Quality-Conscious Plants for an Entire Community

Anne-Marie Hardie

Set up in the midst of the woods, gardeners in Farmington, Maine, experience a nursery unlike any other. Structured around the natural terrain, Robin’s Flower Pot offers guests a shopping experience merged with a nature walk; shoppers wander through their grounds as they browse.

“We are set up a little different than other greenhouses,” said Robin Jordan. “We are off the beaten path and our greenhouses aren’t lined up in a row.”

Each retail structure is thoughtfully placed throughout the grounds with a natural stream running down the middle of the two of them.

Growing comes naturally to the Jordan family. Avid hobby gardeners, Robin’s Flower Pot was born from a suggestion to convert their home greenhouse to retail. The journey began with a single greenhouse and has now evolved into the 4-acre setting that has become the home of Robin’s Flower Pot.

Robin’s gardening adventure began in high school at her local greenhouse where she learned both the love of growing and the hard work that it entailed.

“I was the grunt, the young kid who crawled under the benches and pulled weeds,” said Robin. This passion led her to a career as the groundskeeper at the local university. It was here that she first shared her green thumb with the community, creating beautiful landscapes for all to enjoy.

At home, both Robin and her husband Jim loved plants and enjoyed dabbling as hobby greenhouse growers.

“I enjoy watching things grow; starting them from seed and trying to get it to be the best that it can be,” said
Jim believed that Robin could convert her hobby into a career, so he suggested Robin pursue her own gardening business, starting with selling plants from their backyard greenhouse.

“I originally said no, it's too much work,” said Robin. But the seed was planted and the idea began to grow. Soon, Robin’s Flower Pot would become an integral part of their lives.

Robin’s Flower Pot is a true family affair. Their daughter Kelly Jordan Rasmussen, who continues to work behind the scenes on marketing and graphic design, developed the name. Their son Michael Jordan adds his landscape expertise with natural stone throughout the grounds.

“We just really care about what we grow and sell. We always want to sell quality plants that you put in the ground and it's going to grow,” said Robin. “It’s not going to have to recover from stress for six weeks; it’s going to take off and grow.”

The first challenge for Robin was choosing what to grow for the retail market. The only greenhouse in the area had just closed and the local residents were looking for a new place to shop.

“We were swamped,” said Robin. The small operation continued to grow with consumer demand, adding on a new greenhouse each year. Today, Robin’s Flower Pot has expanded to offer a full line of live plants, from traditional annuals to nursery stock.

**United by a love of growing**

Robin has been the hub of the organization, with Jim stepping in on the weekends and during the busy periods. This fall, Jim will be retiring from the telephone company and will be joining Robin full time in the garden center.

“He is very excited,” said Robin. “Jim loves to water, build and help keep things in their top condition.”

During the peak of their business, there are 12 employees working together to bring beautiful blooms to the Maine community. As the spring rush slows down, the employees take a much-needed break, reducing the staff to four or five, with a further reduction in the fall. Open from April to December, the holiday season provides the opportunity for custom wreaths, poinsettias and seasonal items.

In the last few years, the seasonal plants have been harder to sell, as competition increases from the grocery and box stores.

“We cut back every year with our seasonal mums, but we still have those faithful customers that come back every year for them,” said Robin. “They understand the quality. We are very quality conscious. I like to grow a nice plant for my customers.” Fresh crops are grown throughout the year, ensuring that Robin's Flower Pot customers always receive the highest quality product.
Aligned with the environment
It’s these healthy, vibrant plants that continue to drive new and returning customers to their store. Robin’s philosophy is simple: she will only sell what she would plant in her own garden. Everything else is tossed.

Pests are controlled with biocontrols and nutrients are added with an organic slow-release fertilizer. And naturally based plant food provides strong roots and beautiful blooms.

“It’s nice to know that people, kids and animals can walk through your greenhouse without having to worry about the toxicity of sprays,” said Robin. “We just want to have that feeling that things are a little bit safer here. We have tons of bees and birds.”

Although not a certified-organic facility, Robin strives to make choices that will reduce the garden center’s eco footprint. The majority of the plants are grown in fiber pots with organic soil, providing both a healthy root system and the comfort that the pots will deteriorate back into the earth. In cases where the bio techniques are ineffective, Robin will spot-spray with the lowest toxicity chemical available.

Over the years, they’ve had several surprises, from frozen plants when the furnace went out to losing plants to snow.

“We’ve got that pretty much under control now,” said Robin. “Bigger equipment helps.”

Recently, they’ve added a new retail building with a full production space, including lighting tables and a germinator. During the cooler months, the plants are started in the fully heated facility and then transferred to the greenhouses during the first week of March. When asked about the upcoming winter, Robin is confident that they have both the resources and team in place to cope with the unpredictable climate. GT

Anne-Marie Hardie is a freelance writer/speaker from Barrie, Ontario, and part of the third generation of the family-owned garden center wholesale business Bradford Greenhouses in Barrie/Bradford, Ontario.