

# Digger

MARCH 2018

## HOUSEPLANTS

**Demand  
on the rise**

**PAGE 15**

**Tips for  
retailers**

**PAGE 18**

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## 15 A houseplant awakening

Growers and retailers are tapping into a renewed interest in indoor houseplants. For them, deciding what products will meet customer demands takes a bit of study. Many of them are making those choices in smart, interesting ways.

## 18 Houseplant sales tips

Ten helpful tips for business owners who wish to target customers looking to buy and maintain their own indoor houseplant haven.

## 13 When simplicity beats creativity

Sometimes being too creative with your marketing messages can work against your goals.

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**On the cover:** Houseplants are creatively display at Cornell Farms in Portland, Oregon.  
**On this page:** (Left) Unique options for a miniature garden and (right) colorful tropical plants entice customers at Al's Garden & Home in Sherwood, Oregon. Photos by Dawn Hummel.



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*Digger* magazine is an official publication and a member service of the  
Oregon Association of Nurseries, 29751 S.W. Town Center Loop W.,  
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Domestic subscriptions are complimentary to qualified U.S. nursery  
industry members. Non-qualified U.S. subscriptions are \$42. Qualified  
foreign subscriptions are \$35 to Canada; \$45 to Mexico; and \$80 for  
all other countries. Single copy rate is \$6 while supplies last. Notify  
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# Christmas is here

From the looks of this title, you may be wondering if it's a misprint or if December's article somehow crept its way into the wrong issue. By now, even the discounted holiday decoration aisles have all been put away, right?

It's not a mistake. For many of us in the nursery business, March is harvest time. Or, as we say at our early spring staff safety meetings: "Get ready, Christmas is here!"

Of course, any new team members are a bit confused and probably making a quick glance at the calendar, but sooner rather than later they begin to understand. Hopefully, they don't look at my calendar. I've chicken scratched "Christmas" on March 1 for years.

As growers, we spend months on end getting all of our plants ready for market — planning, planting, pruning and grinding away, day in and day out. Retailers engage in a similar amount of planning, purchasing and projects, so everything is ready for customers to come pouring into the parking lot when the sun starts to shine.

It's honestly pretty grueling work. It's easy to lose sight of why we do it all when we're in the middle of an unpleasant task, like applying pesticides at 1:30 a.m. on a warm August night, or repainting the customer bathrooms on a wet and cold January day.

But then, one day we get up to a distinctive noise that isn't exactly sleigh bells or reindeer hooves on the roof, but it's equally magical. It's the sound of semi-trucks roaring into our docks and driveways. We are somewhat abruptly reminded of why we've been doing what we've been doing all year long.

Christmas is here!

As an industry, we spend a lot of time producing plant material — often years. When it's time, we carefully select the orders, pack the plants and trees neatly into trailers and ship them to destinations near and far. The plants are then unloaded and matched up with the perfect customer. It's a monumental effort that everyone in our industry takes part in each season.

We quickly become absorbed in the fervor of the "holiday" itself, scrambling for more supplies, more labels, more trucks and more labor. More, more and more. It's good fun work and there's so much urgency that the days quickly fly by.

Should we run out of plants or supplies, it's time to check OAN *Nursery Guide* and [www.nurseryguide.com](http://www.nurseryguide.com) for countless listings of the usual and the obscure. The book and website are an indispensable resource for the buyer and the seller. So sellers, be sure to get your plants listed. And buyers? Keep your *Nursery Guide* handy.

And grab your coffee, your raingear, and maybe hum an out-of-season tune, because our industry is going to be busier than the North Pole for the next few months.

Cheers to a great shipping season! ☺



Josh Zielinski  
OAN PRESIDENT

**We are somewhat abruptly reminded of why we've been doing what we've been doing all year long.**



# Calendar

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

## MARCH 1

### ONF SCHOLARSHIP APPLICATIONS

Do you know any high school, college or graduate students who are considering a career as a nursery or landscape professional? If so, tell them March 1 is the last day to apply for one of the 19 different Oregon Nurseries Foundation scholarships. Awards range from \$500 to \$1,500, and are sponsored by individuals and OAN chapters. For more information, log on to [www.oan.org/onf](http://www.oan.org/onf), or contact Stephanie Weihrauch at 503-582-2001 or [sweihrauch@oan.org](mailto:sweihrauch@oan.org).

## MARCH 2

### PLANT NERD NIGHT

Start your garden season off with Mike Darcy's annual Plant Nerd Night, brought to you through the support of The Hardy Plant Society of Oregon, as well as the Friends of the Rogerson Clematis Garden and the Salem Hardy Plant Society. Six regional specialty nurseries will offer previews of new or favorite plants, many of which will also offered for sale at the event. Doors will open at 6 p.m. on March 2. Presentations run 7-9 p.m. at Lake Bible Church, 4565 Carman Drive, Lake Oswego, Oregon. Visit [www.hardyplantsociety.org/plant-nerd-night](http://www.hardyplantsociety.org/plant-nerd-night) for more information.

## MARCH 3

### BEEVENT POLLINATOR CONFERENCE

Registration is open for the fourth annual Pollinator Conference, hosted by Linn County Master Gardeners. The event will take place from 8 a.m.-5 p.m. March 3 at the Linn County Fairgrounds in Albany, Oregon. Three lectures will take place, reviewing how to help pollinators, nurture mason bees and suggestions for creating an environment for native pollinators in your yard. Cost is \$30. More info [www.linnmastergardeners.com/tickets.html](http://www.linnmastergardeners.com/tickets.html)

## MARCH 18

### FRUIT PROPAGATION FAIR

The Home Orchard Society will host the 42<sup>nd</sup> annual Fruit Propagation Fair from 10 a.m.-4 p.m. at the Clackamas County Fairgrounds (694 NE 4th Ave., Canby, Oregon). The event will showcase hundreds of varieties of apples, pears, cherries, plums, persimmons, grapes, kiwis, figs and much more. Admission is \$5 for members (family \$10); \$7 for non-members (family \$12); and free if you join the society at this show. Please visit [www.homeorchardsociety.org](http://www.homeorchardsociety.org) for more details.

## MARCH 28

### GRIFFIN-OAN GROWER WORKSHOP

Join Griffin and the OAN Retail & Greenhouse chapters for a unique technical workshop



## MARCH 31

### NEW VARIETIES SHOWCASE DEADLINE

Submission forms are due for the 2018 New Varieties Showcase. Eligible plants must be new to the market for 2018 or 2019, have different attributes than plants currently on the market, and be in production and offered for sale by a 2018 Farwest Show exhibitor. Download the form at [www.farwestshow.com/nvs.shtml](http://www.farwestshow.com/nvs.shtml). For more information, contact Kristen Rae Urban, OAN event and education manager, at 503-582-2011, or [kurban@oan.org](mailto:kurban@oan.org).

opportunity, hosted at Al's Garden & Home of Sherwood, Oregon. The first of two half-hour training presentations will review different insect pests that trouble growers and how to make smart pesticide decisions. The second session covers the latest strategies for foliar disease control. The workshop begins with a social hour at 5 p.m., and ends with a 7:30 p.m. raffle drawing. All event proceeds support the OAN Scholarship Fund. Register by March 21 and submit your \$25 attendance fee by going to [www.oan.org](http://www.oan.org) under "Events."

