

GROWERTALKS

Under an Acre

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A Little Garden Center with a Big Outreach

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Nestled amongst an Acadian fishing community in West Pubnico, Nova Scotia, Canada, is the small little gem of a garden center, Ouestville Perennials. Founded in 1994, it was inspired by founder Alice d'Entremont's passion for perennials and her need to bring the plants that she loved to her local community.

"From an early age, I loved nurturing and growing seeds into plants," said Alice. "I found, and still find, the whole journey absolutely mesmerizing."

Growing up on a farm, Alice learned both the commitment and hard work involved with working in the fields of agriculture and horticulture. But instead of stepping away from it, she leapt toward it, pursuing the landscape program at Nova Scotia's prestigious Agricultural College.

"It was the perfect combination; I loved the science part of the program, biology, entomology," said Alice. "It had a very hands-on approach and a lot of lab work. We were outside planting and working rain or shine."

Pictured: Alice d'Entremont, owner of Ouestville Perennials in West Pubnico, Nova Scotia, Canada.

Her first job after graduating was as a landscaper. Although, she loved her job, Alice struggled with finding the plants that she wanted for her designs. Alice was left with two choices: to work with the materials available locally or to bring the plants in herself. She chose the latter, developing the foundation for a new business, Ouestville Perennials, a perennial garden center operating from Alice's home. On the weekends, when Alice, wasn't landscaping, she opened her business to the public, providing a beautiful alternative to the chain store garden centers.

However, Alice's career as a landscaper was drawing to an end.

"My back began to bother me," said Alice. "One day, my back began hurting so badly that I couldn't even walk. I knew I had to leave the landscape business and so I delved into my greenhouse operation full time."

News about Ouestville Perennials quickly spread, with people driving as far as three hours for both the quality and the variety of perennials.

“Over the years, the collection started to evolve and we started adding unusual plants, as well as heirloom varieties,” said Alice. “Being in southwest Nova Scotia—which is Zone 6b, borderline 7—we can grow some unusual things and push the zone a bit.”

Over the years, Alice not only brought in her personal favorites, but responded to the queries of her customers, expanding the garden center to include annuals, herbs, and eventually, trees and shrubs.

The first greenhouse was added to the business in 1998, expanding Ouestville Perennials into the colorful world of annuals, baskets and mixed planters. As news about the charming garden center continued to spread, Alice realized that she needed to have more beautiful plants on hand. The second greenhouse was added in 2001 and a third in 2006 to accommodate the growing interest in custom planters. Ouestville Perennials may have begun as a business to fulfill Alice’s personal wish list, but had evolved into a gardening destination for the surrounding communities.

Over the years, Ouestville Perennials has added trees, shrubs, garden tools and pottery to its diverse lineup, becoming that one-stop-shop for the community. The warmer climate provides the perfect foundation for Alice to experiment with a large range of plants.

“Our focus is unusual trees, things you wouldn’t find at the chain stores,” said Alice. “Deer are a problem, so we bring in deer-resistant material, and being near the ocean, we carry a lot of salt-resistant plants, including several varieties of cypress, which is hardier than cedar.”



In the last few years, Alice has noticed how the Internet has evolved the way that consumers connect with garden centers. Customers are more aware of the varieties of plants available and often come in looking for a product. However, there are times where this increased access to information can pose some challenges—especially if the consumers are obtaining information from non-gardening sites.

“We have to be one step ahead. Sometimes the Internet, especially if they are on sites like Pinterest, provides the wrong information,” said Alice. “For example, they are coming in and asking for a bubble

gum lilac when the picture is of a hydrangea.”

Pictured: Alice originally opened Ouestville Perennials to fulfill the perennial plant needs for her landscaping job. But she soon quit that to run the growing operation full time, adding annuals, herbs, trees and shrubs, and eventually opening to the public.

However, there are still those customers who are coming in looking to have the same plant that their neighbor has. Alice said this is one of the benefits of being a part of such a close-knit community. Ouestville Perennials has become a place for customers to simply drop by to say hello, share their gardening stories or to come in for a beautiful addition to their home.

“We take pride in remembering these details and being able to provide plants for the entire community,” said Alice.

Over the years, Alice has strived to give back to the local community that has helped shape Ouestville Perennials into what it is today. This includes donating local planters, hosting school groups and doing an annual fundraiser for the local animal shelter.

Although the official season of Ouestville Perennials typically runs from the 1st of April to the 31st of October, Alice jokes that if the shed door is open, they’re open. As the business is on her own property, the only time it tends to truly close is when Alice is out of town.

Her goal is to keep on growing and broadening her horizon and keep up with the changes within the industry. Part of this transition has been the active use of social media including Facebook, Twitter and an e-newsletter to provide the inspiration and information for her community.

“It’s amazing—you put it into Facebook and you get an almost immediate reaction,” said Alice.

Alice’s passion for the industry shines through as she shares how much she loves connecting with other growers and reading the publications. As a long-standing member, and currently board of director of Nova Scotia’s Greenhouse Grower Association, Alice has developed a wonderful network of colleagues to share ideas and brainstorm challenges. When the catalogues come, shared Alice, it’s like Christmas all over again.

“I enjoy what I do; every day has to be fun,” said Alice. “It’s a passion. I love to learn. I love to learn from my customer, from my suppliers and my plant materials. Every day is a new adventure.”

The garden center provides an outlet for Alice to share her passion for plants with an increasingly interested and engaged community. **GT**

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