

Digger[®]



JUNE 2021

Thriving in the backyard

How growers, retailers and landscapers
can provide for healthier families and a
stronger environment

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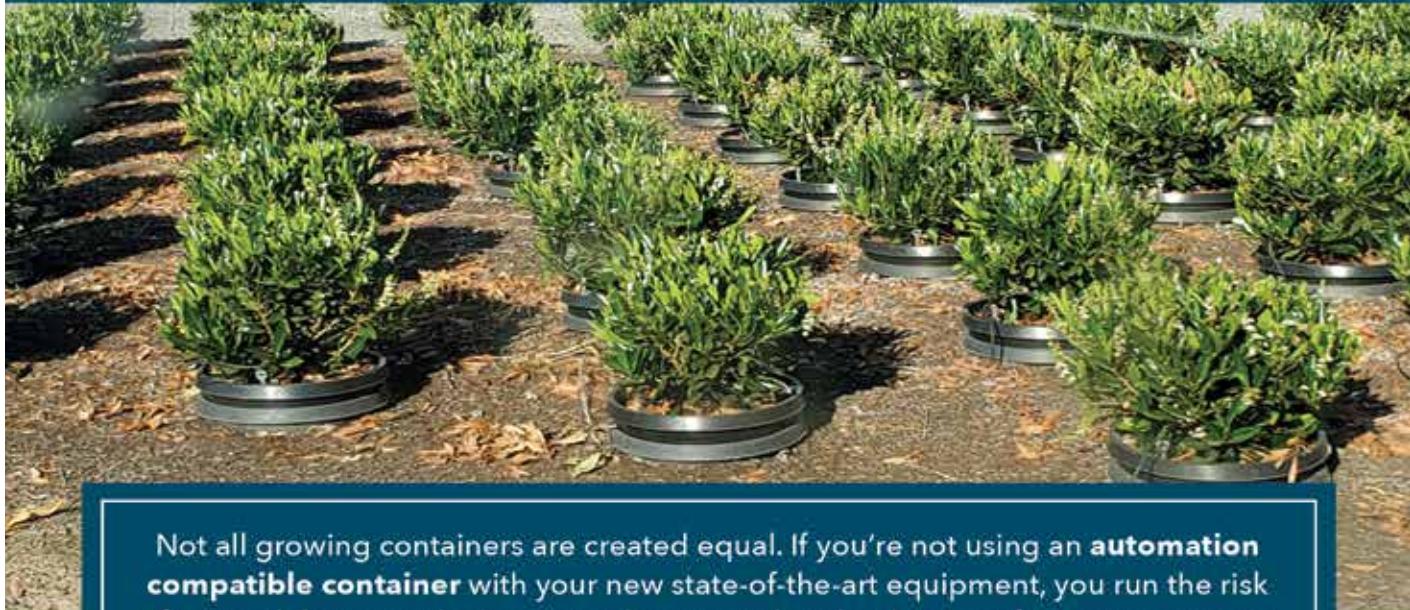
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Digger

June 2021 Vol. 65 No. 6



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Thriving in the backyard

In our annual Sustainability Issue of *Digger*, we explore how growers, retailers and landscapers can provide what consumers need for the healthy and sustainable landscapes they desire.

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Growers find they can't grow enough edible plants, and retailers can't keep them in stock.

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Damage from an ice storm highlights the important role the industry plays in tree selection and maintenance.

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The Oregon State University Garden Ecology Lab studies the health of garden ecosystems.

29 Hired help

Growers explain what it takes for nurseries to find the workforce talent they need.

On the cover: Spring Creek Gardens provides tomato plants for new gardeners wishing to grow a healthy, edible garden. PHOTO BY BECKY PETERSON

On this page: Left: The number of bees visiting California poppies are being tracked by OSU researchers. PHOTO COURTESY OF OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY.

Right: An ice storm in February split tree trunks in Silverton, Oregon. PHOTO BY ERIC HAMMOND

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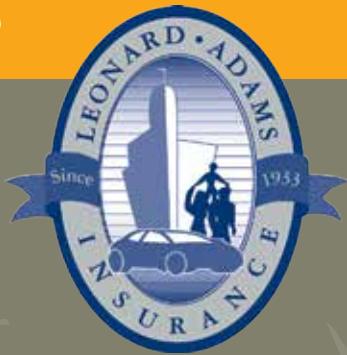


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PH 503-682-5089	PORTLAND
PH 888-283-7219	NATIONWIDE
FAX 503-682-5099	MAIN OFFICE
FAX 503-682-5727	PUBLICATIONS
info@oan.org	EMAIL
www.oan.org	WEB
www.diggermagazine.com	NEWS BLOG

STAFF

Jeff Stone EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR	jstone@oan.org 503-582-2003
Beth Farmer COMMUNICATIONS & WEB DESIGN MANAGER	bfarmer@oan.org 503-582-2013
Bill Goloski PUBLICATIONS MANAGER	bgoloski@oan.org 503-582-2009
Curt Kipp DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS & PUBLICATIONS	ckipp@oan.org 503-582-2008
Zen Landis EVENT & EDUCATION MANAGER	zlandis@oan.org 503-582-2011
Allan Niemi DIRECTOR OF EVENTS	aniemi@oan.org 503-582-2005
Stephanie Wehrauch DIRECTOR OF FINANCE & ADMINISTRATION	swehrauch@oan.org 503-582-2001

DIGGER

Curt Kipp EDITOR & DISPLAY ADVERTISING	ckipp@oan.org 503-582-2008
Beth Farmer E-DIGGER PRODUCER	bfarmer@oan.org 503-582-2013
Bill Goloski ART DIRECTOR & CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING	bgoloski@oan.org 503-582-2009

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SUBSCRIPTION AND CHANGE OF ADDRESS Circulation is controlled. 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 OAN Publications of change of address. Please allow 3-4 weeks for address change.

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2020-2021 EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Kyle Fessler PRESIDENT	Woodburn Nursery & Azaleas Inc. 13009 McKee School Road N.E. Woodburn, OR 97071 sales@woodburnnursery.com 503-634-2231 FAX 503-634-2238
Josh Robinson PRESIDENT-ELECT	Robinson Nursery Inc. P.O. Box 100 Amity, OR 97101 josh@robinsonnursery.com 877-855-8733 FAX 503-835-3004
Todd Nelson VICE PRESIDENT	Bountiful Farms Nursery Inc. 17280 Boones Ferry Rd. N.E. Woodburn, OR 97071 info@bountifulfarms.com 503-981-7494
Jim Simmitt PAST-PRESIDENT	Simmitt Nursery 138 NE 22nd Ave. Canby, OR 97013 simmittnsy@canby.com 503-266-9640 FAX 503-263-6330
Wes Bailey TREASURER	Smith Gardens Inc. 23150 Boones Ferry Road N.E. Aurora, OR 97002 wes.bailey@smithgardens.com 503-678-5373
Amanda Staehely SECRETARY	Columbia Nursery 29490 S. Jackson Road Canby, OR 97013 amandastaehely@gmail.com 503-810-2598
Ben Verhoeven MEMBER AT LARGE	Peoria Gardens Inc. 32355 Peoria Rd SW Albany, OR 97321 benv@peoriagardens.com 541-753-8519

BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Tom Brewer ASSOCIATE MEMBER	HC Companies Inc. ProCal tbrewer@hc-companies.com 503-686-8448
Adam Farley CONTAINER GROWER	Countryside Nursery aifarley@countrysidenursery.com 503-678-0511
Ron Kinney CONTAINER GROWER	Monrovia rkinney@monrovia.com 503-868-7941
Joe Dula CONTAINER GROWER	Moana Nursery joed@moananursery.com 503-266-8170
Jesse Nelson FIELD / BARE ROOT GROWER	Hans Nelson & Sons Nursery Inc. jnelson@hansnelson.com 503-663-3348
Chris Robinson FIELD / BARE ROOT GROWER	Robinson Nursery Inc. chris@robinsonnursery.com 877-855-8733
Jay Sanders FIELD / B&B GROWER	KG Farms Inc. jsanders@kgfarmsinc.com 503-678-3245
Lorne Blackman GREENHOUSE	Walla Walla Nursery Co. Inc. lblackman@wallawallanursery.com 509-522-9855
Tyler Meskers GREENHOUSE	Oregon Flowers Inc. tyler@oregonflowers.com 503-678-2580
Gary S. English RETAIL	Landsystems Nursery gary@landsystemsnursery.com 541-382-7646

Smart stewardship

It's tough to think about the future when we're trying to keep up with solving the problems of the day.

This is something we face nearly every spring, when the most important thing is getting plants out the door to our customers.

We do, however, need to set aside time to strategically plan for the future.

I feel very fortunate to be part of an operation that places a high priority on sustainability and managing our raw materials well into the future. That kind of planning makes the best use of our limited resources, and helps alleviate some of the difficulties we may face before they become major problems.

I see the evidence of forward-thinking tactics every day. Some of the first green-houses that my grandfather built decades ago are still standing tall. Many have had retrofits or modifications over the years, but the bones are very much the same and they were built to last for generations.

Along with our workforce, water seems to be at the forefront of every planning discussion we have. We've been able to grow over the years by focusing on conserving that precious resource. From the design of our can yards, the micro-system pot-in-pot fields, or the many recycling ponds, we try to recapture and conserve every drop of water that we can.

Biological control programs have also emerged in our industry over the past few years. For some, it's hard to get out of the habit of just grabbing the spray gun whenever needed. Yes, it takes quite a bit of open-mindedness, patience, and a willingness to fail to become successful at using biological controls in an IPM program. And, yes, sometimes it also means grabbing the spray gun when needed.

However, the new pest management tools can be more effective than they once were. These modern techniques and complementary systems only help us be better growers and achieve better results in the long run.

Sometimes these sustainable practices are something we really strive toward, and others times come about out of sheer necessity. The world we are operating in changes on a daily basis. Whether it is government regulation or a change in consumer demand, we must be ready to adapt. I think back a few years to how one unfortunate incident brought the word "neonicotinoid" into the public sphere, and changed the way most of us will operate forever.

I think we sometimes forget how great of an impact our stewardship really has on our state. We care for our land. We protect our water. We support future horticulture leaders through the Oregon Nurseries Foundation.

Oregon nurseries annually sell nearly \$1 billion worth of oxygen-creating, carbon-sequestering plants that we share with the world (not to mention the millions more in the queue for next year). I'm proud to be part of that stewardship, and I hope to continue to foster that stewardship in our industry for generations to come.



Kyle Fessler



Calendar

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

JUNE 5-13

PHILADELPHIA FLOWER SHOW

The annual flower show has been moved to an outdoor venue the first time in its history. Vendors and exhibits will be set up throughout Franklin Delano Roosevelt Park (FDR Park), South Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. The unique horticultural displays in the new space allow for as social distancing and the health benefits of being outside. www.phsonline.org

JUNE 15

ARBORJET SCHOLARSHIP DEADLINE

For the eighth year, tree and plant health care company Arborjet is offering its \$10,000 "Taking Root" scholarship. Scholarship applicants must be graduating U.S. high school seniors planning to major in forestry or a related major (plant sciences, horticulture, entomology, environmental science, etc.) for the 2021–2022 academic year at an accredited two-or four-year college or university. Interested students and may apply directly at www.scholarsapply.org/arborjet.