## MARCH 31

### WAZA TO KOKORO

The Portland Japanese Garden is offering a beginner level *Waza to Kokoro: Hands and Heart* seminar September 20-27. The 12-day, stonework-focused program is for professionals in garden design, construction, and maintenance who wish to learn the skills and techniques for creating and stewarding traditional Japanese gardens. Register before March 31. For more information, please visit [www.japanesegarden.org/thecenter](http://www.japanesegarden.org/thecenter)

## APRIL 3

### OAN NURSERY GUIDE DEADLINE

Listings are due for the 2018-19 OAN Nursery Guide. This 360-plus-page book is the gold standard for finding the plants, products and services you want to buy — and letting people know what you want to sell. Only OAN members may submit listings, and each member receives one free listing. To submit listings, log on to [www.NurseryGuide.com](http://www.NurseryGuide.com). If you need your username, password or

other assistance, call 503-682-5089 or email [nurseryguide@oan.org](mailto:nurseryguide@oan.org). For display advertising, contact Blair Thompson, OAN advertising manager, at 503-682-5089 or [ads@oan.org](mailto:ads@oan.org).

## APRIL 7

### GARDENPALOOZA

More than 45 local nurseries and garden art vendors will showcase thousands of plants, tools and outdoor décor at the Spring Gardenpalooza, a one-day gardening event. Festivities will take place 8 a.m.-4 p.m. Saturday, April 7 at Fir Point Farms in Aurora, Oregon. Admission is free. For information about exhibiting, contact Jeff and Therese Gustin at 503-793-6804 or [www.gardenpalooza.com](http://www.gardenpalooza.com).

## APRIL 7

### SOIL SCHOOL

This day-long workshop includes multiple sessions on a wide variety of topics, including soil structure/testing, principles of soil health, permaculture, planting hedgerows for pollinators, rebuilding soils, sustainable landscape design, plant problem diagnosis and non-chemical pest management. Registered landscape professionals who attend can receive certificates from the Oregon Landscape Contractors Board for continuing education hours. Soil School is held at the Portland Community College Rock Creek Event Center and sponsored by West Multnomah Soil & Water Conservation District, Tualatin Soil and Water Conservation District and OSU Extension. The cost to attend is \$30, with online register available at [www.wmswcd.org/soil-school](http://www.wmswcd.org/soil-school).



# Northwest News

OAN members and chapters are encouraged to send in relevant news items, such as new hires, new products, acquisitions, honors received and past or upcoming events. Email [news@oan.org](mailto:news@oan.org).



Josh and Chris Robinson, owners of Robinson Nursery in Amity, Oregon, visit with Rep. Karin Power (D-Milwaukie) during OAN Lobby Day on February 13.. PHOTO BY CURT KIPP



## Northwest Farm Credit Services creates fund to support OAN events

Northwest Farm Credit Services has created a \$3,000 sponsorship fund to help support programs and events put on by OAN chapters. Each chapter is initially eligible to apply for up to \$400 to help support one event that is beneficial for members. This first round of applications is due May 31. After that date, chapters may apply for additional funds to support additional events, provided there is still money available.

The sponsorship program is part of the overall plan to strengthen OAN chapters. Further steps will be considered and addressed as part of the Chapter Revitalization Task Force which has been created and will meet this year.

Chapter leaders have been provided with the application form. Those interested in applying for money from this Northwest Farm Credit Services sponsorship fund may contact OAN Director of Events Allan Niemi at [aniemi@oan.org](mailto:aniemi@oan.org), 503-582-2005 or FAX 503-582-5099, with any questions.

## MEMBERS VISIT LEGISLATORS FOR LOBBY DAY

About a dozen OAN members, including OAN President Josh Zielinski and Government Relations Committee Chair Leigh Geschwill, took to the State Capitol on Tuesday for Lobby Day. They had face-to-face discussions with legislators about issues affecting their businesses and the green industry as a whole.

The afternoon began with a group meeting with House Speaker Tina Kotek (D-Portland), followed by Senate Minority Leader Jackie Winters (R-Salem) and Sen. Chuck Thomsen (R-Hood River). This was followed by smaller groups visiting legislators in their offices.

As always, the lack of available labor was the top issue mentioned by nursery and greenhouse operators. The cumulative impact of multiple employer mandates from the Legislature, including wages, family leave, predictive scheduling and taxes, was also a primary concern. Growers also mentioned water needs, freight movement and the possible impact of climate change legislation if not done thoughtfully.

Lobby Day helps legislators understand the real issues that growers are facing in the nearly \$1 billion, traded-sector nursery industry, which contributes greatly to Oregon's economy.

Thanks to a constructive and issue-oriented approach, the OAN enjoys positive relationships with legislators on both sides of the aisle.

## OAN WATCHES BILLS BY LAND, SEA AND AIR

Aside from cap and trade, there are 274 bills active in the 2018 Oregon Legislature, which convened Monday, February 5. Of these, about 70 are being tracked by the Oregon Association of Nurseries. Members of the OAN Government Relations team are doing their best to ensure the bills help the nursery industry, or at least don't harm it.

"We are watching bills on water storage transfers, land use exceptions and air quality regulations, and we are poised to make sure those bills do not impact nursery owners," OAN contract lobbyist Elizabeth Remley said. "The land use and water bills ask the legislature to bypass the standard process for establishing urban growth boundaries or transferring water rights. That would set a bad precedent and could open those policies to more detrimental changes down the line. The air quality legislation could mean additional burdensome regulations on the appropriate use of pesticides."

OAN members can check Member Update emails for the session's developments. >>

**CHINA ASSIGNS 60,000 SOLDIERS TO PLANT TREES, FIGHT AIR POLLUTION**

The People’s Republic of China is deploying its army in the fight against air pollution by assigning some 60,000 soldiers to tree-planting duty, according to a report by *The Independent* (London, U.K.).

The world’s most populated nation is attempting to plant at least 32,400 square miles with trees this year — an area about the size of Ireland — and eventually raise its forest coverage from 21 percent of its landmass to 23 percent by 2020 and 26 percent by 2035.

The article didn’t indicate where the trees will be sourced, but China has long been interested in Oregon plant material, and a number of Oregon growers are active in the Chinese market. Read the article at [tinyurl.com/yclrmucr](http://tinyurl.com/yclrmucr).

Reduction of air pollution is among the tree and plant benefits promoted by the OAN’s *Plants Make Life Better* campaign. For downloadable materials promote the use of plant material, visit [www.PlantSomethingOregon.com/pmlb](http://www.PlantSomethingOregon.com/pmlb).

**NEW HAZELNUT NAMED FOR POLLY OWEN**

**Polly Owen**, former director of the Hazelnut Industry Office at Oregon State University, will soon have a new cultivar named after her to honor the service she provided to the hazelnut growing industry.

