



● ABOUT:
Breeder, grower and intellectual property manager of perennial and annual plant introductions.

● KEY EMPLOYEES:
Lab Manager **Harini Korlipara**, Lead Traditional Breeder **Janet Egger**, Director of New Products Development **Chuck Pavlich**, Sales Manager **Larry Finley**

● EMPLOYEES:
110 full-time

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● TRADE SHOWS:
Farwest Show, Cultivate'18, California Spring Trials, and others

● NurseryGuide.com

Previous page: Terra Nova Nurseries Inc. owners Lynne Bartenstein, Dan Heims, Ken Brown and Jody Brown. **PHOTO BY CURT KIPP** **This page:** Top: Terra Nova has introduced heucheras in a rainbow of colors. Bottom: The nursery propagates its plants in a tissue culture lab and is able to push out new introductions quickly as a result.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TERRA NOVA NURSERIES INC.

Terra Nova Nurseries Inc.

Founded: 1992 by Ken and Jody Brown, Dan Heims and Lynne Bartenstein

SOME COMPANIES ARE VERY aptly named, but few more so than Terra Nova Nurseries Inc. The Oregon-based tissue culture propagator and grower of annuals and perennials has been breaking *terra nova* — that is, new ground — throughout its 25-year history with its innovative breeding, marketing, propagation and licensing efforts.

The nursery's greatest claim to fame may have been earned for popularizing new *Heuchera* varieties that emphasized foliage, not flowers.

"Dan Heims put *Heuchera* on the map," said managing owner Ken Brown, who shares ownership with Heims and their two spouses, Jody Brown and Lynne Bartenstein. "He called it the leaf show."

However, Terra Nova is also is the world's most prolific breeder of new *Coleus* selections, and has introduced numerous new selections of *Tiarella*, × *Heucherella*, *Echinacea*, *Agastache*, *Coreopsis*, *Sedum*, *Kniphofia*, *Penstemon*, *Nepeta* and *Leucanthemum*.

"There are so many plants we put on the map," Heims said.

The company holds more than 700 active plant patents in the United States and Europe, and has introduced 1,011 new plants, including some developed by others. To drive this pace of constant innovation, the nursery has invested more than \$1 million annually in plant research and development, and built a team of top-notch in-house breeders. Chuck Pavlich, Janet Egger, Harini Korlipara, Gary Gossett and Robert Jansen have all earned patents for the company, in addition to Dan and Ken.

"We're one of the only perennial breeders in Oregon, and we're one of the largest perennial breeders in the world," Ken said. "We have licensees on every continent except Antarctica."

Royalty revenue makes up one-third of the company's earnings. The rest comes through selling the plants that Terra Nova Nurseries grows in its labs and greenhouses. The nursery produces 700 varieties and ships 3 million stage-three tissue culture plants every year, along with 5–6 million liners.

The nursery sells to all sectors of the green industry, including wholesale growers, plant brokers, chain stores, independent garden centers, mail order nurseries, collector nurseries and specialty companies.

From the beginning, Terra Nova has refrained from genetic modification of plants and has not used plant growth regulators to alter the final product.

"We wanted to actually sell what the customer was going to get," Ken said. "We wanted to make sure a Terra Nova plant was going to do what we said it was going to do."

Serendipitous beginnings

Although Terra Nova Nurseries Inc. was founded in 1992, the company's roots go back much farther. Both Ken and Dan grew up in plant-loving households. Ken's mom was a botanist and Dan's was a gardener. One could say their mothers bred a love of plants into their sons, especially for house plants. In young adulthood, both amassed enormous collections.

In the 1970s, the two first met at a meeting of the Indoor Light Gardening Society in Portland. Not long after, Ken was speaking with a coworker, Lynne Bartenstein, at Oregon Health & Science University, where both worked in a research laboratory.

Lynne would bring unusual plants to work. "I got this from my boyfriend, Dan," she said one day.

"Dan ... Heims?" Ken said.

A friendship soon formed between Dan, Ken, Lynne and Ken's girlfriend and future wife, Jody. Although they attended each other's weddings — Dan and Lynne in 1978 and Ken and Jody in 1981 — the two couples lost track of each other.

They reconnected years later when Ken and Jody attended a meeting of the American Hosta Society, where Dan was president. Without this chance meeting, Terra Nova might never have existed. "There has been a lot of serendipity," Dan said.

