



The crew from Bamboo Garden pose for a photo.

PHOTO COURTESY OF BAMBOO GARDEN

## GROWER PROFILE



### OWNERS:

**Noah Bell**, general manager;  
**Nancy Oberschmidt**, owner.

### PEOPLE

Office manager Penelope Costley; nursery foreman Isaias Ramirez; shipping manager Niki Atterbury; inventory manager Suhaila Aboulhosn; plant health specialist Gary Figueroa; designer and consultant Anna Foleen; sales consultant Peter Berglund; planter craftsman Lloyd Dubois; freight shipping foreman Jose Cano; senior propagation specialist Reveriano Ramirez; propagation specialists Teresa Lopez and Manuel Ramirez; catalog designer Charissa Brock.

### KNOWN FOR:

The most diverse collection of bamboo in the United States, with more than 300 species and cultivars of bamboo propagated and grown on-site and sold at wholesale and retail.

### CONTACT:

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North Plains, OR 97133  
503-647-2700  
bamboo@bamboogarden.com

### ONLINE:

[www.bamboogarden.com](http://www.bamboogarden.com)

### LISTINGS:

72 [NurseryGuide.com](http://NurseryGuide.com)

# Bamboo Garden

Founded: 1984

**B**AMBOO GARDEN'S LATE founder, Ned Jaquith, was known as an evangelist or ambassador for the virtues of bamboo. His nursery started as a backyard operation, but grew into one with the largest bamboo collection in the United States, with more than 300 varieties of the plant.

Although Jaquith passed away in 2012, his nursery remains a much-respected resource in the plant community, well known for researching and introducing numerous new cultivars to the trade. Employees are committed to carrying on Jaquith's legacy.

"We've become good at collecting the seed and germinating them," said the nursery's general manager, Noah Bell. "And then, through studying different characteristics of the seedlings and doing field testing, we're able to establish new cultivars that have special characteristics. That ongoing field of research is our specialty."



Scan the code to view their listings

The nursery grows its bamboo on a 20-acre operation. They sell to retail and mail-order customers, as well as wholesale accounts, a customer mix of roughly 50/50.

Consumer desires for a privacy plant drive more demand than anything else. "Bamboo is one of the quickest ways to get a tall plant in a very narrow vertical space," said Penny Costley, the nursery's office manager.

Increasingly compact urban development patterns — tall homes on small lots — have only increased this demand, but the plant should not be typecast by any stretch. There are many other uses for bamboo, and more are being developed all the time.

"You can use it as a specimen," Costley said. "It's edible. You can build things out of it. It's a multipurpose plant."

Collectors and designers love it as well. They develop a passion or interest for bamboo's unique look and assortment of varieties, from small-statured selections to big timber bamboo. It comes in various colors, sometimes with variegation. There are, of course, clumping varieties, as well as running varieties that require a barrier.

People often show up at Bamboo Garden or call looking for plants or just information to fulfill their needs or their curiosity. The 18-member staff helps them find solutions and get the right plant for the right place or application.

"If someone calls up just with questions and then they go and buy



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a bamboo somewhere else, that's fine," staff designer Anna Foleen said. "We want to make sure that you're happy, that you're knowledgeable, that your plants are happy. That was really big for Ned — that people knew what they were doing so that the plants could stay happy."

### Inspired to grow

Bamboo Garden may have begun in Ned Jaquith's backyard in Portland, Oregon, but the roots of his interest in plants went back as far as childhood.

Jaquith was born in the Route 66 desert outpost of Kingman, Arizona, in 1939. From the age of 6, his family lived in the small town of Winterhaven, California, one mile from Arizona and four from the Mexican border. From watching Tarzan and Jungle Jim movies to visiting the San Diego Zoo with his family, he developed an affinity for the tropical look of bamboo.

Jaquith became a gardener early. From the age of 5, he would help his parents grow vegetables that they sold to a nearby grocery store during World War II. As a teenager, he planted his own vegetable garden.

After high school, Jaquith studied at San

Diego State University, then attended Arizona Western College and graduated with an associate's degree. He went to work as a brakeman for Southern Pacific Railroad.

Jaquith moved to Portland in 1976, following his future wife, Nancy Oberschmidt, who had moved there earlier. He brought with him a *Bambusa oldhamii* plant, which died because he didn't realize it wasn't hardy in the Northwest climate.

That experience was instructive. Ultimately, cold hardy bamboo would become a specialty for Bamboo Garden.

The *Phyllostachys vivax* that a friend gave him also died, not due to climate, but rather because it flowered. That too was instructive.

"Bamboo has a very rare, unusual flowering process that will flower once every 60 to 120 years," Bell said. "During the time that a bamboo species goes into flower, all of the copies of that particular plant will flower simultaneously, so the parent plant perishes, but they leave behind thousands of seedlings."

Bamboo Garden would go on to propagate bamboo plants in this fashion.

Although these experiences might

have discouraged others, Jaquith renewed his interest in the plant in 1980. He attended a plant sale in Pasadena, California, and purchased starts of 12 different types of bamboo, bringing them back to Portland.