Named PollyO, OSU’s new variety is an Eastern filbert blight-resistant tree bred by Shawn Mehlenbacher. PollyO is a large cultivar that produces hazelnuts that mature up to two weeks earlier than those of the Barcelona variety, and yield more nuts per tree than both Jefferson and Yamhill trees. Best suited for farmers in the kernel market, PollyO is compatible with McDonald, Wepster, and York varieties, working as a new ‘pollinizer’ tree that leads to decent yields and high-quality nuts.

To read the more, visit *Capitol Press* website by going to [tinyurl.com/yc2dz325](http://tinyurl.com/yc2dz325).

**OAN WELCOMES NEW STAFF MEMBER KELSEY HOOD**

**Kelsey Hood** is the new event and program coordinator for the Oregon Association of Nurseries. She joins the events team for the Farwest Show and other OAN programs and events. Kelsey was hired after Ali Pennell left the OAN. Kristen Urban, already on staff, was promoted into Ali’s former position.

“We are excited to have Kelsey on our team,” OAN Director of Events Allan Niemi said. “Her experience and passion will be great additions to the success of the Farwest Show and our member-focused events.”

Kelsey has a professional background in event planning and marketing from her time with Wheelhouse 20/20, a business development company for the building supply industry based in Portland. She also managed her own event planning business, Belle Carousel Events, which coordinated both corporate and social



events, weddings and charity fundraisers. “Having an unadulterated passion for nature and love for plants, I am absolutely thrilled to be here and cannot think of a better industry to work for,” Kelsey said. “As Thomas Jefferson once said, ‘No occupation is so delightful to me as the culture of the earth and no culture comparable to that of the garden.’”

Kelsey is a graduate of the University of Portland, earning her bachelor’s degree in organizational communication. She can be reached at 503-582-2010 or [khoo@oan.org](mailto:khoo@oan.org).

**EPA WORKING ON REPLACEMENT FOR CLEAN WATER RULE**

The controversial 2015 Clean Water Rule has been officially put on hold for two years while the EPA and U.S. Department of the Army work on writing a replacement. As the rule was written, the definition of the “Waters of the United States” (commonly referred



Yellow streaks and stunted growth are symptoms of soil-borne wheat mosaic virus.

PHOTO COURTESY OF K-STATE RESEARCH AND EXTENSION, TINYURL.COM/YC6RCM7Y



to as WOTUS) gave federal regulatory authority over even marginal waters and streams. Growers and ranchers across the country expressed concern about the overly broad authority this would give federal officials.

"The OAN has been critical of the WOTUS rule over the last several years and supports the administration and the efforts to reduce the overreach by the federal government on water regulations," OAN Executive Director Jeff Stone said.

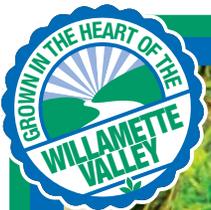
As reported in the *Capital Press* (Salem, Oregon), the leaders of the American Farm Bureau Federation, National Cattlemen's Beef Association and Western Growers issued public statements in support of this delay. Read their comments by going to [tinyurl.com/yc6hqpik](http://tinyurl.com/yc6hqpik).

### SOIL-BORNE WHEAT MOSAIC VIRUS IN NORTHEAST OREGON

Soil-borne wheat mosaic virus has arrived four weeks earlier than last year at a disease resistance nursery near Milton-Freewater, Oregon. Affecting a wide variety of horticultural and vegetable crops, mosaic is a viral disease found throughout the United States.

Christina Hagerty, an Oregon State University assistant professor and plant pathologist at the Columbia Basin Agricultural Research Center, told *Capital Press* the unseasonably warm weather may have caused the early arrival of symptoms.

If you need to have your crop tested or have questions, read the full article online at [tinyurl.com/y7pslulj](http://tinyurl.com/y7pslulj). >>



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**FUTURE PROJECT MAY IMPACT MID-WILLAMETTE VALLEY IRRIGATION**

The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers is developing proposals for constructing a water temperature control tower and floating screen at the Detroit Dam, according to a report in the *Capital Press* newspaper (Salem, Oregon).



The project would likely require draining some percentage of Detroit Lake — the reservoir that feeds into the North Santiam River — for up to two years. Growers in the area would have limited ability to irrigate their crops in that span of time. The project is in the early stages of development, and it will take years to conduct an environmental impact study.

The earliest start date is 2021. Local farmers are waiting the full project details before raising concerns.

Visit [tinyurl.com/yba8hwre](http://tinyurl.com/yba8hwre) to read more about the developing discussion.

**SEATTLE-BASED COMPANY DEVELOPS SHELTERS THAT MEET H-2A HOUSING STANDARDS**

A startup company is creating economical, portable shelters intended for H-2A farmworkers, according to a report in the *Capital Press* newspaper (Salem, Oregon).

This news comes as more and more nurseries show interest in obtaining guest workers through the H-2A program. According to the report, the shelters are lightweight and include heating, air conditioning, electrical wiring and bunks. Their 100-square-foot model units are large enough to shelter two farmworkers. Units are expected to last up to 10 years.

Read more at [tinyurl.com/y8fec7uy](http://tinyurl.com/y8fec7uy) ©

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# When simplicity beats creativity



Ian Doescher

**A**T PIVOT, THE MARKETING agency where I work, I have the enviable (at least I think so) position of being on a creative team tasked with dreaming up creative campaigns for our clients. We're the group that sits around bringing every resource to bear — clever plays on words, less clever puns, cultural references, eye-catching headlines and images, whatever we can — to help our clients' advertising sing.

Occasionally, though, we happen on a campaign in which we try to come up with creative ideas but end up with something simple. That doesn't mean talking down to customers; it means being forthright and clear with your messaging.

Here are some examples and things to consider on this question of simplicity vs. creativity.

**1. When you've got a great offer, put it up front.** If your retail store is offering a 50 percent off sale, you *could* use a headline like "Half is a laugh!" or "The odds of loving this sale are better than 50/50." You could show a clever image that pictures half of your store normally, and half wrapped in money or something.

