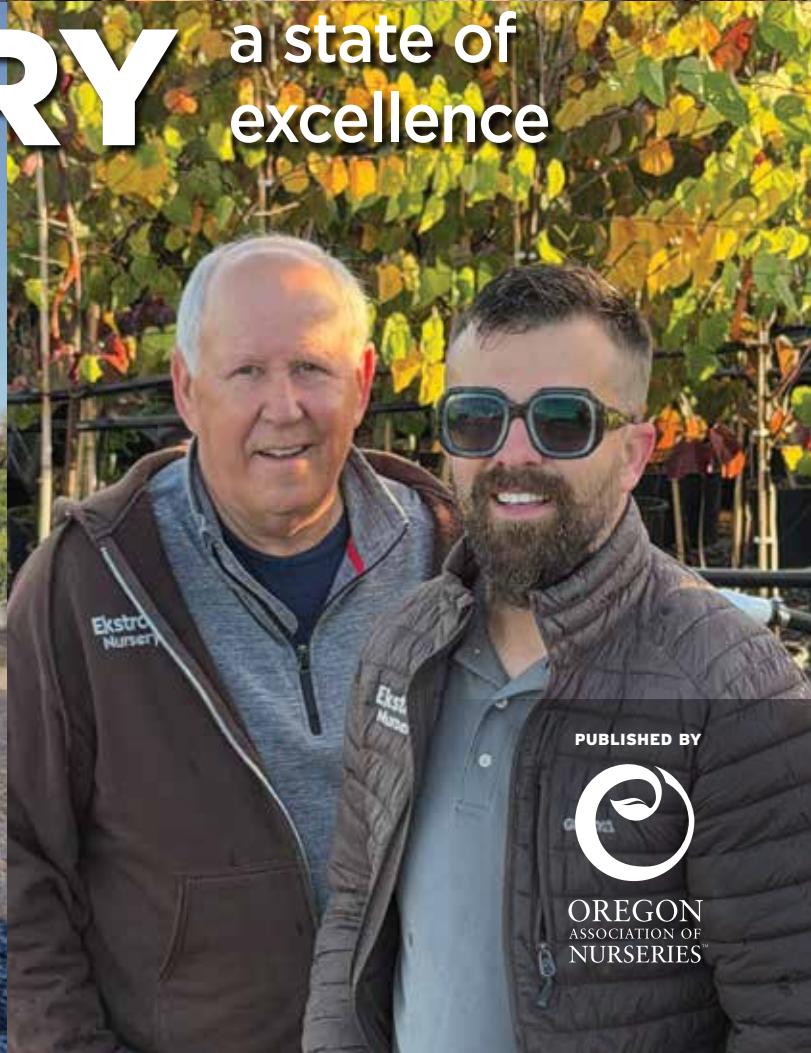




Oregon is NURSERY COUNTRY

Four growers who epitomize a state of excellence





PUBLISHED BY

OREGON ASSOCIATION OF NURSERIES™



According to Chad Sobella, garden centers, rewholesalers, and high-end landscapers from across the country come to Sobella Nursery with an idea of what they're looking for and he finds it. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

Sobella Nursery

A knack for finding unique plants from A to Z

BY EMILY HOARD

Chad Sobella is known for tracking down unique plants for his customers.

To do this, he developed a wide network of sources throughout his life. First, he grew up in a nursery family, then he worked at another nursery, and finally, he started his own growing and evolving business, **Sobella Nursery**.

The nursery specializes in conifers, deciduous shrubs, ornamentals, evergreens, Japanese maples (*Acer palmatum*), broadleaf evergreens and flowering trees.

"We have a great A to Z list from *Abies* to *Zelkova* with unique plants and commodity items all at one nursery," Sobella said.

Sobella said his nursery is known for the brokerage side of finding material. Garden centers, re-wholesalers and high-end landscapers from across the country come to Sobella with an idea of what they're looking for.

According to Daniel Kunkel, who works in sales at the nursery, long-term business relationships are often born from these inquiries.

"Chad and I will track that down and provide them with that needed plant," he said. "That opens up an entire catalog of what we do here and what we can bring »

AT A GLANCE

Founded: 2011
Owner: Chad Sobella
Known for: The brokerage side of his business, finding unusual and unique plants.
Contact: 10906 SE 232nd Ave., Damascus.
Phone: 503-828-7026
Email: Chad@sobellanursery.com
Online: sobellanursery.com
NurseryGuide.com: 279 listings



Chad Sobella at the nursery with his aughter, Camryn, and sidekick, Chase. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL



Trinidad Ramos trims boxwoods at Sobella Nursery. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

in. We build an interesting client base from that. Then they put in bigger and better orders when they see what we can do."