JUNE 23-27

CALIFORNIA SUMMER TRIALS

To stay in compliance with local ordinances and health official guidance to mitigate the spread of COVID-19, all guests must register to attend the individual sites of the 2021 California Summer Trials (formerly California Spring Trials). More than 20 breeding companies are set to showcase their new genetics with unique location dates and times. Group sizes will be limited, and some companies may offer private appointments before or after the event time. For more information about the trials, please contact Oster and Associates at www.growertalks.com/CaliforniaTrials.

JUNE 25

DIGGER: FARWEST EDITION

Display ad reservations for the 2021 Farwest Edition of *Digger* magazine are due June 25. More than 11,500 copies of this extra-large edition will be distributed to *Digger* subscribers, as well as exhibitors and attendees of the Farwest Show in August. To reserve your space, contact Curt Kipp, OAN director of publications, at 503-682-5089 or email ads@oan.org.

JUNE 26

HORTLANDIA

The Hardy Plant Society of Oregon (HPSO) has scheduled the annual plant and art sale at the Portland Expo Center. The Hortlandia Committee of the HPSO board is monitoring the ever-changing conditions of the pandemic and will provide updates as the show dates



JUNE 10

DUFFERS CLASSIC

The 31st annual tourney will tee off at the Stone Creek Golf Club in Oregon City, Oregon. A benefit for the Oregon Nurseries' Political Action Committee, the event is a great way to reconnect with friends while supporting a strong nursery industry voice in Salem and Washington D.C. Sponsorships available. For more information and to register, log on to www.oan.org/duffers.

come closer. If you have questions, email info@hardyplantsociety.org.

JULY 10-13

CULTIVATE'21

Presented by AmericanHort, Cultivate offers educational and networking opportunities and exhibits featuring technology, new products, services and plant varieties. Cultivate'21 is set to take place at the Greater Columbus Convention Center in Columbus, Ohio. The association is working with city, state, and government officials, as well as the Greater Columbus Convention Center, on the proper protocols for having a safe in-person event. More details on these protocols will be available in the coming weeks. For information, visit www.cultivateevent.org.

JULY 27-29

PERENNIAL PLANT ASSOCIATION NATIONAL SYMPOSIUM

The Perennial Plant Association will host the 2021 Virtual National Symposium under the theme, "Celebrating Perennials: People, Place and Purpose." The hybrid format will include virtual speakers – from Italy, Britain, Brooklyn, Denver and more – and smaller, outdoor regional pop-up events around the

nation. Topics will include trial reports, native plants, foliage, biodiversity, and garden design inspiration. Visit tinyurl.com/6bxddyk8 for more information.

AUGUST 13-15

NURSERY/LANDSCAPE EXPO

"Find Your Greatness at EXPO" is the theme of the 2021 Texas green industry trade show. Registration for the show is open. Safety precautions are being developed for attendees and exhibitors heading to the in-person show at the Henry B. González Convention Center in San Antonio, Texas. For registration and further details, go to www.nurserylandscapeexpo.org

AUGUST 18-20

FARWEST SHOW

The biggest green industry trade show in the West is set to take place at the Oregon Convention Center, 777 N.E. Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. in Portland, Oregon. The trade show, produced by the OAN, attracts exhibitors and attendees from across the country and the world. OAN leaders are monitoring the health and safety protocols to ensure a safe and successful show for all. Log on to www.farwestshow.com for more information. ☺

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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.

J. Frank Schmidt hosts vaccination clinic

Nearly 700 employees and their family members (over 18 years old) participated in a workplace COVID-19 vaccination clinic at J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co, the Estacada News and Pamplin Media reported. It took two months for the wholesale grower to coordinate the event, and they opened it up to employees from nearby nurseries.

"We feel it is necessary to help stop the spread and give our workers and their families a chance to get the shot if they choose to," Sam Barkley, high forest farm manager, said. "Many of them have a hard time using a computer, and have trouble when trying to sign up, so we decided to take time out to help."

The majority of their workers at Schmidt are Latinx. Statistics from the Oregon Health Authority show that Latinx people are amongst those hardest hit by COVID-19, and least protected from it. They represent about 13% of Oregon's population, but have had a full 33% of the recorded cases. Despite this, they have received only 6% of the vaccine doses statewide.

Pam Evans, human resources manager, said the vaccination effort allowed workers to get vaccinated in a familiar place while receiving assistance with paperwork, and without language barriers getting in the way. Some do not speak English or Spanish, but indigenous languages and may not read or write well in any language.

Providence Health & Services worked with Costco to provide the vaccinations. The impetus for the clinic came after Schmidt contacted the OAN to ask about options. The staff suggested that the nursery work with their health care provider to set up a clinic at the nursery. Read the full story at tinyurl.com/vuhct7n8.



The Farwest Show will be held in the Oregon Convention Center in August. PHOTO BY BILL GOLOSKI

FARWEST SHOW WILL GO LIVE AND IN PERSON THIS AUGUST 18-20

The Farwest Show will return — live and in person — to the Oregon Convention Center in Portland, the Oregon Association of Nurseries Executive Committee decided May 17. The scheduled show dates are Wednesday-Friday, August 18-20.

After the cancellation of the 2020 show, organizers planned for the worst this year but are optimistic that the biggest green industry trade show in the West will be back this summer. The show will follow the health and safety guidelines in effect for the Oregon Convention Center in order to best protect attendees while facilitating the interpersonal interaction that makes the show essential.

"We are committed to putting on a great show experience," Allan Niemi, director of events at the OAN, said. "Everyone involved has learned to roll with the punches over the past year, but the green industry is a resilient business like no other. It's going to be a great time."

The fact that Oregon Gov. Kate Brown is relaxing restrictions put in place during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic was a major factor in the decision. The future availability of the Oregon Convention Center was another. The entire facil-

ity is currently being used as a mass vaccination site, where nearly one in seven Oregonians have received their jabs, but that operation is scheduled to shut down by June 17 as the emphasis moves to more localized vaccination efforts.

More details about the 2021 Farwest Show will be forthcoming, but the show will proceed.

Hotel registration is open. Farwest attendees and exhibitors can receive special discounted rates at three select Portland hotels for this event. This year's host hotels are Courtyard by Marriott Portland Downtown Convention Center, Doubletree by Hilton Portland, and the newly-opened Hyatt Regency. All are within walking distance of the Oregon Convention Center. When booking through Farwest, trade show guests and staff receive reduced room rates, complimentary Trimet passes and free Wi-Fi. Those staying at Doubletree will also receive discounted parking rates.

To secure a hotel room within the discounted hotel room block, visit the Farwest Show website at <https://farwestshow.com/hotel-travel/> and follow the reservation instructions provided by each hotel. Attendees may also call their hotel of choice to book a room or make their reservation online.

More COVID-19 coverage online

Further updates on how the COVID-19 virus is impacting the greenhouse and nursery industry is online at www.diggermagazine.com/category/coronavirus. We are reporting on the most current information as of press time, but please check online for the most up-to-date information.



Allan Niemi, director of events at the Oregon Association of Nurseries, hands out bags of landscaping plants to guests of the drive-through Ag Fest experience. PHOTO BY BILL GOLOSKI

DRIVE-THROUGH AG FEST PROMOTES AG TO FAMILIES

The Oregon Association of Nurseries (OAN) promoted consumer gardening with a popular booth at the Oregon Ag Fest, held April 23–24 at the Clackamas County Fairgrounds in Canby, Oregon.

The walk-around event, designed to promote agriculture to a family audience, is normally held at the state fairgrounds in Salem. This year, that venue was being used as a mass vaccination site, so Ag Fest organizers had to turn elsewhere. They decided to put on a COVID-19-safe, drive-through event in Canby. This way, families could look at animals and other agricultural demonstrations from the safety of their vehicle's windows.

The OAN hosted the **Plant Something Oregon** booth at the third stop on the route. Each carload received



annuals and seedlings to take home, along with the OAN's Retail Nurseries and Garden Centers Map to help them find places to buy plants and gardening supplies. (The map lists all OAN retail, mail order and landscaping members.)

The give-away plants were donated by **Al's Garden & Home, Woodburn Nursery & Azaleas, Smith Gardens, Kraemer's Nursery** and **Heritage Seedlings & Liners**. "We appreciate these growers for supporting this event that allowed us to reach out to growers, and help kids and families get

their hands dirty planting something," OAN Director of Events Allan Niemi said.

The driving route began with a long table set for 168 guests, representing the number of people the average farmer can feed in a day. Tractor equipment lined the alleys, and cows, llamas, and chickens were around every corner. The option for an ice cream cone closed out the route.

Some 766 cars, or roughly 4,000 people, participated in the three-day event. In pre-pandemic times, the annual event typically has about 20,000 guests. ➤

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GROWERS ADVISED TO CHECK SPELLING ON EXPORTS

The USDA Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS) recommends growers double-check the spelling of the genus and species information on their phytosanitary certificates when filing their information. If details are not correct in the Core Message Set in the Automated Commercial Environment (ACE), it could cause a delay in shipments headed to a plant inspection station (PIS).

APHIS has posted an Agricultural Risk Management system propagative name validation list to verify spelling. It's available at tinyurl.com/npb5p52c. Software vendors may also download the list to use with the PG10 category AP0400 (propagative material) only. Filers must use plant unit (ACE CATAIR Appendix PGA code PTU) for PG26 unit of measure for plant

shipments, and must use the kilogram unit of measure (ACE CATAIR Appendix PGA code KG) for seed shipments. (Refer to the appendix on www.cbp.gov.)

Contact your local PIS for clarification regarding correction requests received from them. For help with the APHIS Core Message Set filing, visit the USDA website at tinyurl.com/cv73a7ab, send an email to ace.itds@usda.gov, or call 1-833-481-2102.

Code 6421 requires plants to be visibly labeled with the name and address of the shipper/owner, the name of the person or agent it is going to, the name of the county, state, or territory where the products were grown, and a statement of its products. Read the full code at tinyurl.com/bys3um34.

Those who have questions are encouraged to consult a nursery inspector. Use the online tool to find your Oregon inspector by logging into tinyurl.com/9hv4zb6p.

CALIFORNIA REJECTING SHIPMENTS FOR LABEL ERRORS

The Oregon Department of Agriculture is reminding growers to double-check the labeling of their plant shipments to California, as the California Department of Agriculture rejected several shipments headed into that state this spring.

California Food and Agricultural

USDA REOPENS APPLICATIONS FOR FARM ASSISTANCE

The USDA Farm Service Agency has reopened applications for the Coronavirus Food Assistance Program 2 (CFAP 2) for at least 60 days or possibly longer, starting April 5.

The program provides financial assis-



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Bob Long, RG, LHG, CWRE
Principal Consultant

tance to farmers, ranchers, and producers of specific agricultural commodities who were affected by COVID-19 market disruptions, if they meet certain requirements. The list of eligible commodities and requirements is shown on a USDA fact sheet and can be viewed on tinyurl.com/vfeh2sc8.