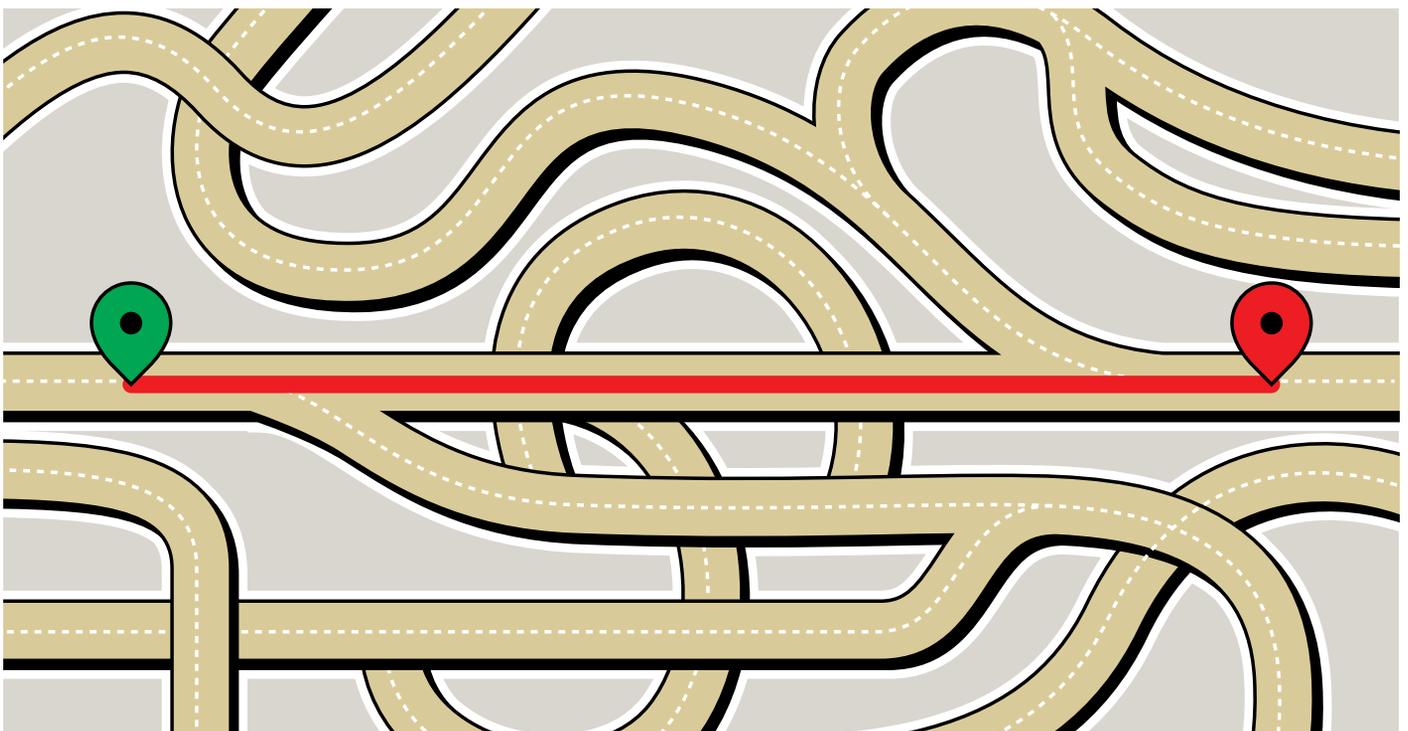
You *could* do those things, but even if they are creative (debatable), they are the wrong choices. The only headline you should use, big and bold, is something like "Everything 50% off!" or "50% off sale!" Why hide a great offer behind a creative slogan or image that might make the message harder to understand?

Yes, sometimes we need creative marketing; we don't create ads that just say "Buy Our Flowers." But when you have a fantastic offer, though, keep your advertising simple and give the offer pride of place.

**Ian Doescher is the Director of Nonprofit Marketing at Pivot Group, a marketing agency in Portland, Oregon. He can be reached at [ian@askpivot.com](mailto:ian@askpivot.com).**

**2. If there's a common name for something you're doing, use it.** Not too long ago, a client (a regional cellular provider) asked us to brainstorm a name for a quarterly flash sale in their retail store. We came up with a few different names, like Selling Point, Red Hot, The Real Deal, and The Hookup.

You get 500 bonus points if you can guess what we eventually called it. If you guessed Flash Sale, you are correct. And you know what? It was the best name. Why? Because people understand what a flash sale is. 





# Healthy plants, healthy profits.

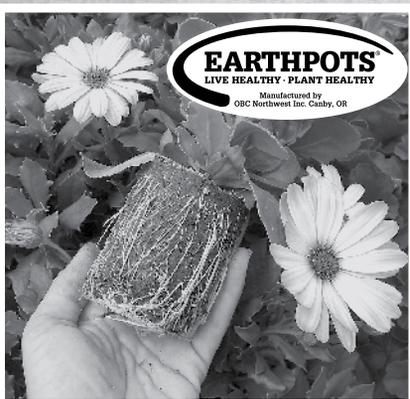
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## PIVOT POINTS

You don't call cell phones "frequency-enabled personal connection tools." You don't call shoes "podiatric locomotion devices." You don't call plants "aesthetically-pleasing natural chlorophyll receptacles."

Think about the terms your customers use — not what your industry uses or what a more creative name might be. Speak in their language.

**3. Being effective trumps being creative, every time.** Some ads are merely creative, while others are creative and effective. (Some are uncreative and ineffective, but let's not talk about those.) When it comes to marketing, effectiveness trumps creativity.

You can have the most creative idea — an idea that makes thousands of people burst into spontaneous laughter and applause when they see it — but if it doesn't produce results for your business, it's a failure.

**4. Put every idea or ad to the test.** When you look at an ad you are creating for your business or a campaign headline, ask yourself: do I understand the main message in five seconds or less? If a headline is so creative that it needs explanation — "You see, it's clever because René Descartes famously said, 'Cogito ergo sum,' and we're breeding and selling corgis, so 'Corgito ergo sum' is brilliant!" — it's the wrong headline.

If you understand the offer or the message in five seconds or fewer, you are in good shape. Even better if you get that down to two seconds. (Remember, people have shorter attention spans than ... sorry, what was I saying?) Sometimes, to accomplish this, you have to set aside creativity and focus on simplicity.

As much as it may pain me — a creative professional — to say so, there are plenty of times when simplicity beats creativity. Sometimes, the most straightforward message is the most effective one. Keeping the points above in mind will help you know when that's the case. ☺



An attractive table display at Al's Home & Garden Center, Sherwood location. PHOTO BY DAWN HUMMEL

# A houseplant awakening

## Growers and retailers tap into a renewed interest in indoor plants

BY DAWN HUMMEL

**L**ISA ELDRED STEINKOPF is addicted to houseplants and has a huge collection to prove it. She recently published a 272-page hardback book on the subject, *Houseplants: The Complete Guide to Choosing, Growing and Caring for Indoor Plants*.

“If I had only paid a dollar for every plant, I’d have at least \$1,000 tied up,” she said.

Enthusiasts like Lisa are a welcome sight for any retail nursery owner, but for a long time they were few and far between — at least when it comes to houseplants. For many, houseplants were something their mom grew in the 1970s.

Not anymore.

Echeverias, succulents, tillandsias, orchids and tropic-als are making a resurgence on the local and national scene. Recent houseplant sales figures reflect the trend.

“Houseplants are getting more popular every season,” said Judy Alleruzzo, a plant buyer with Al’s Garden & Home, a retailer with four Oregon locations. “A few short years ago it was not a big interest department. The increase in popularity of tillandsias and huge assortment of unique succulents are helping to drive our houseplant department sales, which have increased 14.8 percent as of December 2017.”

Jennifer Williams, a plant buyer and merchandiser with Dennis’ 7 Dees Nursery & Landscaping in Portland, Oregon, has also noticed steady growth. The nursery’s indoor plant sales for 2017 were up 18 percent over the prior year, she said.