He joined the newly formed American Bamboo Society (ABS) and would travel hundreds of miles to San Diego to attend meetings. In 1983, he and fellow bamboo collector Daphne Lewis founded the Pacific Northwest Chapter of ABS.

The next year, he took the numerous bamboo plants he had acquired over the past few years and founded Bamboo Garden in the backyard of his Milwaukie, Oregon, home. When he ran out of room there, he rented a two-acre nursery nearby and kept collecting and propagating new bamboo species and cultivars.

By the mid-1990s, the nursery had more than 200 of them.

A key turning point in the nursery's history was the launch of [bamboogarden.com](http://bamboogarden.com) in the late 1990s, when the internet came into general usage by the public. Search engine optimization was also in its infancy, but whether by intent or organically, the website



attracted attention and became a resource for the curious.

“We became renowned internationally as a source of bamboo knowledge,” Bell said. “People started looking for us, finding us. Anytime they searched for bamboo on the internet, we would come up.”

That drove more sales, and the nursery soon outgrew its initial space in the city.

“We had collected so many different species of bamboo,” Bell said. “The original intent was we just needed more space to grow them, and that was back in the early 2000s. The business and the demand for bamboo started to grow as well. So not only did we need space to grow the plants, but we needed greenhouses to propagate and a shipping warehouse to facilitate our shipping orders and everything.”

Jaquith identified a forested, 20-acre

site that was for sale 22 miles northwest of Portland, outside the small, Sunset Corridor town of North Plains. He purchased it in the early 2000s and gradually moved the nursery there.

“I think he just really liked the local geography of having the creek and the hillside, and different diverse microclimates, under which you can grow a diverse number of bamboos,” Bell said.

Around that time, Bell became the general manager of the nursery, responsible for day-to-day operations and helping it along its path of growth.

“Ned was my mentor, more than just my boss,” he said. “He taught me almost everything I know about bamboo and provided the environment and opportunity to learn and grow as the business grew.”

And grow it did. Over the years,

the nursery has supplied bamboo for large landscaping projects across North America, including a whopping 53 truckloads of it for the Asia Trail of the National Zoo in Washington, D.C.

Other projects in Oregon include: the Wayne Morse Courthouse in Eugene; the Portland Japanese Garden; the Lan Su Chinese Garden (formerly Portland Classical Chinese Garden); and the Oregon Zoo. The nursery also shipped bamboo to help landscape Point Defiance Zoo (Tacoma, Washington); Wellesley College (Wellesley, Massachusetts); and the mixed-use Shangri La high rise building in Vancouver, B.C., Canada.

“Ned was passionate about everything he got into,” said Foleen, who started working for Bamboo Garden in 2008. “It was only natural that once he got >>





addicted to bamboo, the addiction turned into a 20-acre nursery. Just anybody who knew him probably would have expected it, I think.”

### Continuing a legacy

Sadly, Ned was diagnosed with cancer in June 2012 and passed away in September of that year. It was a tremendous loss for the nursery industry in Oregon and beyond, as well as the bamboo community worldwide.

Foleen worked with Jaquith for several years before he passed, and remembers him, as many do, for his generosity.

“He was one of those people that literally would give you the shirt off his back if you needed it,” she said. “I actually saw him do that once. He was that kind of a guy, always out to be helpful, always out to be friendly, always easygoing.”

The staff at Bamboo Garden feels privileged to be able to continue Jaquith’s legacy through the cultivation and promotion of bamboo.

Peter Berglund, a sales consultant who

went to work for Bamboo Garden after being a customer for decades, promotes bamboo as a “world plant,” pointing to more than 1,000 species worldwide with different uses.

“It’s for carbon sequestration, for an oxygen output ratio higher than most plants, (for) heat island effect design uses,” he said. “It’s got so many applications, and it’s really being looked at around the globe for material use.” He cited dimensional lumber, flooring, clothing, paper towels and even toilet paper as a few of the examples.

Research into these applications has become a part of Jaquith’s legacy through the Ned Jaquith Foundation (<https://www.nedjaquithfoundation.org>), a non-profit organization that supports bamboo research and education. The organization’s website lists the projects that have been done over the years.

“Every year, we have a fundraising event, and we have grant applicants that we award the funds to in various arenas,” Bell said.

Funds have been awarded to individuals and groups developing bamboo bicycles, those developing it as a food source and those hoping to improve production methods, among others. Timber production, in particular, offers great potential for sustainability and profitability.

“When managed correctly, you can establish a grove that can be harvested 30–50% every year, and then it naturally replenishes the following year,” Bell said.

But for those who love the plant best, it’s still all about the passion for bamboo that drove Jaquith’s initial interest. That’s something he came to personify, and now it will doubtlessly outlive him for many decades to come.

“That brother- and sisterhood of just collecting a particular plant, just makes it much more fun,” Berglund said. “It’s a never-ending story of what they may have, what they’ve encountered, what they’ve had in the past, what they’re looking for in the future. And that just makes it fun. That’s just fun all the way around.” ©