Nursery and floriculture crops are among the eligible commodities. A downloadable PDF of the application form is available at tinyurl.com/79pxpm75.

For more information on the program, log on to www.farmers.gov/cfap.

FEWER STATE-RUN NURSERIES LIMIT LANDOWNER RECOVERY

The closure of state-run tree nurseries a decade ago has contributed to the tree seedling shortage that's impacting Oregon wildfire victims, according to a report from *Stateline* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania). The National Association of State Foresters conducted a survey that found eight states that have closed their operations in the past 20 years, with 29 states still operating facilities.

Much of the 63,000 acres of private land that was destroyed by the Labor Day wildfires remains unaddressed, but Oregon state law requires forest landowners to replant their property within two years of the event. State-run nurseries used to fulfill short orders of forest seedlings for private individuals. Today, the same groups are struggling to obtain seedlings from commercial growers, which typically grow large orders by contract years in advance. Small landowners own the largest share of the U.S. forests.

"We're scratching our heads over this trying to address the need from the fire," said Glenn Ahrens, a forester with the **Oregon State University** extension service.

Log in to tinyurl.com/4spawcmd to read the full story.

REGISTRATION IS OPEN FOR CULTIVATE'21 SHOW

Cultivate'21 will be held live Saturday, July 10 through Tuesday,

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In Memoriam

ARDA BERRYHILL

The Oregon Association of Nurseries (OAN) is saddened to report the passing of Oregon Nurseries' Hall of Fame member Arda Berryhill, who founded and owned **Berryhill Nursery** in Sherwood, Oregon, along with her husband, Roger. She passed away May 13, 2021, at home in Sherwood at age 86.

Arda was born April 11, 1935 to Anna Sophia Carlson and Fred Lien in Cresbard, South Dakota. She married Roger Berryhill in 1956 and graduated from Willamette University in Salem, Oregon, with a degree in biology in 1957.

The couple made their home in Klamath Falls where she worked as a child-welfare caseworker and Roger attended college. After he graduated, the couple moved to the Portland area.

Arda was looking for something she could do while she was at home with their young children. They established Berryhill Nursery on 2.5 acres outside of Sherwood with a 12-foot-by-24-foot greenhouse, growing rhododendrons.

The enterprise gradually grew as large as 40 acres, in time expanding its offerings to more than 500 plants. The nursery sold containerized plants in the Pacific Northwest, as well as rooted cuttings and liners nationwide.



Arda did the propagation, which she learned from Bill Curtis at Wil-Chris Acres in Sherwood. She also did the marketing and bookkeeping, while Roger constructed the buildings on site and maintained the equipment.

At Curtis' urging, Arda joined the International Plant Propagators Society (IPPS), where she became active in the leadership. She served as the first woman president of the Western Region of IPPS in 1984.

Arda also became active in the OAN, serving on the board and as treasurer in the 1990s. Both she and Roger served on the OAN Government Affairs Committee. Arda received many awards for her work on behalf of the industry. She was selected for the OAN Outstanding Service Award in 1984. The IPPS Western Region honored her with the Curtis J. Alley Award of Merit in 1992, for outstanding contributions to IPPS. She was given an OAN Honorary Life Membership in 1994, and was elected to the Oregon Nurseries Hall of Fame in 2000.

Arda retired two years ago, transitioning daily management of the nursery to her daughter-in-law, Diane Berryhill.

Arda is survived by daughter-in-law Diane, son and daughter-in-law Brian and Jody Berryhill, daughter and son-in-law Julie and David Gardener, and two grandchildren. Attrell's Newberg Funeral Chapel in Newberg, Oregon, is in care of arrangements, but no service has yet been announced. There is a memory-sharing page online at www.attrells.com/obituaries.

July 13, at the Greater Columbus Convention Center in Columbus, Ohio. To register, visit www.cultivateevent.org.

Cultivate guests will be expected to wear masks and follow other health and safety protocols. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines will be implemented at this year's event, and the convention center is accredited by the Global Biorisk Advisory Council for its cleaning, disinfection, and infectious disease prevention practices.

More than 100 education sessions will be held during the event. Show organizers have applied for pesticide recertification credits from Indiana, Ohio, and West Virginia. Six half- or full-day teaching and demonstration workshops are also available for an additional registration fee. For tours, registered attendees may choose from one of four tracks scheduled for Saturday, July 10, which will visit the Columbus Zoo and Aquarium, three retail garden centers, two greenhouse production facilities, and three nurseries. Visitors are welcome at the Ohio State University Cultivar Trials, and registration is open for the 5th annual Flower Run 5K at Cultivate.

There will also be a Women in

Horticulture gathering, as well as an AmericanHort GenNext Community networking event, Unplugged. More event details will be released later.

BENTZ INTRODUCES BILL TO ADDRESS SEEDLING SHORTAGE

U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz (R-Oregon 2nd District) has introduced H.R.2562, The Solving Our Shortages for Seedlings Act (SOS for Seedlings Act), according to a report from KTVZ (Bend, Oregon).

The bill directs the U.S. Forest Service to develop a national seedling strategy and provide funding for federal nurseries. It will also create a \$1 billion loan program to start new state, tribal, local and private nurseries.

"My bill, the SOS for Seedlings Act, is tailored to meet the accelerating need of reforestation efforts due to years of devastating wildfires," Bentz said. "This bill directs critically needed support to nurseries in Oregon and across our country as we scale up seedling production to an additional 1.7 billion seedlings annually to meet our country's share of the One Trillion Tree Initiative."

The bill is his first piece of legislation

and has the support of three key House Republicans, including Ranking Member of the House Natural Resources Committee, U.S. Rep. Bruce Westerman (R-Arkansas); Chairman of the Congressional Western Caucus, U.S. Rep. Dan Newhouse (R-Washington); and Former Chairman of the Congressional Western Caucus, U.S. Rep. Paul Gosar (R-Arizona). Read more details at tinyurl.com/28z5tytw.

Announcements

OAN APPOINTS TEMPORARY FARWEST SHOW STAFF

Kelsey Hood has returned to the Oregon Association of Nurseries on a temporary contract to assist in producing the 2021 Farwest Show.

Kelsey will be working on most of the same tasks she managed at the previous Farwest Show. She will manage registration, exhibitor communications and various events, including the Growing Trends Showcase, New Products Showcase, Pub Crawl, and more. There will be other duties as assigned for the OAN. She can be reached at khood@oan.org or 503-582-2010.

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Northwest News

OHP MERGES INTO AMERICAN VANGUARD CORPORATION

American Vanguard Corporation (AVD) is combining its **OHP Inc.** and AMVAC Environmental Products (AEP) subsidiaries, according to a release from the corporation. The merge consolidates and strengthens AVD's ability to provide biological, biorational, and chemistries for non-crop markets, including nursery and greenhouse, golf, landscape, and public health businesses.

Along with the merger, OHP Vice President and General Manager Dan Stahl announced he plans to retire at the end of April. He has collaborated with AEP CEO Shayne M. Wetherall to make sure OHP customers will receive continued service throughout the management transition. Additionally, OHP Vice President of Marketing and Sales Troy Bettner will now report to Wetherall. Bettner has been with the company since 2018 and manages the commercial efforts and supplier relationships. Read more about the merge at tinyurl.com/3nb9xdmp.

BIOSAFE SYSTEMS PROMOTES NEW T&O SALES MANAGER

Eric Smith has been promoted to turf and ornamental (T&O) sales manager for **BioSafe Systems**, according to a release from the company. He first joined the company in August 2016 and played a critical role in developing the T&O division.

Smith will identify new market opportunities and partnerships within ornamentals, grounds maintenance, cannabis and hemp, turf, greenhouse vegetables, as well as controlled environment agriculture (CEA) products such as tomatoes, peppers, cucumbers, eggplant, strawberries, lettuce, herbs, and plants for pharmaceutical uses.

He has managed the East Coast sales team for the past two years and will now lead all sales activities to expand the division's network of businesses. ☎



Let's keep them growing

I HAVE WRITTEN SEVERAL columns on the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on garden centers and how they have responded to it. These last two years have been like no other in recent history—not just for garden centers, but every citizen.

In many cases, our lives have been adjusted for us and we have had to adapt to many situations that we have no control over.

In general, the garden center business has weathered the last two years quite well—certainly much better than many other businesses. In most situations, they were required to implement restrictions, but they were permitted to remain open.

The sales of some categories of products, such as house plants, have exploded beyond expectations. One garden center manager told me that when he thinks sales of house plants will begin to level out, it just does not happen and each month sales continue to climb. With more people working from home, even if there is not an outside space for a garden, there is always room for a houseplant. Many of

them, I hear, are often given names!

Those fortunate people who have the space for an outdoor garden are gravitating toward a vegetable garden, and the sales of seeds and plant starts continue to show huge increases. Last year caught many garden centers unprepared for the surge in vegetable gardening and all of the related supplies. The order preparation was much better this year, but there was definitely a hesitation regarding future ordering. The major question was whether the surge would continue. It has.

Garden centers, like any other business, are constantly looking for new markets to attract new customers. However, what about businesses that are certainly within the boundaries of the horticulture industry, but are not garden centers? These are businesses that have no indoor plants and do not focus on outdoor plants, either. What is happening with them?

A fertilizer powerhouse

I know of one particular business that resembles an old-fashioned feed and farm

Mike Darcy

Head “plant nerd,” longtime speaker, host of

gardening shows on radio and TV, and author

of the *In the Garden* email newsletter.

You can reach Mike, or subscribe to his

newsletter, at itgmikedarcy@comcast.net.

store, but it really is much more than that. The name of the business is Concentrates, and its name does not begin to describe what it offers.

I first encountered them early in my Oregon gardening years when I was looking for some larger than 5-pound bags of blood meal and bone meal. A gardening friend suggested I take a look at the store.

On my first visit, the physical building seemed like it might collapse at any moment, but the service was friendly, the staff knowledgeable, and they had the product that I wanted.

Concentrates began in 1938 as a buyer's co-op for local farmers, farm supply stores, and feed mills that wanted to take advantage of their combined buying power. Today, Concentrates has grown to become the largest wholesale distributor of organic fertilizers on the West Coast. While their product mix has greatly expanded, the bags of blood meal and bone meal are still available.

In 2011, they moved to their first modern facility and are now operating out of a large industrial warehouse in Milwaukie, Oregon.

General Manager Heather Havens joined Concentrates in 1997 and recently told me that the last two years had been their best sales years in the history of the company. Heather has been active in the organic gardening community and was involved in creating the Oregon State University Organic Master Gardener Program. She also currently sits on the board of the Portland Area CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) Coalition. She ➤



WHAT I'M HEARING

The warehouse setting (right) and interior of sales floor (previous page) of Concentrates is not your usual retail space. PHOTO BY PAT BLANTON



is very involved in the product selection and overall image of Concentrates.

A new generation of gardeners

The pandemic has brought a new generation of gardeners who want to grow their own food. They want to have some control over what they are eating, and that includes what might have been sprayed on it.

They probably do not fully know what the word "organic" means, but it is often thought of as a term used to reference something as being pure or without synthetic chemicals. Many of these new gardeners want to purchase products that encompass this belief.