Dan and Lynne invited Ken and Jody to their beach house, where Dan casually



The display garden at Terra Nova Nurseries Inc. attracts visitors from far and wide to see the grower's many colorful introductions.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF TERRA NOVA NURSERIES INC.



mentioned he'd been thinking about integrating a plant breeding company with a tissue culture company. It was a way to bypass the limitations of traditional plant division. "The potential was so extreme," Dan said.

Meanwhile, Ken and Jody had been looking for a business opportunity. This was it.

All four friends had talents to contribute. Ken had a degree in microbiology and worked in quality control as an analytical chemist for Armour Foods. "Laboratory stuff was easy for me," he said.

Lynne, also a microbiologist, had lab experience. Dan was a skilled all-around plantsman and owner of a landscaping business, Terra Green. Jody was skilled in business, working in the corporate accounting office for Coca-Cola. "It was a great confluence of skills," Lynne said.

On that basis, Terra Nova Nurseries Inc. was formed as an equal partnership. Each member took on a particular role.

Ken became the managing owner. Dan became president and the company's main interface with retailers. He took on public speaking engagements to promote the business.

Jody took charge of accounting and financial management. Lynne served as contract manager.

Terra Nova's first step was to create a tissue culture lab. "We couldn't get a building, because when you start you have nothing," Lynne said.

Ken and Jody made a makeshift lab in a spare bedroom of their home, but needed something bigger. The answer was to build a lab in the their backyard. "I had friends help with the foundation and had family and friends help build it," Ken said.

This gave them a place to propagate plants in tissue culture, but not a place to grow them into liners.

"We couldn't afford greenhouses," Ken said. "As I started to make plants in the lab, Dan had a friend with a basement below a mystery book store called Murder by the Book."

They set up grow lights in that basement. The access was bad and

there was no parking, but they made it work by accessing the facility very early or late in the day.

"We were thrifty," Jody said. "We used everything we could get our hands on, including recycled items like the meat racks from Armour Foods. We still have those racks in our greenhouse facility."

All four members of the corporation kept their day jobs as they launched the business.

In no time, Terra Nova was rolling out new plant introductions.

Heuchera 'Snowstorm' and *H.* 'Plum Pudding' were a couple of the company's early hits, giving the company early income and momentum. These were quickly followed by three patent applications Dan wrote at the end of 1993, for *Pulmonaria* 'Excalibur', *H.* 'Chocolate Ruffles' and *H.* 'Pewter Veil'. They were granted in late 1994.

Years of growth

By 1995, the day jobs were history. In fact, Terra Nova was doing well enough to purchase a 2.5 acre nursery at Macksburg, an unincorporated community south of Canby, Oregon. This site would become the company's headquarters, and it greatly expanded the company's production capabilities.

Steady growth continued, as did continuous breeding of new plants. Terra Nova pushed the new introductions out to the public with innovative strategies, including sending out sample plants to influencers, launching a website with extensive plant photos and information, and publishing themed yearly catalogs with photo CDs tucked into the back.

As Dan has often said, "If you don't have a picture, you don't have a plant."

The company expanded again in 2001 with the purchase of a 5-acre parcel on Dryland Road, a stone's throw from the Macksburg property. An adjacent 5-acre parcel was added in 2003, and a new tissue culture lab was built on the Dryland property in 2006. Growth was continuous.

"For the first 15 years, we sold

everything we could make," Ken said.

As a result, the owners of Terra Nova decided to start licensing their introductions to other growers in the United States. It was a way to keep market share and allowed the company to reduce freight costs, particularly to the East Coast.

"If you don't have a way to get it there, you don't have a plant, either," Ken said.

The company expanded its tissue culture lab in 2011, and in 2013, the company began selling stage-three starts to licensees. These are starts grown from tissue culture that have grown large enough to be placed in soil by the customer.

Terra Nova continues to introduce new plants. Their 25th anniversary catalog, published in 2017, highlighted 32 new selections. Also recently introduced are the *Heuchera* Forever™ series, which includes very bright and deep hues, and the ultra-hardy *Heuchera* Northern Exposure™ series, which are highly rust resistant.

The company has also been pushing out heucheras with more prominent blooms to go with the richly colored leaves. "We've been putting it all together, the foliage and the flower," Dan said.

Global reach

As far back as 1995, the company expanded overseas with European labs. Now the company has licensee relationships with partner labs in China, New Zealand, Indonesia, Costa Rica and Vietnam, and is also working with unrooted cutting farms in Africa and Central America.

The global relationships Terra Nova must manage due to the nature of its business are numerous and complicated, but constant breeding innovation remains key to the nursery's success. It's how the company stays ahead of competitors who are constantly trying to best them.

"We have to introduce something better every year or the copycats will take our market share," Brown said. ☺