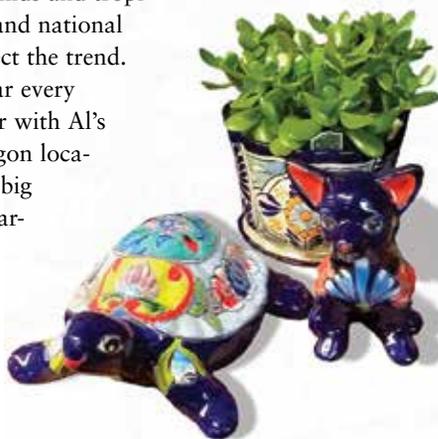
Fessler Nursery, a wholesale greenhouse grower with seasonal retail on the side, has observed the same rise in interest.

“(Our houseplant sales to) retailers have really grown in the last two years,” said Dale Fessler, manager of houseplants and co-owner at the nursery. “We’ve been striving to offer more houseplant cultivars to our clients.”

Houseplants can also be deployed in business and corporate spaces. Kathy J. Fediw, is president of Johnson Fediw Associates, a consulting firm that works with interior plantscape companies.

“I’ve seen an increase in office plant sales of 15 to 30 percent, depending on the city,” she said.

Interiorscapers regularly install blooming orchids, bromeliads and other tropic-als and houseplants in corporate office buildings, changing them out every four to eight weeks.



## A houseplant awakening

Several different houseplant options to satisfy a multitude of customer interests are on display at AI's Home & Garden Center (Sherwood), Portland Nursery (Division Street), the Plants Etc. booth at Portland Flower Market, as well as Fessler Nursery in Woodburn. PHOTOS BY DAWN HUMMEL



### Tapping into interest

Any retailers hoping to sell more houseplants would be wise to target millennials, generally defined as the 80 million people born between 1977–2000. Their spending is expected to reach \$1.4 trillion in 2020, according to a study by Accenture.

According to Mark Leichty, director of business development at Little Prince of Oregon Nursery, a wholesale greenhouse grower in Aurora, Oregon, houseplants can be an initial entry point for customers who may graduate to larger purchases long term.

“Consumers like the idea of growing things indoors — everything from purifying the air to cool plants that are just fun to grow and look at,” he said.

But there's a caveat. Those who monitor trends have noted that fear of failure can drive consumer behavior, particularly among millennials. Alleruzzo has noticed that they will look for information in YouTube videos and come looking for what they see.

“Many customers are decorators and desire specific plants in their home because they found it in a home décor magazine,” she said.

Giving these customers a successful first experience with plants is key to earning repeat business.

Fred de Boer, owner of Mainland Floral Distributors Ltd, a major supplier of house-

plants based in Langley, British Columbia, Canada, suggested that independent garden centers (IGC) should look for ways to stand out as well as ways to help the customer succeed.

“Differentiate yourself from the big box stores,” he said. “Don't try to compete on price on the basics. Instead, offer unique items and education by offering classes, pots, tools, books (and other aids). IGCs are the source for ideas and knowledge.”

### Removing the guesswork

Growers must decide what to grow and buyers must decide what to stock. De Boer says that his approach is to let sales figures drive future offerings.

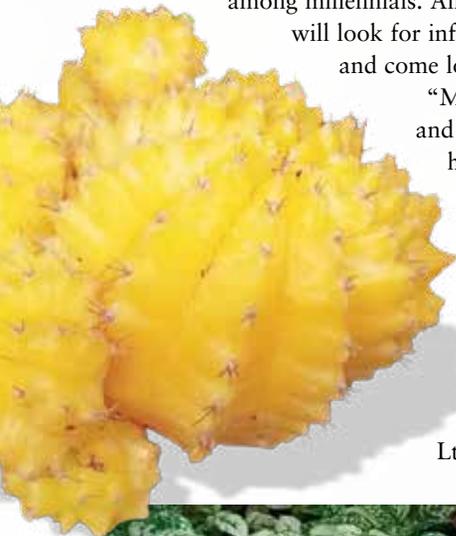
“We are like disc jockeys — you request, we play,” he said. “If an item goes viral it may influence demand, but ultimately our customers decide.”

Alleruzzo peruses industry trade magazines, Pinterest and home decor magazines for new ideas on what to order.

Williams, of Dennis' 7 Dees, said open dialogue with customers is important. “One of the most important ways to keep a pulse on what is in demand is by listening to what customers are asking for and what they're excited about,” she said.

Brian Jacob, West Coast territory manager for ForemostCo®, a Florida-based broker of young plant starts, said that company marketers follow social outlets such as YouTube, Pinterest and Instagram. However, trends aren't always easy to read.

“How do we take information provided by social media





and make the best use of it for our own B2B operations?" he asked. "There are a lot of pins originating in Europe. By the time social media has discovered a new plant, there are typically many years of effort already invested by the professional young plant supplier network."

Justin Hancock, Costa Farms Horticulturist, says many growers show plants that are not yet commercially available to see what response they get from trade show attendees before going into full production. Attending TPIE, Cultivate and MANTS are great for trend spotting.

By combining educated guesswork, customer dialogue and crystal ball gazing, growers can predict what customers will want and determine how best to provide it. >>



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# HOUSEPLANT

### Ways to target consumers

Here are the top 10 tips for targeting consumers that were offered by growers and retailers interviewed for this story:

## 1 OFFER SOMETHING BULLETPROOF.

Houseplants that are easy for brown thumbs to grow — such as tender succulents, *Sago Palms*, *Zanzibar Gem*, *Pothos*, *Sansevieria* and *Philodendrons* — represent a win-win for retailers. Those that also sport a bit of color are even better. *Aglaonemas* and *Syngonium* can be very colorful.

If a plant can serve a dual purpose, that also helps. Plants like Aloe Vera clean the air, have medicinal usages and look cool. ForemostCo® offers certified, organic sourced Aloe that is perfect for dual-purpose houseplant category. *Spathiphyllum* is an excellent, low-light interior plant with attractive white flowers most of the year. It will last multiple years with minimal care. *Curcumas* are great tropical patio plants. They can be brought into garage and left to go dormant. Trot them back out once the weather warms again allows plants to become fuller and floriferous every year.



## 2 BRING BACK MINIATURE GARDENS.

Mini-houseplants less than 2 inches tall are all the rage on the East Coast. The fairy garden craze has not hit the Pacific Northwest with the same ferocity yet, but Al's Garden & Home, Portland Nursery, Garland Nursery and others have been ahead of the bell curve, selling a wide variety of fairy garden plants. They offer a wide range of books, tools and do-it-yourself classes in creating fairy gardens.



## 3 MAKE MINE MACRAMÉ.

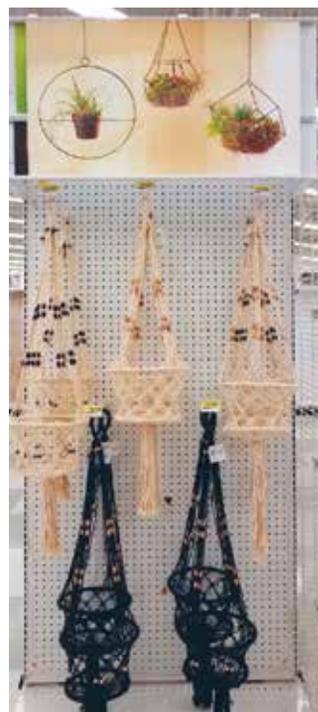
Amongst younger folks, macramé holders are all the rage. Millennials love the retro, kitsch look paired with succulents, tillandsias, orchids, ferns, air plants, and glass terrariums.