These new gardeners are also discovering the true joy of being outside, gardening, and working their hands into the soil and watching something grow. Heather said that these new gardeners have many ques-

tions because so much of gardening is new to them. Many of the new gardeners started with vegetables and now are adding ornamentals into their mix.

At the end of the summer, it is not unusual for customers at Concentrates to bring in a tomato or squash to proudly show off something that they have grown.

When I visit garden centers, it is not common to see large bags of organic fertilizer products for sale. I do not mean the niche products, but more of those that are mainstream, such as blood meal, bone meal, cottonseed meal, fish meal, alfalfa meal, etc.

Many gardeners have heard about these products from other gardeners and seek them in sizes larger than 5 pounds. Also, these products are highly unlikely to

be found in large box stores. Adding items of this nature to the inventory would provide another reason to visit a locally owned garden center.

A new niche in gardening products

Concentrates may be just a niche in the world of garden centers and related stores, but it is a niche that will spread. Organic sections in garden centers have continued to expand in recent years, yet offering fertilizer packs in larger sizes is rarely an option. Perhaps a new creative marketing tool would be to bring in a few different organic fertilizer products and test the waters. Your store might just be offering gardeners a new niche. It is certainly a niche-oriented world today. ☐

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MEET THE LEADER

The voices of Oregon's nursery industry

TELL US ABOUT YOURSELF

I grew up in the nursery business. My parents, Joe and Judy Dula, started Dula's Nursery in Canby, Oregon, in the late 1970s. They bought Rex Denison's 40-acre tree farm and converted it from a field-grown operation to an ornamental deciduous and conifer tree seedling farm. From about 4th grade on, I helped at every level of production. My parents began exhibiting at the Farwest Show and connected with Henry "By" Sprenger II, owner of Nevada-based Moana Nursery. At the time, his garden center had one store and he worked with my parents to source products in Oregon. Through their business relationship, I got to know By very well as a kid.

After graduating from Canby High School, I took a couple of community college-level courses for a few things. I once attended an Oregon State University orientation to look at their horticulture program, but nearly everything that they said we would learn was stuff I was already doing in the nursery now — and I was already getting paid for it. I would have liked to get a college education, but I also had practical field experience to get me through.

The recession of the early 1980s ultimately put my parents out of business. They lost the farm, and I was without a job. However, Moana Nursery had just started a nursery production supply site over in Barlow. By asked if I was interested in working for him to grow the new material for his retail stores and consumer/commercial landscape business. Happy for the offer, I started working at Moana Nursery in 1983. I was one of the crew members when there were only five employees. The nursery was managed by Al Hanson, who would eventually go on to retire in 1987. Once Al had left, By said to me, "Here you go, kid! The job's yours to lose, if you want it."

In the same year, I married my high school sweetheart, Nancy. Together we have two amazing daughters, Ellen and Elizabeth.

WHAT'S YOUR GUIDING PRINCIPLE?

Do the right thing. Be honest. Be direct.



Joe Dula
General Manager
Moana Nursery, Canby, Oregon

OAN member since 2012

OAN roles/positions:

- Farwest Show committee member.
- OAN Board – Container Grower Position #3
- Clayton W. Hannon Distinguished Service Award, 2019

WHAT'S A GOAL YOU HAVE YET TO ACHIEVE?

My goal is to retire sometime prior to my demise.

WHAT'S THE BEST BUSINESS DECISION YOU'VE EVER MADE?

I would say the best business decision I have made in my career was to continue moving towards offering more containerized plant material for sale. Compared to the field-grown balled and burlap plants, the production process has been working out better for the company. We grow a variety of products that work well in high-desert climates. The containerized product allows us to have yearlong sales instead of seasonal windows in spring and fall.

HARDEST BUSINESS DECISION

In 2009, after the Great Recession, I had to let go of more than 30 hard-working employees. There was just no way to make payroll and keep the winter crew. We cut

down to a skeleton crew of three for a few winters to get by.

WHAT'S YOUR GREATEST MISSED OPPORTUNITY?

I should have purchased some real estate opportunities years ago when I had the chance. I'm not a big gambler, and stretching my budget to the limit is a risk I don't often take. But, If there's anything I've learned, you rarely lose on a property investment.

WHO IS YOUR MOST SIGNIFICANT MENTOR?

By Sprenger was a great mentor. He founded the nursery in 1967 with his father in Reno and knew the industry well. He just had good common sense. Because of that, we got along very well. Offering me a job when I was just 19 years old meant a lot. Together, we would work on any topic — finances, employees, you-name-it — from all the angles that made sense.

BEST BUSINESS ADVICE:

"What would you do if it was your money?" Since I have worked for someone most of my life, I always make decisions with someone else's money. By and I would have discussions about the business, and he would ask me that question. I think of this often.

WHAT DO YOU LOVE MOST ABOUT THE NURSERY INDUSTRY?

The variety of duties and changes in the industry make the job really interesting. It is a seasonal business, but it is never the same each time around.

WHAT IS YOUR GREATEST CHALLENGE?

Employees and accountants are my two biggest challenges. It seems like I'm always trying to build a solid crew that works well together on and off the field. But, once I get one, it's difficult to get them to stay for more than a year or two. As far as accountants go ... things do not always go as planned when running the day-to-day operations. Explaining what happened down to the exact dollar each month can feel like a burden.





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WHAT MOTIVATES YOU TO GO TO WORK EVERY DAY?

I'm fortunate to have a lot to look forward to each day. I love my family and work to make sure they're taken care of. I feel a sense of purpose with my responsibilities to my job and the nursery industry. There is always work to be done, and I feel like I need to be there to see it through to the end.

WHAT ARE YOU MOST PROUD OF?

Having worked for a company for a long time, I'm proud to be at a place in my career where I am trusted to handle things on my own. I treat the job as if I own the business, even if it belongs to someone else.

INVOLVEMENT WITH OAN:

I've been going to the Farwest Show most of my life. Moana Nursery has been an OAN member since 1980. Through them, I've been a committee member and volunteer for the OAN's trade show, and I was honored to receive the Clayton Hannon Distinguished Service award for the time I dedicated to the industry. It is important that many smaller individual companies form a big group with a powerful, strong voice to deal with the many issues the industry will face. Our members are all aware of the never-ending list of grand ideas that other people think should be put into place that will affect your business.

IN YOUR OPINION, WHAT ARE THE MOST CRITICAL CHALLENGES FACING THE NURSERY INDUSTRY TODAY?

Labor will continue to be a huge issue for our businesses — both the lack of people in the workforce and the increasing costs to keep them. The second biggest challenge is shipping. Trucking for the nursery industry is critical and continues to get more expensive and tougher to schedule. Government regulations, interference, and taxes are also forced on the industry and business owners. There are never any reductions in these areas, only more additions. ☺

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A hearty appetite for edibles

Growers find they can't grow enough edible plants, and retailers can't keep them in stock

BY TRACY ILENE MILLER

IN MARCH 2020, U.S. governors began rolling out stay-at-home orders, including in Oregon, because of the coronavirus known as COVID-19. Not long after, Americans in lockdown turned their attention to edible gardening any way they could — in containers, in the backyard, online.

When the **Oregon State University Extension Service** at the time waived its \$45 fee for its online vegetable gardening course, approximately 1,000 people per day began signing up. By April 1, 2020, more than 17,500 people had registered for the introductory course.

Meanwhile, seed suppliers across the country were forced to meter their sales. Some sold out. So did vegetable and herb starts growers. Retail garden centers scrambled, scouring sources for starts to restock the shelves.

Although the pandemic elevated edible gardening, where Americans of all ages latched onto food-producing gardening during lockdown, indicators existed before that there would be an increased interest in the activity. The 2016 National Gardening Survey, conducted by Harris Poll, estimated 6 million new gardeners in 2015 — 5 million of which were millennials. Two years later, lawn and garden participation and spending for U.S. households was at an all-time high.

By the 2020 survey (reporting on 2019), activity had dipped.

That drop-off might have continued were it not for the pandemic. But it hasn't. The pandemic created another swell in the wave of garden seekers that some say will last longer.

Yet, even with those impressive sales, edible gardening trends are the same as they were before, according to retailers and growers in Oregon.

This article explores what consumers want in their edible gardens, and the evident shifts of the past 5–10 years.

Tomatoes

Tomatoes and peppers maintain their dominance of the edible garden market. Customers are still keen on old-fashioned heirloom tomato varieties, such as Cherokee purple, Pineapple, and Green Zebra. But, demand has tapered since the explosive interest began a decade ago, with a shift to offering a greater number of tomato varieties overall.

"We have always carried over 200 varieties of tomatoes, and having those unusual varieties is important," said Laura Altvater, color buyer and manager at Portland Nursery.

There's a balance in thinking through the type of tomatoes to offer for gardeners, as growing regions can vary vastly even in one state. Coastal areas tend to buy more short-day varieties, for instance.

Becky Peterson, sales manager at wholesale grower **Spring Creek Gardens** (Junction City, Oregon), believes that heirlooms, including several beefsteak varieties, are still strong sellers, as are varieties bearing the state name (e.g., Oregon Spring) or an in-state location (Siletz, Santiam, Willamette).

Colors (yellow, purple, chocolate, orange, streaked) are popular. Furthermore, the evergreen best-sellers include the high-yielding Sungold cherry (orange) and Super Sweet 100 cherry (red), the hybrid indeterminate Early Girl, San Marzano plum, and large beefsteak tomatoes.

Gardeners are far more adventurous in the varieties they will buy compared with 10 years ago, which has led to nurser-



A hearty appetite for edibles

Previous page: Bush beans are a popular choice for new gardeners.

Containers in 4-inch containers are sold to help gardeners feel successful.

PHOTOS BY BECKY PETERSON

ies expanding their offerings, according to Bernie Johnson of **Mountain Valley Gardens** (Klamath Falls, Oregon), “What I have noticed is a decrease in the popularity of grafted vegetables, but the people who like them are attached to them,” Altvater said. “They’ve got more disease resistance and, in some instances, earlier production or more reliable production; they can handle temperature fluctuations better, and you can get more out of a small space from one plant. But grafted vegetables are very much a niche market.” In smaller gardens, especially in urban areas, consumers are opting for a “one of each” approach with tomatoes, which favors the 4-inch pot. Increasingly, six-packs of tomatoes have declined in favor of 4-inch starts (sold the most), gallon sizes, and even two-gallon sizes. Peterson claims they appeal to new gardeners and retirees alike. Stores that serve customers with large gardens and in more suburban and rural areas still supply a limited number of six-packs, usually with staples such as cherry and beefsteak varieties, and with variety packs of mixed-colored peppers.

Peppers

Peppers are hot. Literally and figuratively.

“It used to be when we planned a crop, more than 60% was sweet and bell peppers,” Peterson said. “Now we slant to hot peppers. We’re growing them bigger, putting them in our larger containers, and making a bit more profit on those.”

Cultural influences may partially be at play here, indicated by the popularity of Hot Ones, a breakout YouTube series. It has a simple premise and a big focus on hot sauces and peppers. Celebrities are challenged during their guest appearances to eat progressively spicier, hot-sauce seasoned chicken wings. With 14 seasons, the show has racked up 279 video episodes ranging from 2.6 million to 84 million views each.

