



Kelleygreen Nursery

BY CURT KIPP



Grown under the cover of nearly 100 greenhouses, the quality of Kelleygreen Nursery's Japanese maple liners has kept their customer base happy for many years

PHOTO BY CURT KIPP

FOUNDED:
1980 by brothers Jan and Tom Kelley

PRINCIPALS:
Father and son Jan and Kevin Kelley

KNOWN FOR:
300 varieties of Japanese maples, plus a smaller variety of rhododendrons, dogwoods, beeches, magnolias and others, all in containers

HEAD OFFICE:
195 Roaring Camp Lane
Drain, OR 97435-1130

CONTACT:
541-836-2290
kgn.maples@gmail.com

FARWEST
2019 SHOW BOOTH:
#14037

WHEN WHOLESALE PLANT buyers drive across the wooden, one-lane bridge to access Kelleygreen Nursery, they typically don't do it by accident.

The grower of containerized Japanese maple varieties is situated on 22 acres of gently sloping ground that is nestled between forested Coast Range hills, about a three-hour drive from Portland, or about 45 minutes from Eugene.

"If somebody comes here, we know they're serious," said cofounder Jan Kelley, who owns and operates the nursery together with his son, Kevin.

But one needn't visit the nursery to meet the Kelleys and see the quality of their material. They will be at the Farwest Show. Their island booth is located directly across from the Farwest Show Resource Center in the middle of the show floor, and the Japanese maples will be the first thing you notice.

"There's probably only two or three other nurseries in Oregon that are as broadly conceived in Japanese maples as we are," Jan said.

At any given time, they usually have around 300 different varieties in production. They will typically add 10 varieties to their production each year, dropping a similar number from production at the same time.

"In the garden center world, there's always

enough maple fanatics who are looking for something new and different," Kevin said.

Kelleygreen typically produces between five and 15,000 of each variety of tree that it offers. It all depends on market demand, the availability of scion material, and the ease of growing that variety. Although varieties come and go, they always make sure to offer the most popular, commodity-type varieties (such as *Acer palmatum* 'Crimson Queen' and *A.p.* 'Bloodgood').

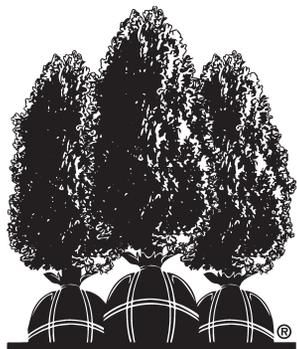
"We're known for the breadth of our offerings," Jan said. "We do everything from liners to small specimens. Everything is grown in containers. Nearly everything is grown under cover."

Growing the trees under greenhouse coverings has two purposes. First, it allows the Kelleys and their workers to prune the trees in the wintertime regardless of the weather. And second, the plastic brings the trees out of dormancy about a month sooner, allowing for a longer growing season and early shipment of the material if the customers want it.

"Around here, the trees break bud typically in mid-April," Jan said. "Ours might be in February or mid-March."

The nursery rounds out its offerings with an assortment of rhododendrons, magnolias, dogwoods, beeches and a few others — but *Acer* ➤

Come see us at Farwest
booth #11037!



KG FARMS, INC.

WHOLESALE GROWERS OF QUALITY
FIELD GROWN NURSERY STOCK

Ornamentals • Deciduous Shrubs
Evergreen Shrubs • Conifers

KATHY & GREG WILMES

18995 ARBOR GROVE RD. NE
WOODBURN, OR 97071

FAX (503) 678-3247

kwilmes@kgfarmsinc.com

(503) 678-3245



**BIRINGER
NURSERY**

Wholesale Growers of
Fruit, Flowering &
Shade Trees

Deciduous Shrubs

Espalier Apple & Pear
Combination Fruit Trees

Dwarf Fruit Cherries
on Gisela™

Dwarf Flowering Cherries

Frost Peach®

PO Box 2809

Mt. Vernon, WA 98273

(360) 848-5151 Fax (360) 848-5959

Member profile

Japanese maples are the primary focus of Kelleygreen Nursery, but they also offer a selection of containerized woody ornamentals. PHOTO BY CURT KIPP



palmatum is their bread and butter. All of the trees are grafted on site.

“We kind of describe ourselves by saying our product line is very, very narrow — but within that, we do everything,” Jan said.

The nursery employs around 15 people during the winter, ramping up to 22 in the spring. The type of customers they serve run the gamut; the nursery grows liners for other nurseries, as well as retail-ready containers for garden centers, mail-order retailers, landscapers, rewholesalers, brokers and others.

“We ship all over the country and a bit into Canada,” Jan said.

The nursery’s strongest market is the West Coast, which receives some 60 percent of the production. Other markets include the Northeast, the Southeast and eastern Canada.

Marketing is done mostly by word of mouth, referrals and relationships. The nursery does not have a website or plan to build one. They do business with about 100 steady customers.

“It’s pretty rare that we lose a customer,” Kevin said. “We have some that have been with us for 25 years.”

Coming back home

Kelleygreen Nursery was started 39 years ago, in 1980. Jan had grown up in what is now Coos Bay, Oregon, the largest city on the Oregon Coast.

He studied psychology in college and became a professor of graduate studies in Atlanta, Georgia. However, he didn’t find city life conducive to raising a young family with his wife, Ellen. “It was like the neighborhood was raising the two boys, not Ellen and myself,” Jan said.

He became interested in horticulture, so despite a lack of training, he started a retail

nursery in Atlanta. Finding it enjoyable, he decided to quit academia, pack up the family, move back to Oregon and start a wholesale nursery.

“It was like coming back home,” Jan said.

