



# TSW Nursery Sales Inc.

Founded: 2001 by Todd Williams



- **ABOUT:**  
Wholesale grower and broker of trees and shrubs in containers and B&B, shipping to most of the United States.
- **PRINCIPAL:**  
**Todd Williams**
- **KEY EMPLOYEES:**  
**Todd Williams**, president/CEO; **Marissa Williams**, CFO; **Laura Woodward**, inside sales manager; **Tom Dodd**, farm manager; **Shelby Cabeceiras**, assistant office manager; **Jaime Urcino**, farm/shipping foreman; **Oscar Lopez Hernandez**, assistant farm foreman.
- **EMPLOYEES:**  
20 year-round, plus seasonal
- **CONTACT:**  
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Wilsonville, OR 97070  
📞 503-678-4401  
📠 503-678-4422  
✉ sales@tswnurserysales.com
- **ONLINE:**  
[www.tswnurserysales.com](http://www.tswnurserysales.com)
- **TRADE SHOWS:**  
**Farwest Show, MANTS, Idaho Horticulture Expo**
- **LISTINGS:**  
**235 NurseryGuide.com**

**A**MBITION AND HARD WORK have propelled Todd Williams from a single leased loading dock and an office in his apartment to a successful wholesale nursery operation with two growing locations and a strong team behind him.

“I always knew I was going to have my own business in the nursery industry,” Todd said. “I always had an entrepreneur’s mindset.”

And after nearly 20 years in business, it’s clear any risks Todd took in the early years have paid off. “Failure is not a bad thing,” he said. “It’s a learning experience. Get out there on the thin ice — the skinny branches.”

TSW Nursery Sales Inc. (Aurora, Oregon) ships trees and shrubs to retail garden centers, wholesalers, landscapers and growers all over the United States, 12 months a year.

The nursery prides itself on its consistent quality, as well as its variety. They sell trees, shrubs, broadleaf evergreens and conifers. Depending on the selection, material is available as liners, bare root, containers, air pots and B&B. Some of the material is grown by TSW; the remainder is obtained from quality growers based in the Pacific Northwest that TSW has worked with for many years.

“We strive to fill all of our customers’ orders to the fullest,” Todd said. “And if we aren’t able to source a specific plant, we always offer the customer an alternative or substitution to switch to.”

TSW will also work with customers to custom grow material on contract. “When

our customers come to us with a problem, we solve it, no matter what it is,” Todd said.

For quality assurance, all plant material that is shipped from TSW is double and triple checked. “We like being hands on with every order,” Todd said. “Quality and consistency is the most important. Our customers are always looking for consistent products and timely shipping.”

And giving customers what they need is the priority.

“Customers are not growers,” Todd said. “They want a seamless process that is as simple as possible. They want the plant shipment to come in, be consistent, look nice, and perform as expected. If they’re moving plant material and selling plant material, we’re doing our job.”

Backing Todd is a talented team of growers and support staff.

“They are excellent at their jobs and work at the highest level,” he said. “They are some of the best people I’ve ever worked with.”

## Falling in love with the industry

Todd was born in Las Vegas, Nevada and was the third of seven siblings. His father worked for The Bell Telephone System for 30 years, helping to develop systems such as 911 for the phone company in the late 1960s. His mother was a homemaker.

“My mom was very kind, sweet and calm,” he said. “My dad was always very driven when I was growing up.”

A few years after high school, Todd enlisted in the U.S. Army. He completed >>

Previous page: TSW Nursery Sales Inc. serves as both a grower and broker of containerized shrubs (right), maples (left), and other woody ornamental products.

From left, Jaime Urcino, Todd Dodd, Oscar Lopez Hernandez, Marissa Williams, Austin Williams (driver), Todd Williams, Shelby Cabeceiras, Laura Woodward. PHOTOS BY BILL GOLOSKI



his service at 24, then earned an associate's degree in business from Truckee Meadows Community College in Reno, Nevada.

After returning home from the military, Todd got a job at a retail nursery in Sparks, Nevada, starting at what was then the minimum wage, \$5.50 per hour.

"I just fell in love with the nursery industry," Williams said. "I loved being outside. I'm type A — you can't keep me inside very long. I like to be outside, moving and grooving. It was fun to go to work. I enjoy working directly with people."

