

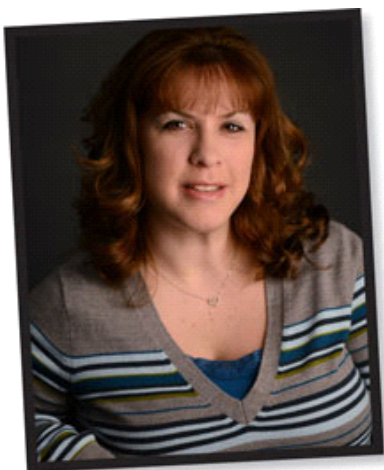
GROWERTALKS

Inside Look

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Getting Comfy

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A nursery grower commented to me recently that he's noticed that we (*GrowerTalks*) have been including more nursery-focused articles in these pages. Which is nice because it's true and I'm glad he's noticed.

Last year, my column for the August issue—which has been the Nursery & Landscape Issue for a few years now—talked about how I was working to get out of my comfort zone when it came to this segment of our industry.

Now don't get me wrong—I'm no expert. You can rattle off some genus name of a tree or shrub and 70% of the time I'll still give you a blank stare. But I'm starting to get an understanding of the nuances of the businesses that grow and sell woody ornamentals.

Case in point: My annual late spring trip this past May was to Virginia and all of my visits, except for two, included nursery growers. And as they toured me around their vast acres of trees upon shrubs upon trees, I actually felt comfortable with what I saw ... and can start to point out some varieties, too! For someone who's spent the last 15 years amidst the annuals and perennials, that says a lot.

I can relate to these nursery growers and maybe the reason is because they've had to step out of their comfort zones during the last 10 to 30 years, too. All of the Virginia nurseries I visited have added what they call "color" to their lineups, meaning annuals and perennials. They started with just one type of crop and then expanded from there when they realized their customers would buy more.

One of those nurseries I visited was Lancaster Farms, owned by Art Parkerson, who we're lucky enough to have on our contributing writing staff. And it's a great coincidence that he happens to be in this month's issue talking about how nursery growers have had to step out of their comfort zones when it comes to automation.

In his column, he says, "Nursery growers belong to an ornery fraternity ... Some of our 'fierce independence' has been tempered because the changes we were forced to make ... well, they turned out not to be so bad after all."

I said I was getting comfortable with nursery products; I also said I wasn't an expert. But you know who is? Our good friend, and editor of our *Nursery & Landscape Insider* e-newsletter, Dr. Matthew Chappell. He reached out to a bunch of woody ornamentals breeders to find out what's new for next spring.

And we have the second part of our coverage from the California Spring Trials (which seems like 100 years ago, I know). That long-standing event has even evolved from just seed annuals to now ... well ... everything except trees. Woody ornamentals have become a large part of many breeders' offerings, making them leave their comfort zone to include new products for a whole new customer base.

Actually, attending Spring Trials and seeing the new shrub varieties has given me the opportunity to learn about things like loropetalums and vibernums. And I'm comfortable with that. **GT**