His brother, Tom, joined him as a partner initially. They purchased a 22-acre parcel on Elk Creek, a tributary of the Umpqua River, between the small towns Drain and Elkton. (Tom later sold his share of the business back to Jan.)

“We started at zero, and the learning curve was very steep,” Jan said.

They named the nursery Kelleygreen, after the color Kelly green. Initially, they started out with rhododendrons and also raised sheep on the property. The nursery only really took off when eldest son Kevin, then fully grown, decided to join his father’s business in 1989.

“I thought of doing other things, but nothing ever just grabbed me,” Kevin said.

“Probably the best thing that happened was when Kevin wanted to come into the business,” Jan said. “That really turned a corner for us.”

Kevin took a community college course in grafting and brought the skill home to share with his father. Their initial attempts at grafting didn’t go well.

“We grafted 1,000 trees the first year and lost 900 of them,” Jan said.

With practice and experience, their batting average improved. Around the same time, Kelleygreen started to offer Japanese maples. By growing them under cover, the nursery was soon able to offer larger and more polished trees than were widely available at the time. The timing was perfect, as market interest in the versatile species was soaring.

The Kelleys were soon able to expand

(From left) Jan and Kevin Kelley are the father-and-son duo that successfully run Kelleygreen Nursery. PHOTO BY CURT KIPP

Next page: Dogwoods sold in containers are another offering of the Drain, Oregon nursery. PHOTO BY CURT KIPP



their operation, purchasing an adjacent 20-acre parcel in 1992.

“Our maple liners that we continue to grow are pretty much in a category by themselves,” Jan said. “The growers that buy them don’t have to hold them another year. They pretty much put them right in the ground.”

Kevin and Jan have a tendency to be

tougher on themselves and their products than their customers are likely to be. It ensures that quality will be up to par and that no customer will be disappointed when they take delivery. As a result, no shipment from the nursery has ever been refused. “That’s important to us,” Jan said.

“When you sell a plant that’s so nice, it pains you to sell it, those are plants you’re

always successful with,” Kevin said. “Those are the orders that grow your business.”

The value of self-reliance

This past February, the nursery encountered adversity when 43 of its 100 or so greenhouses were crushed to the ground by a sudden and heavy snowfall.

Like all locations in Western





WWW.NELSONIRRIGATION.COM

IRRIGATION TECHNOLOGY FOR THE FUTURE

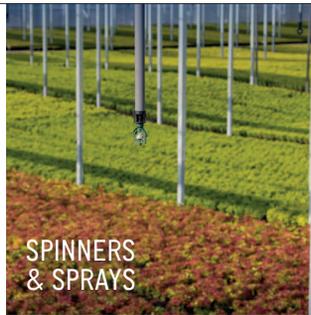
ROTATOR® SPRINKLERS

- HIGH UNIFORMITY
- NO RISER VIBRATION
- EASY TO CLEAN
- EASY TO REPAIR
- LONG WEAR LIFE
- NO SEALS UNDER PRESSURE




SAVE LABOR WITH TWIG® WIRELESS CONTROLS





SPINNERS & SPRAYS



1/2" & 3/4" IMPACT REPLACEMENTS

PART-CIRCLE OPTIONS AVAILABLE



THE ORIGINAL BIG GUN® SPRINKLER



DON MARJAMA NURSERY CO.

Grower of Quality Oregon Field & Containerized Stock

Conifers • Ornamentals • Japanese Maples
Dogwoods & More

11333 S.E. Bluff Road • Sandy, Oregon 97055
(503) 668-8083 • fax (503) 668-4833
sales@donmarjamanursery.com

VISIT US AT
BOOTH #9051-10052
AT THE FARWEST SHOW

THE GOLD STANDARD OF FERTILIZER PERFORMANCE



Kathy "Golden" Brown Gol "Don" Mulcahy "Golden" Harada

Strike it rich with **APEX**[®]

Dig for gold at the Farwest this year. Stop by the APEX[®] booth for a chance to win prizes, including a \$500 Stub Hub gift card, discover the latest in controlled-release nursery nutrition, and meet our team.



find your nutrient release curves at
app.simplotgalxeone.com

GAL-Xe ONE
[Nutrient Efficiency
That Lasts]

Simplex[™], APEX[®] and GAL-XE^{ONE} are trademarks of J.R. Simplex Company. ©2019 All rights reserved.

Member profile



Oregon, the nursery gets snowfall from time to time. Usually about 3 or 4 inches will fall without consequence. Jan remembers going to bed on a Sunday night with the snow falling down. Having seen years of it, he thought nothing of it.

"I got up the next morning and there were greenhouses down all over," he said. "There was 2 feet of snow."

He cut the plastic on those greenhouses that were still standing and got to work on the repairs. Four months later, by early July, about 30 of the greenhouses had been repaired or rebuilt. Nonetheless, Jan estimated that the nursery lost about 20 percent of its trees due to the incident.

Through it all, the working relationship between father and son is key to the entire operation.

"The fact that Kevin and I work together six or seven days a week, it's fairly rare for a father and son to work together that long and get along," Jan said. "We work well together, but if push comes to shove, we go with his opinion."

Kevin and Jan share in many of the duties, from planning to HR to payroll to sales. Jan handles the billing, but most other responsibilities are shared. They don't employ any office workers other than themselves.

"This is not a plush operation here," Jan said.

The nursery's employees are cross-trained to handle any duty on the farm except grafting. They have three workers who specialize in that. All are overseen by a foreman who has been with the company for 25 years.

"We do not have anybody here that is not involved in plant production," Kevin said.

Although Jan has been at it for 39 years now, he doesn't foresee quitting. "The question comes to me, when am I going to retire, and I have no interest in it," he said.

"We do what we like to do, and we're very fortunate," Kevin said. ☺