Lesa Stanley has done administrative work at Sobella for about four years, handling orders and paperwork. She said that Sobella gets many new customers from positive referrals from previous customers. They'll notice high-quality plants and ask where they came from.

"The quality gets them coming back," Stanley said.

Growing a reputation for quality

Sobella grew up working for his family's farm. He left the family farm in 2004 to work for **Patterson Nursery Sales** in Eagle Creek, Oregon, which was chiefly known for growing and brokering specimen trees. (Patterson was purchased by, and became part of, Devil Mountain Wholesale Nursery earlier this year.)

In 2011, he decided to start his own nursery. "I got tired of the grind, and I was a family guy, so I wanted my own hours," Sobella said.

He rented some land with a loading dock from his parents' business.

"I started making cold calls and taking pictures of plants and started offering those plants to those customers during the cold calls," Sobella said. "I offered my service of finding unique and different things. And it slowly grew into what it is today."

After a few years, Sobella Nursery grew out of the rented Sobella Farms space. About 10 years ago, Sobella bought his own 40-acre property in Damascus and moved the operation there.

Over the last two years, the nursery has seen an upswing in sales, Kunkel said. He has worked at Sobella Nursery for that long, after spending five years at **Eshraghi Nurseries LLC**.

"I brought business with me from other nurseries I've been at before," Kunkel said. "Working at Sobella, I work with my crews and office staff but also 25 different nurseries that we contract with or pull in from other nurseries. My understanding and networking have greatly improved."

Kunkel said he's learned about the strengths and weaknesses of the nurseries he works with.

"Chad's and my job is to understand that and be prepared for it and get ahead of certain issues," Kunkel said. "There are guys that know us so well, and we have a great relationship. It's almost automatic that they know what we need and they work to get it for us.

"The partnerships have developed and reinvigorated my interest in nursery work."

Kunkel works on procuring plant material within an ever-changing market. He said Sobella Nursery has the opportunity to bring in new plants that are out of the ordinary.

For Stanley, the nursery's variety and quality of the plants stands out, as well as the customer service.

"We are always willing to help in any way as far as shipping and getting things organized for the customer," she said. "That is what brings them back and keeps them staying."

Sobella said he sees the success of his nursery in its growth, in the quality of all the local Oregon growers he works with as vendors, and in his staff of four people in the office and 25 outside.

Employee retention is also a marker of success. "We have folks who have been here 10 years, all the way to me at two years," Kunkel said. "People stick around, it's a good environment."

According to Stanley, Sobella prioritizes good customer relationships. "He's always willing to work with the customer, making things right how we need to, so it's been a great place to work for sure," Stanley said.

The nursery's plant list is ever-changing, offering interesting opportunities for

staff to learn about new plants. Some of what they source comes from other Oregon nurseries. "There's always something to learn here, and new growers that keep things going," Kunkel said.

Challenges

Sobella said every year is a little different. While the nursery has faced labor issues at times in the past, that's not an issue at the moment.

Stanley said the main challenge right now comes from high gas prices.

"When gas prices go up, that affects the shipping, so now customers are a little more willing to wait it out," Stanley said. "We do our best to check with each one of our sources for who can give the best pricing at the time. It's a matter of talking to each broker and seeing what they can do and what timeframe is better. It changes daily, so they'll say, 'Oh, just wait a week,' and it makes a difference."

In addition to the rising shipping costs, Kunkel said the labor costs and plant healthcare costs like fertilizer are also high.

"Our rising costs mean rising costs for our consumer," Kunkel said. "Most nurseries have taken a slower approach to stocking their yards, with just enough of what they need to sell, because there's not as large of a demand from the consumer."

He said it's a question of balancing plant love with plant cost. He said Sobella works to put out the best quality products possible, to keep the end consumers happy.

"We keep it free of disease and put our best foot forward and hope for the end consumer to be satisfied and build more orders," Kunkel said.

For the future, Sobella plans to just keep moving forward and just keep working.

Stanley added that the nursery plans to keep growing its customer base in different areas.

"Once you establish a new customer, they tell all their sources, so you get that tree limb of each customer you can reach and they'll reach all their customers as well," Stanley said.

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Looking ahead

Kunkel said the future is very bright for Sobella.

"We've got a good team here and things are on the uptick so we'll see more success, more stability and growing to whatever we decide to do," Kunkel said. He said he visits customers and sees the challenges they face and how to work with them.

He likewise encourages customers to visit Sobella to see how they're operating.

"Relationships based on trust and knowledge are where our success is going to lie," Kunkel said. "We'll keep doing what we're doing, and success will follow."

Emily Hoard is an Oregon-based freelance journalist covering business, environmental and agricultural news. She has a background in community reporting and a master's degree in multimedia journalism. You can reach her at **HoardE123@Gmail.com**



Nelson Arango organizes an order in preparation for shipment. PHOTO BY VIC PANICHKUL

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