

GROWERTALKS

Features

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Hort Goes Hollywood (North)

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Clearview Horticultural Products—Langley

Brothers Rob and Fred Wein are fourth-generation clematis growers, whose business began in Ontario in the 1960s. The Wein elders decided to move west to British Columbia where they could semi-retire and dabble in some traditional farming, but they missed working in the greenhouse, so they decided to move the business to BC.

Rob said it was quite a small operation back then until the 1980s when he and Fred joined on. Now, over 30 years later, Clearview has four locations and leases a fifth one in Langley.

“Our backbone is clematis liners,” said Rob, and they ship them all over North America all year round for growing in the spring, summer and fall. (They even ship some to New Zealand and mainland China.)



Out of the 200 different varieties of clematis, seven of them are their own genetics, which they call the Vancouver series, and more are in the pipeline with one or two being introduced each year. BC provides the perfect climate for growing clematis because they like the cool winters and moderate summer temperatures, Rob said. And because of this, Clearview is able to ship naturally vernalized liners year-round. They offer all liner sizes, including 30 mm Ellepots and 2.5-in. pots. For some growers who want a quicker crop, like a 1 gal. that finishes in six weeks, they offer a 2-year-old Euroquart liner and even 1-gal. pre-finished.

Clearview also grows a fair amount of regal, zonal and ivy geraniums, and other spring plants for their IGC and big box customers, but they stay true to what started it all: clematis. And with vining plants becoming more and more popular among consumers, Clearview is in a great position to capitalize on the demand.

“A lot of nurseries don’t want to grow clematis themselves any more, so they bring them in,” said Rob. “And now you have to have clematis for the big box stores.” And Clearview is able to do just that.

1. Clearview has created 10 different recipes for their custom baskets. During peak season, greenhouse workers stick 35,000 cuttings a day.
2. Vining plants like clematis need additional inputs, like bigger pots, trellises and stakes. These are being grown outside to delay them a bit so they’re ready for mid-May.



Burnaby Lake Greenhouses—Surrey

When Burnaby Lake was started by Herb Vander Ende’s grandfather in 1956 after he emigrated from Holland, they were growing bedding plants and cut flowers. But since the mid-1970s, when Herb’s father and two of his brothers took over the business, they’ve been concentrating more on potted indoor plants. Today, Herb and his four brothers and a cousin are handling the day to day.

In two different locations totaling 1.8 million sq. ft., Herb and his staff of 250 employees produce everything from 4- and 6-in. rose plants and mums to kalanchoes and other succulents, cyclamen and hellebores for local grocery chains and IGCs. “We’re relatively full 52 weeks a year,” said Herb.

They still do some cut flowers, but Herb admitted that most of that business started to wane in the late ’90s. However, they do have an area where local mom-and-pop florists can come and shop for product.

Pictured: Burnaby Lake employees hand-make beautiful mixed potted plant containers for Costco.



West Coast Floral—Surrey

This BC business wears many hats. Twenty years ago, they merged their two separate businesses to create one—West Coast Floral that handled sales and shipping, and West Coast Growers, which was the propagation part, using the latter name. All under one umbrella, West Coast Floral’s operation today consists of propagation (along with being a Ball FloraPlant rooting station), sales, shipping, freight forwarding and wholesale finished plants. Oh,

and they’ve had a full-scale retail garden center on their property for the last 22 years called West Coast Gardens.

I met with Jason VanderMey (a Green Profit Young Retailer finalist in 2011) for a quick tour. He and his brother Brad run the business that their parents John and Joyce managed for his grandparents, who opened the business after moving to Canada from Holland in the early 1950s.

Jason said that their core has always been growing plants and they do a bunch of different things—annuals and poinsettias, but they also grow fall mums, succulents and other potted plants, some tropicals and tons of vegetables and herbs—for their grocery store and IGC customers.

Pictured: For 22 years, West Coast Floral has had a retail store on their property aptly called West Coast Gardens. They were just getting product out and there were already customers shopping among the displays.



Van Wingerden Greenhouses—Blaine, Washington

Since they're so close, I made a quick drive over the border back to the U.S. to see Len and Tom Van Wingerden, the two oldest of 11 children who help to run the business with their dad Mike.

When they opened in the early 1980s, they grew bedding plants, baskets and planters, which is still the primary part of their business.

For the last 15 years, they've been a plug producer for Ball Seed, supplying them to growers in Western Canada and the Northwest U.S. They also have a small retail store at their facility (which is about 10% to 15% of their business), 65 acres of blueberry fields and they sell finished cucumbers.

As far as the retail part of the business goes, it's officially been open for 10 years, but Len and Tom said that their dad always let the public come through one of the greenhouses and buy plants. They joked that they "Van Wing'd it" for a while before getting serious about building an actual store. When I visited in early March, they were still getting things ready to bring out their early spring crop of primroses, pansies, ranunculus and cyclamen. They also were preparing for the height of wedding season, which their sister Jen manages.

For their wholesale customers, they were busy growing 40,000 hanging baskets ranging from 10 to 18 in. They also create color bowls and other finished containers for grocery stores and IGCs.



Westcan Greenhouses—Langley

When I sat down with Eric Voogt, he shared that as a young man working at his father's vegetable business in Holland his dream was to always have his own greenhouse operation. And he certainly paid his dues to get to where he is today.

Emigrating from the Netherlands to Ontario when he was 20 years old, Eric started his career in the business working at Aldershot

Greenhouses. After receiving a job offer to work at Burnaby Lake (Herb Vander Ende's business on page 57), Eric moved to the BC area. Four years later, in 1981, he opened Westcan.

"I just jumped in with both feet," said Eric. "As an immigrant, I was a bit more determined because I wanted to show my family back home what I could accomplish."

Eric's story about Westcan has peaks and valleys. In the beginning, they grew everything—from lilies to cut flowers to tropicals. They also did a lot of propagation and used to be a Ball Seed supplier during the 1990s and 2000s.

But when the Canadian dollar went south, so did a lot of his business. Now, Westcan only propagates a small amount for a few local customers. This is also when the big boxes moved in, making it harder for his customers—IGCs and the local auction—to compete. Still, Westcan has been able to adapt to the changing business climate, contract growing for larger growers who sell product to the big boxes and handling special requests from local customers, which allows them to have a diverse product range.

Westcan has just the one location, 70,000 sq. ft. under cover, which is currently on the market. None of Eric's children are interested in taking over the business, so he's looking to sell it.

"There have been a lot of changes in the last 12 to 15 years," he said. "The last seven years have not been profitable, but we're surviving." **GT**

Pictured: Westcan offers a wide variety of vegetables and herbs that Eric personally grows himself.