When macramé holders show up in JoAnn Fabrics, Pier 1 Imports, Michaels craft stores as well as Crate and Barrel catalogs and Etsy sites at the same time, it's time for garden retailers to take note.



## 4 TAG, YOU'RE IT!

Most houseplants lack the branded or detailed information ornamental growers typically provide on plant tags. That's an oversight. Most women's and men's clothing items sport 2–3 tags per item. Contrast that with houseplants — many lack even one! According to Dale Fessler, Fessler's Nursery recently added them. "Until we entered the retail market, we weren't tagging our houseplants, but now we are," he said. According to Williams, Dennis' 7 Dees recognized houseplant tags as an upgrade for 2018 to help drive increased sales.





# SALES TIPS

## 5 EDUTAINMENT AS A SALES TOOL.

Millennials are hard-working individuals who crave authentic learning experiences. Classes are a great way to reach them and drive sales. Al's Garden & Home schedules classes in January and February when their gardener base is staying indoors. To boost orchid sales around Valentine's Day, Al's features basic orchid care classes. Their mini-indoor fairy garden classes are gaining popularity. There's also PlantNite.com, a Boston-based website that organizes "build your own terrarium" and similar events at local bars and restaurants and licenses independent entrepreneurs to run them.



Frank Adams, presents at the 2016 American Institute of Floral Designers Christmas event at the Portland Flower Growers Market.

## 6 SIGNAGE: THE SILENT, 24/7 SALESPERSON.

When the seasonal crunch time ensues and staffing is an issue, do not forget about signage. Al's uses rotated signage to give more information about plants in stock. They also try to use light requirement stickers to identify high, medium and low light plant varieties. "We have made a conscious commitment to have knowledgeable staff people available to customers to help them select plants for their homes, offices or as gifts," Alleruzzo said.



## 7 WOULD YOU LIKE SOIL WITH YOUR PLANT?

Plants generally do not enjoy a huge mark-up, but soils, tools and other sundry items do. Asking the customer if they want soil or fertilizer can boost retail sales immensely. Add-on items such as baskets, glass, macramé holders, books, specialized soils, fertilizers, and specialized tools offered online, in merchandised displays, endcaps or classes can turn a \$3.99 sale into a \$25-\$50 sale.

"There are endless opportunities for add-on sales with indoor plants," Williams said. "We have good success with specialty soils and fertilizers, decorative moss and rocks for top dressings, and indoor pottery."

We have added a few items this year such as macramé hangers, cork pieces and other unique plant display items that are trendy. We have surely not yet tapped the full potential of this department."



## 8 GET INTO TRAINING.

Houseplants can be an afterthought at retail nurseries, particularly for front-line employees. To avert this possibility, Al's Garden & Home pays specific attention to houseplants in its staff training. The company hosts a spring refresher class for all staff and seasonal employees so they are ready to answer questions, help customers, and keep the department properly merchandised. "Our specialized houseplant lead employees shadow veteran staff gathering in-depth information to keep the department clean, plants stocked and well-cared for in their daily routine," Alleruzzo said. >>



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## A houseplant awakening



## 9 BE AWARE OF 'THE AMAZON EFFECT.'

As everyone in retail knows, Amazon's share of holiday shopping dollars, and retail dollars in general, is going up. Independent garden centers and wholesale nurseries are not immune. Millennials are purchasing houseplants from non-traditional sources. The rise of PayPal and Square payment apps, Etsy and Facebook are technology disruptors impacting traditional brick and mortar retailers.

If that's not enough to cause concern, Amazon has made moves into brick-and-mortar retail and recently introduced its cashless, contact free retail store concept in Seattle where you walk in, pick up your merchandise, walk out and are charged automatically.

## 10 KNOW THAT PEOPLE WANT TO LIVE WITH PLANTS.

Shrinking home lots and yards are becoming nearly non-existent inside urban growth boundaries. Houseplants bring the outside indoors — providing enjoyment to young and old alike. Hop on the houseplant train to offer your customers a wee bit of green happiness year-round. ☺

*Dawn Hummel is the president and CIO of BeeDazzled Media LLC, a firm specializing in marketing for small B2B horticulture and floriculture customers. She has more than 20 years of experience in retail garden centers and wholesale nurseries, and can be reached at [dhummel@beedazzledmedia.com](mailto:dhummel@beedazzledmedia.com) or 503-784-0691.*



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- Be able to analyze our systems & processes, looking to continuously improve efficiency.

- Have a valid Oregon driver's license with insurable driving record.

- Have computer literacy including Word, Excel, Power Point and internal reporting.

- Spanish language skills desired but not required.

**Compensation:** This is a salaried position that includes full benefit package, pay DOE.

**To Apply:** If interested, please submit resume and letter of interest to:

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 Administrator Bailey Nurseries, Inc.  
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## EMPLOYMENT

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2. Knowledge of tractor/equipment/sprayer operation.
3. Basic knowledge of insects, weeds, disease in nursery crops.
4. Basic understanding of economic thresholds for application justification.
5. Must be able to work independently and be available for working evenings/weekends if necessary.
6. Oregon Certified Pesticide Applicator License (or ability to acquire)
7. Knowledge of Worker Protection Standard and Employee Right to Know requirements (Hazardous Communication Program)
8. Pass internal safety training
9. Basic computer skills helpful
10. Valid driver's license with insurable driving record.

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# GROWING KNOWLEDGE

Series content is coordinated by Dr. Jay Pscheidt, professor of botany and plant pathology at Oregon State University in Corvallis, Oregon.



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

## Heroes and villains

Research identifies harmful and beneficial microbes in nursery soil

BY JERRY WEILAND, CAROLYN SCAGEL, NIK GRUNWALD, ZACHARY FOSTER, VAL FIELAND, AND LUISA SANTAMARIA

**F**OUR YEARS AGO, we received funding from the Floriculture and Nursery Research Initiative to study the interaction of soil-borne pathogens and environment on nursery plant health and disease control (*Digger*, July 2015).

Since then, we have made significant progress in identifying the beneficial and pathogenic microbes (microscopic fungi and oomycetes like *Phytophthora* and *Pythium*) found in rhododendron roots and in assessing how pathogen diversity affects disease development and control.

Our initial research focus has been on rhododendron because it is a common ornamental crop here in the Pacific Northwest nursery industry and because many of the soil-borne pathogens that affect rhododendron also affect other plant species.

What we learn about these pathogens on rhododendron will help us solve root diseases on other horticultural crops affected by the same pathogens.

Our research team consists of experts in nursery production, plant pathology, mycorrhizae, plant physiology, and extension services from the Horticultural Crops Research Laboratory (USDA-ARS), Oregon State University, and Oklahoma State University. Together, we hope to provide a comprehensive approach to identifying the key beneficial and pathogenic microbes that affect nursery plant production and to evaluate how that microbial diversity impacts disease control.

