

Summary of the PNW Native Plant Forum October 16, 2025

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Panel 1 - PNW Native Plant Industry Overview; barriers and opportunities in the regional native plant nursery economy

Dr. Gail Langellotto (Oregon State University College of Agricultural Sciences) - Native plant producer survey results, industry observations, barriers to procurement, opportunities for growth

- [National survey of native plant producers primarily serving retail markets.](#) How do we expand the availability of native plants and growing a market for them at the same time. Gail and her team were interested in gauging desire and need for developing a native plant growing network largely focused on the ornamental market. Survey encompassed 72% retail, 42% wholesale nurseries that served a mix of retail, restoration, and landscaping markets. Using cedar as an example, only 21% of nurseries were requesting from their supplier and 17% providing the seed source to customers, 56% sell ecotypes outside of region. Other results can be found in the slides or in the Native Plant Nursery Producer Survey [here](#).

Don Norman (Go Natives! Nursery) - Growing a retail nursery in the PNW, balancing growth and capacity, expansion opportunities

Don Norman shared how their nursery has adapted to a growing retail market for native plants through modernization, outreach, and education. Early adoption of digital payments and participation in public displays and rain garden programs helped raise visibility and attract a steady flow of new customers—now about 70% each month. The

nursery's success hinges on balancing plant quality, customer education, and reliable supply amid ongoing challenges with soil mixes, species availability, and seasonal demand. By expanding retail hours, offering educational kiosks and handouts, and promoting native alternatives to popular non-native plants, the nursery is both meeting market demand and fostering ecological awareness. Don emphasized that continued growth in the native plant retail market will depend on reliable supply chains, informed customers, and collaborative efforts to maintain quality and diversity.

Cammie Donaldson (Florida Association of Native Nurseries) - History, purpose, successes and lessons learned from establishing and sustaining a native plant nursery network

Drawing on her experience leading FANN, Cammie emphasized how collaboration, education, and transparency can strengthen the native plant industry. Through partnerships, outreach, and creative funding—like license plate revenues and professional education programs—Florida's network has grown both market demand and grower capacity. She highlighted ongoing challenges with limited resources, supply transparency, and industry awareness, urging the PNW to invest in collaboration and education to build a resilient and ethical native plant supply chain.

Lunch Sticky Note Exercise

1. Are you part of any native plant Networks what works and what doesn't work?

Networks:

- Backyard habitats greater Portland area Facebook group
- Would love to be part of or create a Facebook group for PNW Native Growers and buyers
- WNPS
- chapters are too geographically large - love tours
- Puget Sound Seed Network
- Washington Farm Bureau
- Coordinate multiple Regional seed Partnerships
- founding member of Oregon Native Seed Alliance

Challenges:

- collaboration work
- assessing demand is very hard

- engagement over time
- business model

2. *Buyers: what do you need to support your plant purchase needs?*

- Money
- A central repository for nurseries/growers to list available inventory so buyers don't have to call several places for inventory
 - Opportunity: Talk to OSU herbarium
 - Opportunity: Look into Cammie's idea
 - Challenge: to be useful these need to be regularly updated by growers
- USDA plant finder tool
- A pollinator-safe plant certification - this would allow buyers large and small to source plants grown according to a known standard so that they know plants are safe from pesticides upon purchase
- Make culturally significant plants available - plants important to local tribes e.g. spring bank clover, huckleberry, elderberry, chocolate lily, devil's club, swamp lantern (skunk cabbage)
- Shifting to buy smaller quantities for residential sale and wholesale
- More species diversity
- Information on why some plants aren't in cultivation
- Directory of Growers based on location
- There's a need for large caliper street trees that homeowners are being required to plant because of tree codes. These are super hard to find
- Liners, plugs, bare root for smaller retail businesses 50 to 100 of some species is sometimes too much
- Availability to request a quote online
- Updated availability list - we waste too much time contacting Growers to find out that they are out of what we need
- Information on seed sourcing
- Do you offer source certificates?

3. *Growers: what do you need to strengthen your businesses?*

- How to know how much of each species to grow as a newer grower / retailer
- How long to hold on to an individual plant that's not selling at what point do you put it on sale or donate it?
- How to decide whether to offer bulk discounts wholesale prices as a smaller grower and retailer
- Wholesale bare root we need two to three years depending on species and sizes needed contracts offered
- We need to know: what you want, how many you need, when you need them, what seed sources in advance

4. Plant propagation questions, needs and offerings

Specific species propagation or access challenges:

- Problems propagating: *Achlys triphylla*, *Mahonia nervosa*, *Maianthemum dilatatum*,
- Do you foresee any negatives in teaching the public about Native seed collection and propagation?
- Native highbush cranberry source
- Propagating or finding Pacific yew
- How to grow *Iris tenax* and equally *Aquilegia formosa*, *Lupinus albicaulis* plants
- Help with propagating *Sambucus* and *Gaultheria* from ← seed ask Dave Schachter Eatonville Nursery
- Tips for growing sedges by seed in a greenhouse
- *Viburnum opulus* plugs or bare root
- Western mountain ash
- Need better access to diverse native genetics with less red tape. bureaucracy at the agency level. diverse genetics equals ecosystem resilience but access is limited by regulations

Nursery Practices:

- New to Greenhouse growing please help!
 - How to battle algae
 - Best potting mix for tiny seeds
 - What kind of tray to use for getting seed started
- Is there an economical way to sterilize pots?
- Soil
- Best soil mix to plant native seedlings?
- Appropriate soilless mix and fertilization

An Overview of Native Plant Genetics in the PNW - Jeff DeBell (Washington Department of Natural Resources)

- Woody vs. herbaceous - gene flow, generation time - affect changes/evolution
- Development of seed zones (environmental and climatic) and the importance of having a common language for seed zones to facilitate market development. Have mostly accomplished their goal
- Climate seed sourcing tools - climate based models have some limitations but useful
 - Seedlot Selection Tool - climate and GIS models that allow us to pick a time in the future at a select location and predicts where current locations best match the conditions of the selected future location
 - Zone Matcher - similar as above but zone based instead of point location based
- Balancing Risk

- Not responding quickly enough or over responding = plants not matched with their environment - evaluate your risk when planting
- Guidance
 - Important to maintain seedlot information as best as possible to track and adapt to change
 - Be flexible on the system you use for planting genetically appropriate plant materials. When being too conservative in sticking to a particular system there's risk that you won't have the plant materials you need to get the work done

Panel 2 - PNW Nursery Trade Genetics: a Conversation about Climate Adaptation

Dylan Levy-Boyd (Fourth Corner Nursery), Matt Gravel (Bloomsday Natives), Emily Wittkop (Jonny Native Seed), Randy Lawrence (Clean Water Services)

Facilitated Q & A: trends in buyer requests regarding seed zones, opportunities and constraints for grower experimentation with regard to climate change, buyers' expectations, genetic considerations, and grower needs, etc.

- Clean Water Services - Native riparian planting to mitigate the impacts of waste water treatment plants (restoring and maintaining natural shade). DEQ provides credit for these actions. CWS initially sourced only from the Tualatin basin but that's shifted to ecoregion level to diversify and reduce risk of climate change generally. Now, "local is probably gone". With Seedlot Selection Tool (SST) they've selected a future climate analog (50yrs) and found most species ranges are outside of Oregon. To develop guidance on long-term canopy resilience, in partnership with Tualatin SWCD and Institute of Applied Ecology, they started common garden trials sourcing seed in the regions identified by the SST.
- Johnny Native Seed (Emily Wittkop) - Data collection system that regional collectors use to identify site and seed source. Includes observations on phenology, pests, impacts from herbicides, drought, etc. Consumer driven tracking.
- Fourth Corner - Produce a lot of plants each year but also throw away a lot of plants each year for plants that are not purchased. Partnership with Northwest Natural Resource Group to test species in common garden trials for climate adaptation. Otherwise, they are using Level 3 Ecoregions. Seedlot tracking largely based on customer demand

- Bloomsday Natives (Matt Gravel) - Work with environmentally minded homeowners and generally aren't asking about seedsource. Mostly serving the urban market and so focuses on seed collection in urban areas. Urban seed may be better adapted to climate change given urban heat island effect.
- Jeff DeBell - Depending on who you're customers are (urban vs. wildland) you may not need to worry as much about the long-term

Audience Discussion:

- Tracking sources and getting an understanding of what diversity is getting planted is a concern but for seed sourcing tracking decisions are mostly consumer driven. Additionally, there are limitations in where collection can occur which also contributes to the problem.

Panel 3 - Propagation Panel: Experiences with 'hard to propagate' species, dormancy, germination, growing methods, and more

Jo "Cirque" Stormer (Nobody Nursery), Lea Dyga (Oxbow Farm & Conservation Center, Mara Friddle (Institute for Applied Ecology - Plant Materials Program)

The panel highlighted the complexity and interdependence of native plant propagation, restoration needs, markets, ecological concerns, and funding structures. Success relies on patience, transparency, cooperation, and adaptability across the native plant supply pipeline.

Propagation Techniques: Discussion about using wild-collected seeds, greenhouse production, and the unique challenges for hard-to-grow native species. Methods and media like peat, perlite, bark, sand, and chicken grit were debated for their efficacy and environmental impact, with some nurseries shifting towards peat-free mixes due to sustainability concerns. Peat alternative sellers:

- [Forest Floor Organics in Eugene](#)

- [Concentrates in Portland](#)

Germination and Scaling: Participants shared experiences with low germination rates for certain species and the need for patience, experimentation, and sometimes years-long workflows. Scaling up production involves balancing equipment, labor, and maintaining genetic diversity, with larger operations using mechanization, while others rely on increased labor.

Market and Contract Growing: The market for native plants is unstable and driven by both supply and demand. Contract growing—where buyers fund ahead of seasons—offers stability but comes with risks if buyers back out. Much of the market remains speculative, with growers making educated guesses about future demand.

Buyer-Grower Dynamics: Challenges exist around planning and communication between restoration buyers and growers due to unpredictable funding cycles, short project timelines, and difficulty forecasting long-term needs. The need for more transparent communication, realistic expectations, and better advance planning was emphasized.

Supply/Demand & Species Diversity: There's a circular challenge: buyers request what's available, but new species aren't grown until there is demand. Growers sometimes "create" new demand by trialing new species, but they face challenges marketing plants with little existing market.

Economic and Logistical Barriers: Small specialty growers face high risks when investing in new or rare species, and cash flow constraints make speculative growing difficult. Retail markets and contract growing have their pros and cons, and diversity in offerings is often supported by serving both large-scale and retail markets.

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