“Trinidad, Ghost, Scorpion, Jimmy Nardello’s — we never have enough of these hot varieties,” Altvater said.

“Hot Padrón and Eastern Asian



shishito are the darlings right now,” said Leigh Geschwill, co-owner at wholesale grower **F&B Farms and Nursery** (Woodburn, Oregon).

“The hot peppers have more connoisseurs than the sweet,” Altvater said.

They seem to be skewing toward male buyers. “Even here in our office, it’s become a hobby for [male employees] to see what kind of peppers they can get their hands on,” Peterson said.

Herbs

“We sell as much Italian basil as we can get our hands on,” Geschwill said.

The trend in herb starts is mirrored by that of sales for fresh herbs. Italian basil, cilantro and mint continue on top. Other high-demand herb starts are Italian parsley, dill, English lavender ‘Hidcote’ (*Lavandula angustifolia* ‘Hidcote’), rosemary and thyme. Customers frequently request rosemary and ‘Hidcote’ in larger sizes.

Basil is the number one seller. However, in keeping with the trend for

assortment and variation, consumers are looking beyond the traditional sweet Italian varieties and the classic large-leaf Genovese basil. They seek alternatives such as Thai sweet basil, purple, cinnamon and smaller varieties such as spicy globe.

“We do see a trend to having more specialty products that are ethnic-based,” Geschwill said, including a focus on Asian and Hispanic cooking. “Thai- and Asian-style basil are still second to Italian, but they are gaining in popularity.”

Where six-packs reign

Six-packs of tomatoes and peppers may be waning, but for the many other vegetables planted in multiples, they are thriving, especially with best-selling cool-season vegetables like kale, lettuce, broccoli, cabbage, cauliflower, and sugar snap and sugar pod peas.

“We can’t grow enough sugar pods,” Peterson said.

Home gardeners planting their own green salads buy the six-packs of lettuce, in single varieties and in blends, to keep their

Flats of herbs and vegetables like oregano and tomatoes are available at Spring Creek Gardens

PHOTOS BY BECKY PETERSON



gardens, and bowls, full all season long.

While an *Atlantic* magazine writer called the end to the kale craze in 2019, growers and retail garden center buyers are saying otherwise. Kale — especially the smooth-leaved lacinato or Toscana varieties — continues its status as a health-conscious darling of cooking shows and gardeners. The same cultural influence is seen with the

increasingly prized brassicas, broccolini and Romanesco broccoflower.

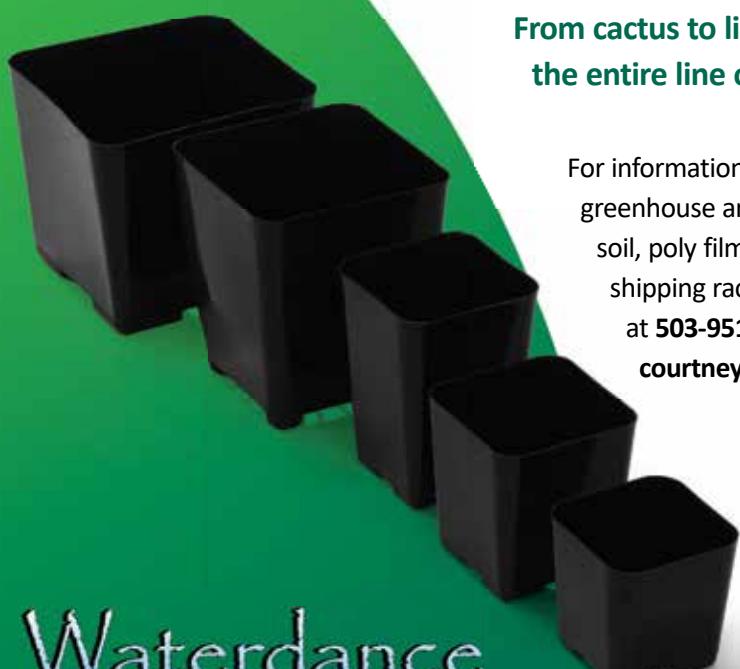
"A surprise hit last year was lemon cucumbers," Peterson said, noting that they sold out. "People became obsessed."

Altvater has seen that the varieties of cucumbers — a consistent top-seller — has increased and consumers are buying them out. The thin-skinned, small-fruited

Persian-type cucumbers, such as the varieties Mideast Prolific and Adam, are particularly popular because of their presence in grocery stores. While customers walk in asking for Persian, that term doesn't always make it to the plant tag, according to Altvater. It might be mentioned in the fine print of the description. Staff training helps to match the plant to a buyer's ➤

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A hearty appetite for edibles

Sweet banana peppers (top) and sweet corn options (below) are available in 4-inch starters.

PHOTOS BY BECKY PETERSON

request after a trip to the supermarket.

Similarly, although both winter and summer squash never go out of style. The proliferation of sizes and shapes from seed companies and in the supermarket — for both eating and decoration — is prompting gardeners to experiment in parallel to their culinary experience. One trend in packaging Altvater noted, has been a preference for the jumbo packs growers are using, instead of regular six-packs.

"The individual cells are much taller and wider than shorter; the plants slightly larger with a better root space," she said. The plants don't dry out as quickly, and they have a longer shelf life. On the retail side, the jumbo packs may be a dollar more expensive, but they're worth it, she said. Eliminating the different sizes and codes at the register, having all of the tray packs the same size, makes it easier to explain pricing to the customer because they have fewer sizes to interpret.

Nothing off limits with pots

Today, customers are buying plants as starts that traditionally have only been directly seeded, and some even historically recommended against as a transplant. This includes corn (both ornamental and sweet), carrots and even beets.

"We sell a lot of corn," said Peterson, "and they will buy a 4-inch beet, almost ready to eat" as a start, Peterson said. Spring Creek also sells lots of white, red and sweet potatoes in gallon containers.

The trend may be the upshot of the fear to fail.

"People think they can't have luck with seeds," Altvater said.

The last five to six years saw an influx of younger generation gardeners, and then the pandemic added even more new gardeners. They may be looking for foolproof gardening as well as the



convenience of more mature plants sold in larger gallon sizes.

"For new and inexperienced gardeners, starting off with a gallon gives you a bigger root system, it gives you a head start," Geschwill said. "It's easier to grow. I've killed lots of 3.5-inch plants, but not as many gallons; they will handle stress better."

Container growing

Breeders continue to actively pursue the container and patio gardening market with varieties that are more compact but have good yields. "That has really picked up," Altvater said.

The selection is now vast of well-performing bush cherry tomatoes, mini bell peppers and mini eggplants, compact hot peppers, globe beets, compact bush squash and zucchini, leaf lettuce, chard, and even bush runner beans and carrots!

Early to plant

Another surprise is the delivery of tender starts earlier, especially as sales of home greenhouses soar. (At least one greenhouse manufacturer reported 80% greater sales year over year at the beginning of the pandemic that has leveled now to 50% higher sales than the year before.)

"With tomatoes, and wholesalers providing bigger sizes, we start to get gallon sizes now in early April, where in the past we wouldn't see them until the end of



Sweet banana peppers (top) and sweet corn options are available in 4-inch starters.

PHOTO BY BECKY PETERSON



April or May," Altvater said.

The challenge for retail centers is to keep the plants protected during these early deliveries and to be sure their customers are aware of this need for protection, too, before they leave the store. Growers also face a challenge when shipping earlier these tender items, like cucumbers, which may go from a warm greenhouse to a cold truck,

It's a balance to keep those plants alive and delivered in good shape.

On the opposite end of earlier delivery of plants to consumers is the trend of season-extending, Geschwell said.

"We have seen good sales in fall crops," she said. Customers are growing in personal greenhouses and in containers, which stay warmer placed up against the house.

The rise of organics

Consumer demand for organic produce continues to grow, with sales finishing 14% higher in the fourth quarter of 2020 over the previous year. That demand has extended beyond supermarket shelves to the plants and seeds consumers buy, which in turn has influenced a rapid increase and a better selection of organic seeds.

"I've been seeing that production is increasing and getting more stable for us greenhouse growers," Geschwill.

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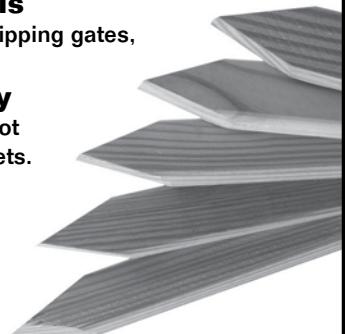
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Herbs like silver thyme are fragrant options for home gardeners.

PHOTO BY BECKY PETERSON



In fact, the organic seed market is expected to grow at a compound annual growth rate of 12.7% over the next 5 years. North America has the fastest growing market, and vegetable seeds make up nearly half of all organic seeds coming to market, according to research firm Mordor Intelligence.

The impact of the pandemic

It remains to be seen whether the explosive gains in edible gardening endure after COVID-19 recedes. But already this season, growers and retailers are seeing short turnaround times for sales. Crops that might normally have lasted two weeks in inventory are gone in a matter of hours or days.

"Anything that can be grown, people are buying. Last year, we were still selling broccoli in late May, and it used to be if you had broccoli in March you were panicking," Peterson said. "Nobody got their fill of lemon cucumbers and Walla Walla onions, so this year they are buying them in droves. And the strawberries sold out in minutes. I probably haven't even scratched the surface on sales and we're out for the season."

Growers and retailers are stretched their thinking on their production numbers and are trying to plan accordingly, but consumers may still be in a scarcity mindset.

When Geschwill forecasted her output for the year, she doubled the vegetable plant production.

"Based on demand just in March, that was a good call," she said.

On the retail side, Altvater is also increasing her numbers, ordering extra heavy. For instance, one weekend in March, coming into Sunday morning, she had only 10 flats of vegetable, where ➤



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A hearty appetite for edibles

Colorful basil options are great for cooking.

PHOTO BY BECKY PETERSON



normally she would have 40 to 50.

"That was me underbuying," Altvater said.

That experience, and the experience of last year, is pushing her to buy outside of her comfort zone and increase her orders. The next weekend, her Sunday inventory was just fine. Nevertheless, sales already show that the popularity of home-grown veggies is as strong this year as it was last, she said.

One outcome of last year's shortage is it provided garden stores confidence to sell different varieties. "When they realized that they could put them out and customers would still come," Peterson said. Customers were flexible and were actually excited to see different varieties they hadn't tried before.

"This year we brought back Amish paste tomato, reintroduced Aunt Molly's

ground cherry (*Physalis*), Martini cucumber and Mojita mint," she said.

The shortages pushed nurseries to experiment as well.

"We were doing vegetable programs on the fly daily," Peterson said. "We had shortages of seeds, plastics, and it introduced us to different varieties of pole beans and squash, and we found some new things that we liked."

Geschwell also had *Physalis* to offer and is testing lemon grass and artichokes in gallons.

"I don't feel it is risky," she said. There's no way to know if the choices

made are going to meet market demand, but as gardeners are looking for a wide variety of crops, experimenting at this moment in time is warranted.