Our goal is to improve disease man-



Rhododendrons with root rot in a low-lying area of the field. PHOTO BY JERRY WEILAND

agement and soil health for nursery production in the Pacific Northwest. Here, we will summarize what we have discovered so far about microbial diversity and how soil-borne pathogen diversity might be affecting disease control.

### Microbial diversity research

We are using a technique called metabarcoding to study the diversity of microscopic fungi and oomycetes (the microbiome) that occur in the roots of healthy rhododendrons from different nurseries. Some of these microbes are beneficial (e.g., mycorrhizae), some are neu-

tral decomposers of organic matter, and some are plant pathogens (e.g., *Pythium* and *Phytophthora* species).

By comparing the rhododendron microbiome at several different nurseries from both field-grown and potted plants, we expect to identify organisms that are consistently associated with plants and might be candidates for biological control or provide plant growth promoting effects. We also expect to identify common root pathogens, as well as previously unrecognized pathogens, that are important players in reducing root health.

Our preliminary results suggest





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## Heroes and villains

that each nursery has a distinct community of fungi and oomycetes, although a few specific organisms are common among all nurseries, including fungi typically thought to be mycorrhizal, the fungus *Trichoderma* (sometimes used as a biocontrol agent), and several saprophytic species that decompose organic matter.

Pathogens were detected, but none were consistently found across all nurseries. Although we found that field-grown plants had different microbial communities than potted plants, those communities were not necessarily more diverse.

We also looked to see whether there were any differences in community diversity between three rhododendron cultivars, but did not find any. This is surprising because similar studies on other crops have revealed differences in the root microbiome between closely related cultivars.

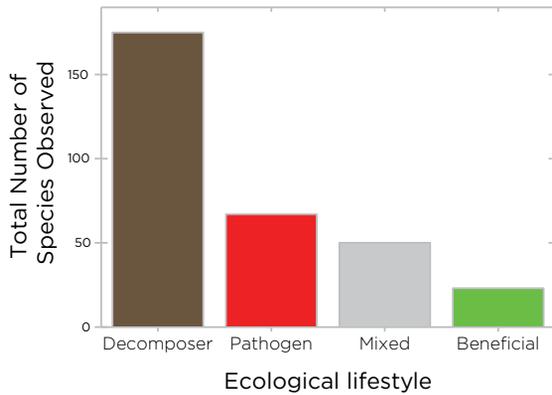
Finally, we tried to assign the organisms we found to different ecological lifestyles and estimated that most were decomposers, some were pathogens or had multiple possible lifestyles (mixed), and relatively fewer were beneficial. However, the beneficial organisms, while not as diverse, were some of the most commonly found organisms in our study.

### Soil-borne pathogen diversity

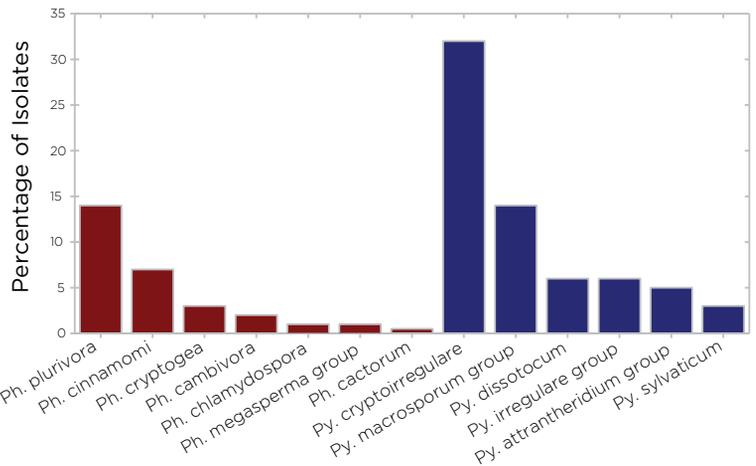
In addition to our microbiome work on healthy plants, we are surveying diseased rhododendrons to find out which soil-borne pathogens are the most common and cause the most damage.

From 2013 to 2017, we sampled rhododendrons with symptoms of root rot from seven cooperating nurseries that grow rhododendron. So far, *Phytophthora cinnamomi*, *Phytophthora plurivora*, and *Pythium cryptoirregulare* are the most common pathogens isolated. The only pathogen we found at all seven nurseries was *Pythium cryptoirregulare*, so it was important that we assess the ability of this pathogen to cause disease.

The good news is that, although *Pythium cryptoirregulare* is common, it does not appear to be very aggressive



Left: Inferred lifestyles of fungi and oomycetes found in roots of healthy looking rhododendron nursery plants. Right: Common soil-borne pathogens associated with root rot in rhododendron nursery plants.



Phytophthora (Ph.) and Pythium (Py.) species

on rhododendrons with established root systems. We tested the ability of *Pythium cryptoirregularis* to cause root rot on 6- to 8-month-old rooted rhododendron cuttings and found that, after three months, it was only occasionally able to cause enough damage to reduce plant size.

*P. cinnamomi* and *P. plurivora*, on the other hand, were also common, but were only found at six of the seven nurseries. In contrast to *Pythium cryptoirregularis*,

both of these *Phytophthora* species caused extensive root rot in the same amount of time, especially when there were high amounts of inoculum in the soil. However, even at low levels, *P. cinnamomi* was able to reduce growth in inoculated rhododendron plants.

To better understand the variability within these three pathogens, we are using a technique called genotyping-by-sequencing to provide us with a genetic finger-

print for each individual. Current results suggest that although *P. plurivora* populations are moderately diverse, they tend to be very similar across different nurseries. This indicates that *P. plurivora* is common in the nursery industry and likely moves readily among nurseries on infected, but asymptomatic nursery stock.

We are also studying the genetic diversity in *P. cinnamomi* and *Pythium cryptoirregularis*. This work will form >>

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the basis for developing detection assays to help diagnostic laboratories identify these pathogens. Results will also reveal whether the pathogens reproduce clonally or sexually, which can help us understand how likely the pathogens will be able to overcome fungicide or cultivar resistance, and how pathogens move among nurseries.

### Disease control

We have started to evaluate chemical options for managing root rot, including fungicides and gypsum. For the fungicide work, we are investigating how pathogen

diversity affects disease control efficacy.

We compared the ability of mefenoxam and phosphorous acid to control root rot caused by either *P. cinnamomi* or *P. plurivora* on *R. catawbiense* cultivars. We applied the fungicides to either the leaves as a foliar spray or to the roots as a soil drench.

For *P. cinnamomi*, only the fungicide soil drenches were effective at reducing root rot. Foliar applications of either product were ineffective. This makes sense because the soil is where these root pathogens are located and causing damage.

However, for *P. plurivora*, neither fungi-

cide was effective in controlling root rot, regardless of how they were applied.

These results must be viewed with caution. We may have, by chance, inadvertently selected a fungicide-resistant isolate of *P. plurivora*. While the isolate of *P. plurivora* used in our research came from a diseased nursery plant, and our diversity studies suggest *P. plurivora* has low population diversity in Oregon nurseries, other *P. plurivora* isolates may be more sensitive to these fungicides. Therefore, we are evaluating a larger number of *P. cinnamomi* and *P. plurivora* isolates to gain more confidence in our findings.