The nursery in Sparks was small when Todd started. As it grew, he was given increasing responsibilities. He sought out mentors throughout the industry, from growers to retailers and more. Eventually, the nursery assigned Todd to build two growing grounds in California to help supply the retail operation with trees, shrubs and perennials. He learned as he went along, helping the nursery grow their business.

Todd eventually ended up in charge of the whole growing and nursery retail operation until the time he decided to leave. "It was time to step out and do something different," he said.

### Getting in the ring

Inspired by Oregon's status as a nurs-

ery powerhouse, Todd decided to head for Oregon and see where he fit into the industry. "Oregon has a unique situation for growing," he said. "The growing climate here is some of the best in the United States."

Todd was given an opportunity to work for a wholesale nursery in Oregon in 2000. He stayed for a year and a half, then decided he wanted to start his own company and be his own boss. "I decided to go out there and step in the ring," he said.

Using his initials for a business name, Todd founded TSW Nursery Sales Inc. in Gresham, Oregon in 2001. He started with four employees, a small amount of leased acreage and a loading dock. His apartment doubled as a "home office" — literally.

Todd focused first on brokering plant material. He felt he could help buyers obtain plants they were otherwise unable to locate in the trade. "There was a lot of opportunity," he said. "There was a lot of plant material to be sold."

From his experience working in a retail nursery that also grew some of its own material, Todd knew what customers would expect and need. He also knew that his plants would have to prove themselves in the marketplace and make a strong first impression.

"When you're building a new business, if they open the (truck) door and it's

not right, sometimes they don't open that door a second time," he said.

Todd did not keep a day job; rather, he poured everything into getting TSW up and running. He was all in, spending time visiting people and going to trade shows. That was all by design.

"When you're hungry, you work hard," he said. "You have to work for free till you start making money. I had an apartment office and the shipping dock. It was as hard as you can imagine, to wait for the first sales."

The sales came, and business grew. Next Todd needed a place to grow his own material and improve his ability to fill orders for an expanding customer base.

In 2004, he purchased a 14-acre hazelnut orchard in Aurora, which would become his headquarters and first growing site. He cleared off the trees and converted it to a nursery. He started growing plant material there in 2005.

Todd shipped his first non-brokered trees and shrubs in 2007 and 2008, which unfortunately was just as the recession started to hit. This slowed plans for rapid expansion, and forced some layoffs. At the lowest point, TSW was down to seven employees, but the operation has grown every year since.

"To make it through, I feel very

Left: Staff move a tree to a new location of the nursery. Right: Laurel shrubs are prepared for an order in containers. PHOTOS BY BILL GOLOSKI



lucky,” he said. “You’ve got to know when to put on the gas and when to put on the brakes.”

**Growing for the future**

By 2013, Todd identified a need for more material in the marketplace, driven by a recovering economy. He noticed some growers, stung by the recession bubble, had been gun-shy about increasing

their numbers again.

“The timing of the industry has created a huge gap,” he said.

TSW Nursery Sales leased 14 acres that a neighboring grower wasn’t using. When they needed it back, he vacated that site and purchased 32 acres further south in the Willamette Valley, near Gervais.

The process of redeveloping the Gervais site into a working nursery has

kept him busy building roads, installing drainage tiles, putting in irrigation — and all while working around a natural gas main along the edge of the property. “There’s things you’d never, ever guess that you’ll have problems with,” he said.

With TSW about to enter its 20<sup>th</sup> year in business, the nursery has 20–25 employees year-round and brings on additional workers as needed seasonally. ➤

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Supported by bamboo stakes, woody ornamentals are stored under a covered hoop house at TSW. PHOTO BY BILL GOLOSKI



Finding adequate labor is the biggest challenge for him, as it is for most nurseries.

“The more you can become more mechanized, the better it will be, but some things you can’t mechanize,” he said. “Pruning, you need to do by hand.”

In the role of owner and leader, Todd styles himself as a tough boss with high

standards, but one who creates a culture of teamwork and appreciation. “Everyone is on the same team and on the same level,” he said. “My crews in the nursery are as professional and do an extremely good job every day.”

Even with the challenges he faces at his growing nursery, Todd still finds the

same enjoyment in the work that he did almost 30 years ago.

“Every day when I go out in the nursery, I always feel like I want to learn something else,” he said. “I love what I do. It’s very gratifying succeeding and having a customer call up and thank you.” ☺

*Curt Kipp is the director of publications and communications at the Oregon Association of Nurseries, and the editor of Digger magazine.*

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