"Some people are going to be hooked, they had great success gardening last year, and others had challenges, and they still want to try," Altvater said. "In general, we will gain a lot of gardeners from the pandemic. We are in a general upward trend." ☈

Tracy Ilene Miller is a freelance writer and editor who covers several topics, including gardening. She can be reached at tmillerwriter@gmail.com.

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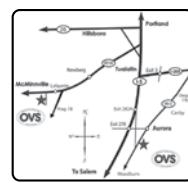


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An employee performs skilled grafting techniques in a nursery setting.

PHOTO BY CURT KIPP

Hired help

What it takes for nurseries to find the workforce talent they need

BY JON BELL

WORKING IN THE NURSERY industry is not easy. Laborers in the fields endure harsh weather conditions and strenuous work that can test their physical endurance. Drivers spend long hours on the road away from their families. Growers and production staff have to constantly monitor crops to ensure they're healthy and on track.

"You don't get a reset if you have an issue and a crop fails," said Margaret Whealdon, a senior human resources generalist at **Smith Gardens**, a grower of annuals and perennials headquartered in Bellingham, Washington. "I think some people don't realize — this is really hard work. People who do this do it because they love it and have a passion for it."

Almost as hard as the work itself: finding the people to do the work. Oregon's nursery industry alone employs more than 23,000 workers throughout the year. Many of those workers are seasonal laborers tending to the physical work of running a nursery: plant-

ing, fertilizing, watering, digging, packing, shipping. For years, a labor shortage has made it hard for nurseries to fill those roles.

But beyond that, experienced nursery and field managers and educated horticultural specialists also fill key positions to keep nurseries running smoothly. As it is with laborers, finding good people to occupy those roles can be challenging, too, thanks to an industry shortage, an aging workforce and the loss of some horticulture programs at universities and colleges around the country.

"It's hard work and you really have to love what you do. That's always going to be a big challenge," Whealdon said. "But we're hopeful. We always get our guy. We always get our girl. We just have to persevere and keep our eye on the ball."

A shallower pool

Generally speaking, most nurseries are looking to hire all kinds of workers. Part of that comes from the fact that the



Hired help



industry has seen an unexpected boom during the COVID-19 pandemic, which has found more people staying at home and, as a result, tending to their landscaping and gardens.

"We've just seen a real resurgence of the customer base," said Nathan Lamkey, president of **McHutchison and Vaughan's Horticulture** in Naperville, Illinois. "The stay-at-home culture we had the last year brought us so many new consumers and so much more demand. It's really great for our industry, but with that demand, the question becomes: How do you grow sustainably and find the right people?"

Finding field laborers can be tough because of the nature of the work, immigration issues and other challenges. Positions that require lots of industry experience or higher education degrees — think associate or bachelor's degrees — are equally hard to fill.

"There's definitely a shortage of people with horticulture backgrounds and with the right talents and skill sets to meet the needs," Lamkey said. "I'm not saying they're not out there, but the pool is limited."

Part of the reason the pool is so shallow is because, in recent years, colleges and universities around the country have been scaling back horticulture programs due to diminishing demand. More students have been pursuing business, marketing and tech-

nology-related degrees, which has diminished demand and interest in horticulture.

"Colleges are dropping their programs, and that's concerning to us," said Pam Evans, human resources manager for **J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co.**, a wholesale grower of shade, flowering and specialty ornamental trees in Boring, Oregon.

At the same time, older, more experienced nursery professionals are either retiring or approaching retirement in an aging workforce trend that's tightening the labor pool even more. With a shallower labor pool, the qualified candidates are sought out by a larger number of prospective employers, so competition is stiff.



Previous page, top: Employees wrap racks of products at Smith Gardens in Aurora, Oregon. PHOTO BY BILL GOLOSKI
Bottom: Vaughan's Horticulture employee Ken Turrentine holds the Dümmen Orange, J'Adore poinsettia combinations grown at Smith Gardens Inc. PHOTO COURTESY OF SWINERTON

"When you have someone who has very specific knowledge, for example in soil science, all the nurseries want that person," said Maria Surgnier, chief human resource officer for **DCA Outdoor Inc.**, a Kansas City-based nursery growing and distribution company. "There are a lot of companies hiring, so competition is a big challenge."

Tracking down talent

For most nurseries, hiring never really stops.

"We're always looking," Evans said.

And what they're looking for is a range of candidates who bring not only education but experience to the table.

"We're always going to look at someone's experience or background," Surgnier said. "If someone was raised on a farm, that speaks very highly to us. Very rarely do we put a hard stance on the need to

have a degree."

Evans echoed that sentiment, saying that when hiring farm managers, J. Frank Schmidt & Son looks for candidates with either a horticulture degree or at least five years' experience in the field.

"That experience is valuable," she said.

One way nursery operations find talent is by partnering with area colleges, universities and community colleges. Even though some have whittled down their horticultural offerings, there are still plenty who have programs. Whealdon said Smith Garden works with some nearby junior colleges and universities on an internship program; DCA Outdoor does, as well. Surgnier also said professors will occasionally refer students to the company, something DCA takes note of.

In addition, Surgnier said DCA works with candidates to kind of tailor positions

so that they will fit them well. They don't post a full job description, but rather key responsibilities and critical success factors, which allows for a little more flexibility. DCA also uses a Culture Index Survey, which is a recruiting and management tool that helps employers identify employees' traits and characteristics, and how they like to be motivated and communicated with.

Terri Cook, senior vice president of human resources for **Everde Growers**, a nursery with 14 farm locations across four states including Oregon, said she's had good luck filling positions through the company's internship program. Just recently, Everde hired three new employees, all of whom had interned with the company through their colleges. And not only is Everde adding skilled employees to its team, it's also bringing in some much-needed younger faces.



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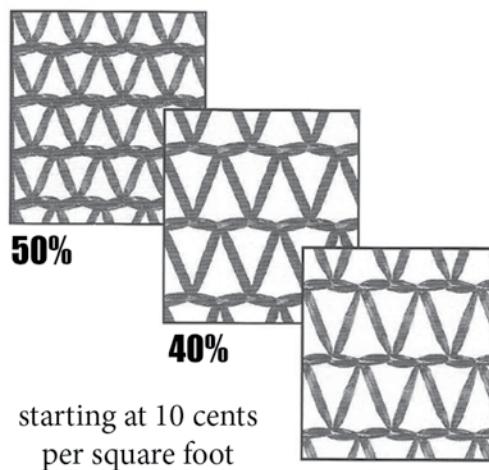
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Schwope Bros Tree Farms hosted a multi-week management skills training program for DCA Outdoor in Independence, Missouri.

PHOTO COURTESY OF DCA OUTDOOR.



"We recognize that we've got to bring young bodies in and get them trained up," she said. "It's the future of the industry."

Positive prospects

So, what are nurseries looking for in prospective employees aside from experience

and, where applicable, higher education?

For some, it's a willingness to learn. J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co. offers a management training program as a way to help employees figure out what they'd like to do at the company while also educating them about every aspect of it. Evans said

employees in the program rotate throughout the company over a one- to two-year period, gaining experience in everything from tissue culture and containers to the various soil types in the different regions where J. Frank Schmidt has operations.

"They get a great opportunity and we grow them as employees by finding what their passion is," she said. "It's a great way for people to really get into the company and learn."

Though the focus should be on horticulture and related fields, Cook said younger folks thinking about a career in the nursery industry would be wise to study business, as well. That way they learn the basics of what it takes to run a successful enterprise.

Whealdon said Smith Gardens is always on the lookout for people with a passion for the nursery industry.

"I think we look for people who, through the way they talk about their experience in growing or school, you can tell if they're passionate," she said. "We want people working here who are going to be working here for a long time. We are a forward-thinking company, and we're looking for people with passion and curiosity and who are always questioning about how we can do this better." ☈

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Jon Bell is an Oregon freelance journalist who writes about everything from Mt. Hood and craft beer to real estate and the great outdoors. His website is www.jbellink.com.



Lessons from an ice storm

Widespread tree destruction highlights the importance of proper selection and maintenance

BY ERIC HAMMOND

THE NORTHERN WILLAMETTE VALLEY in Oregon was hit by a once-in-a-generation ice storm on February 12 and 13 of this year. In the small town of Silverton, where the valley meets the Cascade Range foothills, freezing rain fell for more than 30 hours.

Trees and their branches were coated with thick ice.

It was beautiful, but the impact was terrifying and severe. Even before nightfall the first day, large branches started to break, and shortly after dusk, whole trees began to collapse. Thousands of trees in Silverton were shattered. Before the storm was over, more electrical customers in Oregon were without power than in any previous outage event.

The storm ended as we awoke the next morning to find a catastrophic scene outside our front doors. More than 1.5 inches of ice covered everything. Within only a few blocks of my home, dozens of ancient Oregon white oaks (*Quercus garryana*) were ripped from the ground or broken. More than 60 were affected citywide.

Silverton's urban tree canopy had been defined by these trees. This storm was a change event. Cultivated trees fared far worse than the oaks, but they did much less damage because they were many decades younger.

The impact on the industry

The day after the storm, I was beginning to recognize damage trends. I wondered how broad the trends were and what it might mean beyond a bump in tree sales for the industry.

It was easy to walk down a block from my house and see all the birch (*Betula* spp.) trees destroyed. Other blocks held only

ruined Callery pear (*Pyrus calleryana*) or red maple (*Acer rubrum*). This is a trend that will continue for years as some of the damaged trees decline or become infested with bronze birch borer.

It was evident that some of the trees broke under the ice because they had canopy faults prior to the storm. Others presented susceptible form or brittle wood.

Trees are planted everywhere in the landscape, so a large number of tree owners are the lay public. They may not know what trees to plant, or how to care for them. They might not understand good pruning practice. That puts them at a disadvantage when it comes to managing these trees and preventing these problems.

Our industry is a partnership between producers, sellers, specifiers, and plant care providers. Each must perform their role well for the whole to succeed. Each must educate their customers, or they endanger gains made across the industry.

There are businesses taking advantage of the reputation of the industry. They operate outside normal best practices. When standard practices aren't followed, they wreck the good standing of the whole industry. Consumers, with their busy, stressed-out lives, don't perceive the separation. The ice storm points this out with clarity.

Sometimes, in worst-case scenarios, our industry is linked to broad classes of tree failure. Our promotion of Callery pear trees is one example. Recently, I and more than 184,000 others were mesmerized by a short social media video about it. The video lambasted the industry for selling this "stinky and repulsive" tree.

All aspects of the industry — propagators, growers, retailers, designers, and plant care professionals — have lessons to

Lessons from an ice storm

Previous page: Ice from a February winter storm takes a Japanese maple down to the ground in Silverton, Oregon.

Tree branches and leaders were snapped in half (top and bottom) from the weight of trees. PHOTOS BY ERIC HAMMOND

learn from this ice storm. The public has much to learn too, and the industry needs to be there to support them.

An assessment of the damage

In search of lessons to learn from the ice storm and its damage, I took to the streets with a notebook. We were still in the aftermath of the storm, so I had no power, no cell service and no internet. I kept warm by walking over 25 miles of Silverton's streets, covering most of the town.

I surveyed the damage to cultivated trees. I couldn't look up methodology because of ongoing service outages. Time was critical for gathering data, because cleanup was progressing, and damage was being cleared away every passing day.