With gypsum, we evaluated whether application (0, 1, 5 or 10 percent) to soil was able to control root rot in young *Rhododendron* 'Looking Glass' H-2 plants inoculated with *P. plurivora* or *P. cinnamomi*. In this preliminary trial, no significant visible symptoms of root rot were present on plants, possibly because the cultivar may be resistant to the pathogen isolates we used. Gypsum application at 5 and 10 percent did, however, improve plant growth compared to plants grown in substrate with 1 percent or no gypsum.

### Future research

The next stage of our research is to continue to evaluate the effect of environment on the development of root rot. We have ongoing studies to evaluate the effect of irrigation and plant nutrition on root rot severity. In addition, using the tools we have developed to assess microbial diversity, we will be evaluating how cultural practices and disease control measures alter the soil microbial community in nursery systems.

We are currently conducting an experiment to test the effect of common root rot pathogens on the composition of fungal communities in the roots of rhododendron. Is the non-pathogenic community involved in pathogen establishment or is disease purely an interaction between the host plant and the pathogen? Do different pathogens interact with the non-pathogenic community differently?

We are also considering an experi-



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ment testing the effect of common fungicides on the non-pathogenic community. It has been demonstrated in many studies that members of the non-pathogenic community can provide nutrients (e.g., mycorrhizae) or protection from disease (e.g. *Trichoderma*). Do common fungicides kill these beneficial organisms as well as the pathogens? Could protecting plants with fungicides that also kill symbionts make them more susceptible to pathogens in the future and therefore disease control would become more reliant on continued fungicide application?

Discovering interactions between beneficial/neutral organisms and pathogens could inform future disease control strategies.

The results from our studies will be used to establish criteria for implementing disease control strategies in nursery production systems. One continuing challenge for nursery growers in effectively managing disease is proper pathogen identification. We are hoping to address this challenge in future research by developing simple diagnostic tools which can be used by growers and plant disease diagnosticians to better target disease control measures. ©

*Dr. Jerry Weiland (Plant Pathology), Dr. Nik Grunwald (Plant Pathology), and Dr. Carolyn Scagel (Plant Physiology) are research scientists with the Horticultural Crops Research Laboratory, USDA Agricultural Research Service in Corvallis, OR and are also affiliated with the Departments of Botany and Plant Pathology or Horticulture at Oregon State University. They can be reached at Jerry.Weiland@ars.usda.gov, Nik.Grunwald@ars.usda.gov, and Carolyn.Scagel@ars.usda.gov. Zachary Foster is a Ph.D. student and Val Fieland is a Biological Sciences Technician in Nik Grunwald's laboratory. Dr. Luisa Santamaria (Botany and Plant Pathology) is an associate professor at Oregon State University and the North Willamette Research and Extension Center. She can be reached at luisa.santamaria@oregonstate.edu.*

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# Excitement in the air

**The nursery and greenhouse industry is known for adopting new technology. When it comes to exploring advanced production technologies, we're not exactly wallflowers.**

OAN members have invested their time in the development of smart-sprayer technology by serving as testers. They've embraced the OAN's *Nursery Guide*, a searchable hub that brings buyers and sellers together online.

And now, members are on the forefront of using unmanned aerial vehicles — UAV's, more commonly called drones — for a number of purposes.

When I think of a tech geek (which I mean in a nice way), one person is foremost in my mind. I have known Rod Park, who owns Park's Nursery in Gresham, for 20 years, which predates my time at the OAN. He has always been a gadget guy — a perfect counter balance for my suspicious, Luddite and tech-phobic ways.

Leave it to Rod to use drone technology as a marketing vehicle. He filmed footage of his farm, then played the video at his Farwest Show booth this last year. But there are many more ways in which nurseries are starting to use drones. The possibilities are exciting to contemplate.

## **Past decade of research and technology**

It's no secret that Amazon wants to deliver its packages with drones, but the best and most impactful use of drones may be in more rural farm communities.

To some, a drone looks like a fly-ing spider — around the size of a turkey — and looks like a toy. Some drones are toys, but the ones a nursery would use are serious. Outfitted with GPS technology with pre-programmed points and elevation parameters, today's drone can fly over the top of crops with inches to spare and zoom higher to give a true bird's eye view.

Several years ago, researchers were in Oregon testing potential applications after a breakthrough by the University

of Florida. Researchers modified a multi-rotor craft, giving it the ability to count, identify and detect pest and disease issues. Many in the industry see the practicality, even as questions remain about the value proposition for small versus larger growers.

## **The legal limits of drones**

There are some pretty sensible rules around drones. For example, you cannot shoot them out of the sky if they annoy you.

Obviously, everyone should operate a drone in a careful manner. The operator must be able to see it without the use of binoculars. You can't drive and fly at the same time unless you are in a sparsely populated area, and the drone cannot exceed 400 feet above the ground or that same distance above a structure.

The most challenging rule is that drones can be only used during the day. That's problematic because the drones are technologically capable of operating at any hour, day or night. The FAA will not allow us to use a drone inside the Oregon Convention Center during the Farwest Show for marketing purposes. I guess that makes sense to protect our exhibitors, though it's a bit of a buzzkill.

In rural areas, the privacy and safety concerns are less prevalent and the potential uses for drones are more promising, especially on large-scale farms.

## **Nursery applications of drone technology is growing**

Robust investments in drone technology have opened up applications for different field uses. Soil and field analysis can be digitized into 3D maps, and used for irrigation and nitrogen-level management as well as planting.

While there still are concerns about using drones for pesticide application, there is the potential ability to identify and surgically treat for weeds, thus reducing the necessity (or current practice) of treating the entire field to ensure the weeds are all gone. The ban on daylight use comes into play here — it may well be more practical to fly and treat at night, when the wind is down.



Jeff Stone  
OAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Drones with cameras have the opportunity to detect pests earlier than traditional scouting methods allow. It would be easier to send a crew out to address a smaller area for treatment than have them cover the entire farm.

Another potential advantage is to record a visual history of what a grower has produced over time, and be able to identify how the plant is looking in a certain field at a particular time. Drones can also be used to document new tile and irrigation lines so that the grower may find them more easily in the future. Drones can monitor crop growth and fertilizer needs along with more precise measurement of crop planting rows for calculations of the number of plants per row.

According to Rod and some other growers, drone technology is a boon for marketing. It is dynamic, provides a tour of the nursery through high-resolution video, and demonstrates for customers the clean, pest-free growing conditions of Oregon's nursery industry.

The larger the nursery operation, the more cost-effective this tool may be. The cost of a drone has come down dramatically over the past several years, but it remains a tool that must be justified by the cost/benefit to the operation, depending on the needs of the grower.

Oregon has three FAA-approved testing ranges and use by agricultural operations is growing. With greater acceptance of this tool, I hope authorities will relax the regulations on drones for appropriate field use by Oregon growers. It will be exciting to see what the future holds for the use of drones to manage crops and market the nursery industry. ☺



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