

## Virtual Hortlandia 2020

### Dancing Oaks Nursery

[www.dancingoaks.com](http://www.dancingoaks.com)

This week Joanne Fuller talked with Fred Weisensee at Dancing Oaks Nursery and edited the conversation for this article.

#### *How did you get established?*

Dancing Oaks is located at my childhood home. Leonard Foltz and I always assumed that we would retire here. We were living in Portland and starting to get serious about gardening. We realized that if we built our dream garden in Portland, it would be very hard to leave it. So, we moved out here and started building the garden. We were in our 30's then, I just turned sixty, so it's been twenty-five years since we established the nursery.

#### *I know you have been very interested in climate change and its effect on everything, including gardening. Can you tell me more about your experience at Dancing Oaks?*

We are really seeing changes here. The last two winters have been Zone 9 winters with temps never falling below 20°. That is the first time that has happened two years in a row. So, things we used to kill in the garden are now surviving. The thing that scares me the most is the risk of fire and the effect of heat-drought stress on insects and birds. I also wonder if there is an impact on the birds and pollinators from the presence of non-native plant species. But thankfully, the science suggests that many insects and birds can adapt to new species. And we are growing plants that can tolerate the heat from places like Australia, South Africa and Northern California.

#### *What types of plants do you grow and sell?*

Arctostaphylos is an under-used plant in the NW. A good one is *A. patula* 'Siskiyou Pink'. It's a natural hybrid with evergreen foliage and that beautiful peeling bark typical of so many manzanitas. Another is *A. 'Rancho Santa Ana Hybrid'* (Arctostaphylos RSABG 18273) that has a compact form with bronze new foliage, smaller green leaves with a silvery cast and red stems. We are growing *Ceanothus* including *Ceanothus 'Centennial'* with deep green, small, crinkly leaves with blue-purple flowers. It only gets 3" tall, and it's really a drought tolerant ground cover. *C. repens* (*Ceanothus thyrsiflorus repens*) gets a little taller at 6" and has sky blue flowers. *Eucomis* is a great South African bulb with a long season of interest. The darker foliage ones get deeper color in more sun, and the green leaved ones tolerate more shade. They can survive low temps in western Oregon. *Eucomis pole evansii* gets to four feet tall and *E. 'Rhode Island Red'* gets even taller with bold burgundy foliage. *Eucomis* is a good structural plant for situations with less water and leaner soil. If life is too easy, they flop.

We grow baptisia, salvias and verbascum, all for flower color and long-lasting structure. The clary sage (*Salvia sclarea*) is a biennial that seeds around our garden with long blooming soft colors on a four-foot tall inflorescence, *Salvia turkestanica* is short lived but reseeds. It creates a ghostly silhouette even in part shade and is also about four feet tall. *Verbascum bombyciferum* 'Polar Summer' has soft yellow blooms that open in succession on furry grey candelabras that keep getting taller and taller till fall. On the East Coast, they would grow these plants with big swaths of *Muhlenbergia capillaris*. Unfortunately, it isn't warm long enough here for it to bloom. We finally found *Muhlenbergia reverchonii* 'Undaunted' with ruby feathery flowers that sway in the wind, and in the fall/winter the silver spears look like a fountain of silver. We grow these with a selection of other grasses including *Stipa gigantea*, *Stipa barbata* and *Bouteloua gracilis* 'Blonde Ambition'.

### ***Tell me about a few shade plants you grow and sell?***

We grow lots of ferns, including *Arachnoides simplicior*. It has shiny leaves with a light green almost yellow stripe down the middle of each dark green leaf-- very unusual, and it stands out in the woodland. The foliage holds up so well, I don't cut it back. I let the new and old growth stay on the plant and just edit as needed. I like *Diphyllia cymosa*, the umbrella leaf. As it emerges in spring, it looks like fists of foliage emerging from the ground. It takes shade to part shade with white flowers held above the leaves coming up from between the leaves. The fruit turns brilliant blue. We also grow our native *Vancouveria planipetala*--it's a creeping ground cover with green veins and red mottled leaves. The white to blush-pink delicate flowers are held high above the plant.

### ***What is shopping from Dancing Oaks like right now?***

We always do mail order at [www.dancingoaks.com](http://www.dancingoaks.com) and right now people can also pre-order for curbside pick-up. We are open Wednesday - Saturday 9 am - 5 pm and Sunday 10 am - 4 pm. We are working hard to make it safe for folks to come and shop for plants on site. We are limiting the number of people in the greenhouses and following all sanitation precautions. We have a large garden with lots of space. We can have many people on site while still maintaining plenty of social distancing. The property is 15 acres, and the nursery is about 4 acres-- so plenty of room for people to wander around and lots to see.