I surveyed only planted, cultivated trees, both native and non-native, that I could see from the sidewalk or street. (The only exception to this rule were Oregon white oaks growing in Silverton younger than about 75 years.) Shrubs, wild feral trees, and topped trees were not surveyed.

I classified each tree as "destroyed," "moderate" or "fine," based on the evident damage level.

Destroyed — Destroyed trees collapsed under the ice or had large parts of their canopy ripped away. Some were



dead or looked like they would die soon. Trees in this category were missing 50% of their tree canopy or more. They needed significant corrective action to avoid having permanent and significant structural faults. Because most homeowners can't or don't do the kind of pruning required by this level of damage, I considered these trees ruined. Future decay will be a real problem in these trees if they are not removed.

Moderate — If the tree appeared able to recover from the damage and maintain or regain a safe tree form with modest cor-

rective pruning – the kind of pruning a novice could do – the tree was classified as moderately damaged. These trees lost less than 50% of their canopy. Of course, in the weeks since the storm, many trees with moderate damage were ruined when homeowners, with no understanding of tree physiology or correct pruning technique, attempted to "fix" them. Vast numbers of trees I classified as moderately damaged could now be rightly classified as destroyed.

Fine — Trees in the fine category might have had broken limbs, but those comprised less than 30% of the total canopy, and never the leader of an excurrent tree. (Trees with a single dominant leader, such as a Douglas fir, *Pseudotsuga menziesii*, have excurrent habit.) These trees, without any pruning, were ready to continue growing and appeared unlikely to become dangerous. They manifested few structural faults and little decay will occur because of the storm.

Grouping by genus and species

As I assessed each tree, I grouped them by genus, and sometimes went as far as species when I was confident of the identity.

All species of *Betula* were lumped as birch. I am more comfortable with maple identification from sidewalk distance and split them into species. Flowering dogwoods (*Cornus florida*, *C. kousa* and their hybrids) were all grouped together because they look too similar from 75 feet away.



By the time I was done observing all of these trees, I had assessed more than 3,750 trees, held in 145 genera and species.

Some 72 of the species I identified had more than 10 representatives. 28 species were numerous enough to make up more than 1% of the total survey population. The top 13 most-represented trees totaled 2,009 individual trees, 53.7% of all trees identified in my survey, as follows:

- Red maple (*Acer rubrum*): 9.0%
- Birch (*Betula* ssp.): 8.5%
- Japanese maple (*Acer palmatum*): 6.2%
- Callery pear (*Pyrus calleryana*): 5.1%
- Flowering dogwood (*Cornus florida*, kousa, and hybrids): 5.1%
- Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*): 3.5%
- Deciduous flowering cherry (*Prunus* ssp.): 2.9%

- European hornbeam (*Carpinus betulus*): 2.5%,
- Pine (*Pinus* ssp.): 2.4%
- Norway maple (*Acer platanus*): 2.3%
- Sweetgum (*Liquidambar styraciflua*): 2.1%
- Western red cedar (*Thuja plicata*): 2.0%,
- Oregon white oak (*Quercus garryana*): 1.8%.

Some 54% of these, or 1,094 trees in all, had moderate damage or were destroyed. All but two of these species had a percentage in the double digits. Only Douglas fir and western red cedar received almost no damage.

Although Silverton's population of ancient Oregon white oaks did the most severe property damage in the city, Oregon white oaks younger than about 75 years had only moderate damage, and

none were destroyed by the storm.

I analyzed the proportion of each species that received moderate damage or was destroyed, following the model demonstrated by Susan Sisinni, et. al. (1). If the proportion was above 1, more were destroyed than their population represents in the survey; the species is deemed very susceptible to ice damage. If the proportion is below 1, they are considered a more resilient species.

Based on my survey in Silverton, the trees most susceptible to the ice storm damage were birch (7.8 proportion), red maple (6.4), Callery pear (4.7), and sweetgum (1.6). For these, the percentage damaged was much higher than their population percentage would suggest.

Those suffering damage roughly in proportion to their population were European hornbeam (0.9), deciduous



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Lessons from an ice storm

On the road to recovery, trees have been trimmed to recover as well as possible. PHOTO BY ERIC HAMMOND

flowering cherry (0.75), and pine (0.64). Norway maple at 0.6 had low damage proportionate to its population size.

Flowering dogwood (2.2), and Japanese maple (3.2) sustained more damage than I initially suspected. Broken small trees don't garner the same attention a 50-foot shattered birch does, nor can they inflict the same level of damage when they fall.

Three native trees led the way, with very low damage proportion: Douglas fir (0.05), Oregon white oak (0.3), western red cedar (0.0).

Oregon growers are respected for producing stock sold and distributed across the country. A diverse selection is important for their businesses, but that diversity is not well represented in the urban canopy.

The three most common street trees in Silverton — birch, Callery pear, and red maple — represent 27.5% of the urban canopy. The 10-20-30 rule suggests that of the urban canopy, no more than 10% should be a single species, no more than 20% should be the same genus, and no more than 30% should be from the same family.

According to this rule, these three trees have reached their maximum safe use. These three are much more susceptible to ice storm damage than other varieties. They need summer irrigation. Birches are subject to destructive insect attack. These are attributes that make them poor choices for use here, and prove the risk inherent with overuse.

Tree care for a more resilient forest

Storm damage reveals a tree's legacy of management. It is easy to look at most trees and see when pruning stopped after planting.

The healed scars of formative pruning remain around head height. Above them, it is common to observe included bark, acute crotch angles, crossing branches, and other canopy faults. It demonstrates a leave-it-be approach that is practiced by many tree owners and caretakers.

The consequences of neglect compound over time as trees age. Older, broader trees, and trees with included bark break apart at higher rates.

The opposite is also true. Trees from



some of Oregon's best producers are routinely butchered by unprofessional landscape maintenance crews and homeowners. Whether from ignorance of best practice or malign intent, ugly and dangerous trees result.

Homeowners, confronted with post-storm tree care, experience uncertainty, stress, increased cost, and future risk. It will impact the industry as homeowners recognize this. Reconstructive and formative pruning requires a level of knowledge and commitment beyond normal. It isn't recognized, nor is it affordable by homeowners. Meanwhile, many yard maintenance crews do not practice good pruning, nor do the people that hire them.

After the urban forest canopy lays collapsed on the sidewalk, residents are left to fix these problems on their own. Consulting city street tree lists results in poor guidance in all but the most progressive and well-funded cities.

Landscape designers and plant care professionals have a greater voice in educating consumers, but a large numbers of them do not use these services or — worse at a time like this — can't afford them. Consumers need knowledge about which

trees respond well to restorative pruning and which need removal.

Developers, homebuilders, and landscape installers have a strong influence on the choice of street and shade trees planted at new construction sites. It is formative for a city and region. They need education about best practice and better variety selection from all levels of the horticulture industry.

Education from producers and sellers to all buyers is important, whether homeowners or wholesale purchasers. A more diverse selection of street tree species will help yield a more resilient urban forest. ☈

Eric Hammond is a ISA Certified Arborist and serves as the chief horticulturist for Trella Urban Forestry Technology LLC, a China-based company that is planting native trees in urban areas and forests to help the country attain carbon neutrality. He resides in Silverton, Oregon and can be reached at onlygrowinthesun@gmail.com.

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Susan Sisinni, Wayne C Zippner, Andrew G Pleninger. 1995. Impacts from a major ice storm: street-tree damage in Rochester, New York. Journal of Arboriculture 21(3) 156-167.

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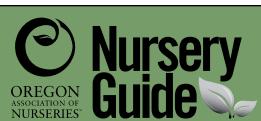
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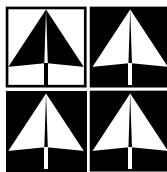
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Figure 1. Aaron Anderson's study plots at OSU's North Willamette Research and Extension Center, in August of 2019. Despite no supplemental irrigation and drought conditions, Douglas' Aster (*Symphyotrichum subspicatum*, in the foreground) retains its long-lasting blooms..

PHOTO COURTESY OF OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

Native plants, bees, and microbes

The OSU Garden Ecology Lab studies the health of garden environments

BY GAIL LANGELLOTTO

THE GARDEN ECOLOGY LAB at Oregon State University (OSU) studies the plants, insects, animals, people, decisions, and management practices that either improve or degrade a garden's ability to promote environmental and human health.

An underlying premise of our work is that gardens are important and understudied systems, that are key to building more sustainable, healthy and just communities.

Currently, we have four active research projects. In this article, I provide a brief update on each project, with a specific focus on our native plant studies.

Native plants and pollinators

Ph.D.-candidate Aaron Anderson studies the insects that are associated with Willamette Valley native plants. Over the course of a long term field study (2017-2019), he collected and identified about 40,000 insect specimens!

He is currently working through the analysis of this massive data set, so that we can create an infographic that can be used by gardeners and green industry professionals, to select native plants that support an abundant and diverse assemblage of beneficial insects, without attracting an excess of herbivorous pests.

Aaron's first paper from his dissertation is currently



Native plants, bees, and microbes

"accepted, pending revisions" in the journal *HortTechnology*. This paper reports on his survey of gardeners' impressions of the aesthetic value of his study plants, and includes five specific recommendations for native wildflowers that Pacific Northwest nurseries might consider growing and marketing as pollinator plants.

These plants are globe gilia (*Gilia capitata*), California poppy (*Eschscholzia californica*), Douglas aster (*Symphyotrichum subspicatum*), Oregon sunshine (*Eriophyllum lanatum*) and common yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*). These plants all fell within the 'sweet spot' of being attractive to both pollinators and to gardeners.

Out of the candidate native wildflowers we recommend, many gardeners noted that they already had common yarrow and California poppy in their gardens, which may reflect their higher market availability. However, substantially fewer gardeners said that they already had Douglas aster, Oregon sunshine, or globe gilia in their garden. This further reinforces the idea that these plants show an opportunity for nurseries to consider propagating and marketing these natives as bee-friendly plants.

Aaron also found that sharing short messages, related to the bees that were found on each native plant, greatly increased gardeners' impressions of what had previously been considered an undesirable plant. All native plants included in our survey increased in attractiveness, after gardeners were exposed to such messages.

The increases we observed in the attractiveness scores suggest that a significant subset of gardeners consider ecological traits (such as attractiveness to bees) as a component of a flower's beauty, and that a minimal amount of education can significantly sway gardeners' opinions on native plants. Based on these results, nurseries and garden stores may be able to increase the palette of native plants that gardeners find attractive and suitable for planting by sharing brief messages about the ecological benefits these plants provide.

Bees on native plants and cultivars

In 2020, Ph.D. student Jennifer Hayes completed her first field season of research, which is a monumental accomplishment during this time of COVID restrictions on our work. Early in the year, Jen finalized her list of study plants, which included one native species and 1–2 hybrids or native cultivars. Although we started with a much broader list of potential study plants, so many native plants did not have native cultivars or appropriate hybrids available for sale.

Once Jen and her crew put the plants in the ground, a new set of challenges emerged. For example, the native yarrow emerged with bright pink flowers, which suggested that these plants were not true natives. In addition, the *Sidalcea* cultivars that Jen and her crew planted came up looking decidedly different than the *Sidalcea* native.

Given the unexpected results, Jen

went on a journey to the OSU Herbarium. She learned that the Willamette Valley's native *Sidalcea malviflora* has been reclassified as *Sidalcea asprella*, and that the cultivars we purchased were hybrids of *Sidalcea malviflora* (native to Southwest Oregon and California). The findings suggest a need to work with local nurseries and native plant growers to see whether or not there should be — or can be — standards for the sale of native plants.

Should native species and native cultivars be verified or share provenance? Should gardeners be asking for this information? I don't know, but I think that they're important questions to consider.

With one field season's worth of data in hand, the native cultivars were more attractive to *all* bees (with overall patterns being driven by the abundance of the European honey bee) for all floral sets, except California poppy. When we excluded honey bees from the analysis, to look at mostly native bees, no clear pattern of visitation on native plants versus native cultivars emerged.

Native California poppy was most attractive to native bees. But, native cultivars of *Sidalcea* were more attractive to native bees (keeping in mind that in 2020, our native cultivars were not cultivars of our regionally appropriate native plant). For all other plants, there was no difference.

We look forward to collecting additional data in 2021 and 2022, to see if the lack of difference in bee visits to native plants versus native cultivars holds up. Particularly for the perennials, we are finding that bee visits change so much from year to year, as the plant becomes established.

Jen's study also offered an unexpected opportunity to study gophers' preference for camas bulbs. Though Jen's gopher troubles became apparent in June, she noticed signs of gopher activity when her plants were being installed in her study plots in early spring.

By August, there had been so much gopher activity in her study plots, that she conducted a damage assessment. Every camas plot was excavated, and any remaining bulbs were counted. No

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Figure 2. Jen Hayes, standing in the middle of her native plant and native cultivar study plots at the Oak Creek Center for Urban Horticulture on the campus of OSU.

PHOTO COURTESY OF OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

bulbs were found remaining, across five *Camassia leichtlinii* 'Sacajawea', and only 49 of the 200 planted bulbs remained across her five native camas plots.

Notably, 192/200 bulbs remained across her five *C. leichtlinii* 'Blue Heaven' plots.

There is a clear preference for the native *C. leichtlinii* and native cultivar 'Sacajawea' bulbs over the 'Blue Heaven' cultivar. She also noticed that any bulbs that were planted shallower than the recommended 2-3x the height of the bulb were missed by the gophers.

Garden bees of Portland

Each June, July, and August, from 2017-2019, undergraduate Isabella Messer and I travelled to 25 Portland area gardens to sample the garden bee community. Although we still have a few specimens that await identification, we have developed a pretty good picture of the garden bee community in Portland area gardens.

All together, we collected between 76 and 84 species of bees across a combined 13.2 acres (acreage of all 25 gardens, summed). A few noteworthy specimens:

- We collected one specimen of *Pseudoanthidium nanum*, which is a non-native species to our area, which seems to be establishing and spreading in Portland. Stefanie Steele from Portland State University is writing a scientific note on this apparent introduction, tracking its incipient spread in the region.

- We collected one specimen of *Lasioglossum* nr. *cordleyi* which may be a new species. The notation nr. *cordleyi* means that this specimen looks similar to *L. cordleyi*, but that the morphology of this specimen is different enough than the normal type for this species, that it catches your attention. Further study will be needed to determine if it is indeed a new species, or not.

- Some of the species we collected (as well as their ecological characteristics) suggest that gardens are healthy habitat for bees. For example, we collected 72 specimens of *Panurginus atriceps*, which is a ground-nesting, spring-flying bee. Previous studies of garden bee fauna



found ground-nesting and spring-flying bees to be relatively rare. We found *P. atriceps* to be surprisingly common in our collections. This bee is a social parasite that does not collect nectar or pollen or construct a nest for their brood. Instead, they take advantage of the hard work of other bee species by laying their eggs in the nest of another female. Parasitic bees are often used as bioindicators of habitat health. They would not be present on a site, unless the site also supported their obligate hosts.

- We collected two species of bees that are listed on the IUCN red list for threatened and endangered species: *Bombus fervidus* (18 specimens) and *Bombus caliginosus* (10 specimens). I am not yet sure if their presence in urban gardens suggests that these species are recovering, that these species might be urban associates that would be expected to thrive in urban gardens, or if gardens might represent particularly good habitats for these species.

Garden microbes in soil and on skin

In the spring of 2020, Dr. Gwynne Mhuireach started her post-doctoral research in our lab. She studies how having your hands in the soil, via normal gardening activities, might change the microbiome of gardeners' skin.

She recruited 40 gardeners to participate in this study: 20 from western Oregon and 20 from the high desert. Each gardener was asked to sample their skin microbi-

ome (by running a cotton swab over the surface of their hand) before gardening, immediately after gardening, 12 hours after gardening, and 24 hours after gardening. Gardeners also sent in soil samples, so that we could assay organic matter and soil ➤



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Native plants, bees, and microbes

Figure 3. One of our best gardens for bees was located adjacent to a golf course. This gardener's space exploded with flowering plants. Plant cover mostly negated the need for mulch, which offered benefits to ground-nesting bees. PHOTO COURTESY OF OREGON STATE UNIVERSITY

chemical characteristics.

Initial examination of her results suggest that:

- Soils have much greater microbial diversity than skin.
- The skin microbiome was much more variable, from person to person, than the soil microbiome was, from garden to garden. Individual gardeners' skin microbiome was so unique, that it might be analogous to a 'fingerprint'.
- Garden location (high desert or Willamette Valley) and garden management type (organic or conventional) were significant, but weak predictors of the soil microbiome community.
- Collection time was a significant but weak predictor of the skin microbiome community. Immediately after gardening, some gardeners showed a microbiome signal that suggested that soil



microbes transfer to skin after gardening. Other gardeners showed no such signal.

- Any persistence of soil microbes on skin was short-lived, and did not show at the 12- and 24-hour sampling periods.

Over the next few years, Jen will continue her study of native plants and native cultivars, while Aaron, myself, and Gwynne are hard at work analyzing

results and writing up our respective studies. If you are interested in following our work, please visit our lab website: blogs.oregonstate.edu/gardenecologylab/ ☺

Gail Langellotto, Ph.D. is a Professor of Horticulture and the Statewide Extension Master Gardener Program Coordinator at Oregon State University.

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Sustainability is our calling card

It is fitting that this issue of Digger focuses on sustainability.

Sustainability is embedded in how our nurseries operate, and it comes standard with all of our products. Last Labor Day, our region and the nearby Cascade forests came under attack from raging wildfires. Communities were destroyed, people were forced to evacuate, and the sky turned a dirty shade of orange. But I think the ultimate legacy of those fires will be one of rebirth and recovery. Our natural ecosystem can be replanted and sustained through the most dire and apocalyptic of events.

Two stories intertwined by 6.7 miles

The Santiam River Canyon is home to two major hydroelectric dams — Big Cliff Dam, and then the larger Detroit Dam just a few miles upstream. The fires that ravaged the area truly demonstrated the raw, destructive power of Mother Nature.

As the operator of both dams, Mike Pomeroy found himself racing between the two to secure and prepare them for the oncoming Beachie Creek fire. When his path to escape was cut off by the encroaching fire, he found himself inside the concrete walls of Detroit Dam itself, kept company by a chipmunk that also took refuge there.

Pomeroy pulled together supplies, including food, water, a cot, extra clothing and a sleeping bag. He made his way to the lower levels of the dam, thinking that was the safest place to be. He laid down on the cot and wrapped himself in his sleeping bag.

Eight hours after entering the dam, Pomeroy emerged from it in the morning to see daylight, rather than fire. He tried his radio and got a response. By midday, coworkers and first responders were able to come evacuate him. He'd been alone for 30 hours when they reached him.

Just a few miles upstream from the dam is Mongold State Day Use Park. This is where volunteers from the Idanha-Detroit Rural Fire Protection District assembled in response to the fire.

Veteran firefighters said they had never seen such an explosive fire. It sounded like deep, rumbling noises more akin to a train — but the black smoke columns signaled the fire running across the forest canopy.

The light was like what you would see a Mars Rover relaying back to earth. Rockslides and downed trees pinned in 70 firefighters, campers, and residents. As the fire closed in, repeated calls for help were answered, but conditions ruled out helicopter support. Main roads weren't passable.

Using Forest Service roads, a convoy of sedans, trucks and other vehicles formed to escape. During the night, they inched away from the roaring fires and thick smoke — at times having the caravan back up to select another forest service road when one was blocked. The volunteer fire fighters led the group over the ridges and back roads to safety.

Seedlings and trees are the answer

It took most of the fall for the fire to be contained and controlled. Salvage operations were needed to remove dangerous snags left standing by the fire. The state now is looking to replant state and federal forest lands.

I have a bumper sticker in my office in Wilsonville (and at home, which during COVID-19 I have called my “64th Avenue Bunker”). J. Frank Schmidt III gave it to me, and it says, “Trees are the Answer.”

We are seeing this first-hand not only by coalitions spurned into action to resolve a state and national crisis for reforestation, but also in the halls of Congress.

On Capitol Hill, newly elected U.S. Rep. Cliff Bentz (R-Oregon) introduced H.R.2562, the Solving Our Shortages for Seedlings Act (SOS for Seedlings Act) to address the national shortage of seedlings needed for reforestation efforts following wildfires across the United States.

According to the House Natural Resources Committee, wildfires destroyed more than 68 million acres in the last decade and over 10 million acres in 2020 alone. Here at home in Oregon, roughly 1.07 million acres burned during the 2020 season, the second-most on record. Firefighting costs are also high — \$354 million. 347 million trees burned, and 4,000 homes were lost.

The Oregon State Legislature has before it House Joint Memorial 8, which urges support of the federal legislation. What is critical is that the OAN will be in the middle of shaping how the private nursery market can meet the demand of the devastation.



Jeff Stone
OAN EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Promote more trees in urban areas

The Plant Something campaign, designed by the Arizona Nursery Association and visionary Executive Director Cheryl Goar Koury, not only promotes the benefits of plants but also their climate change perks.

The OAN got on board — we saw what climate experts saw: the nursery and greenhouse industry are a part of the climate solution. Studies have proven that shade trees and landscaping along paved streets can cut repair costs, reduce building maintenance expenses, and cool down public spaces.

Trees can reduce the urban heat island effect as well. When asphalt is exposed to the direct, intense rays of the sun, it can reach extremely high temperatures, causing it to break down more quickly and requiring more frequent repairs. One study has shown that protecting streets with a shady canopy cuts cost.

In addition, well-planned landscaping also protects buildings from the sun's pounding rays in summer and the biting conditions of winter. Situated properly, plants can create buffers between the buildings and the elements.

In rural and urban environments alike, trees are the true sustainable resource that our forest brothers and sisters know each day. The nursery and greenhouse industry provides the starts the forestry industry needs to mend our fragile landscape. Likewise, we provide the trees to make our cities more livable.

The OAN fully supports large scale efforts like the Million Tree Challenge, and we can rise to the occasion, demonstrating our critical role in the sustainability of our built environments and forest lands.

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