

Nursery grows from interest in palms

By ALIYA HALL
Capital Press

WOODBURN, Ore.— Jim Parsons said he is asked all the time how he got into the palm tree business.

“When I first started showing at farmers’ markets, people who didn’t understand that palms could grow here looked at me like I was crazy,” he said. “Now I have people calling me, especially in the warmer months. So, it seems to be going more mainstream.”

Parsons, who is the health teacher at Woodburn Middle School, calls his family-owned business, Oregon Palm Nursery, a good “side-hustle.”

“I lived overseas and my first couple of teaching jobs were in tropical places. The first one was Guam and the second was Honduras. I learned to love palm trees and tropical plants,” he said. “They’re just so beautiful and majestic, and they’re an icon by themselves. Someone who doesn’t like them, I just don’t understand. They evoke a relaxed feeling for me, a peaceful relaxation when I see them.”

When he moved back to Oregon in 1999, Parsons saw a Chinese Windmill Palm in a Portland nursery with a tag saying it was hardy to low temperatures, and that sparked his research into growing palm trees.

“I looked up some other information about cold palms and thought, Wow, that’s amazing,” he said.

Parsons bought his first



Aliya Hall/Capital Press

Jim and Eveling Parsons are the owners of Oregon Palm Nursery.

seeds online from outside the country, because there weren’t many palm seed producers in the U.S. at that time.

“I read how to germinate and grow them, and got a pretty good success rate. But I think I bought more than I needed; I had way too many and thought, What am I going to do with these?” He said.

Parsons began contacting local nurseries, but they had little interest. That was when he decided he needed a bigger property.

“I brought my plants with me and ramped it up more. People now call me and make appointments. We don’t have regular business hours because I still teach. I’m on vacation right now, which works out pretty good because spring and summer are my best selling months,” Parsons said.

About 90 percent of its inventory is cold-hardy exotics, plants that can withstand a wet and cooler climate. The nursery’s most common palms are Chinese Windmill and

palms, especially the Waggie palm.

“The Chinese Windmill will grow one foot of trunk on average a year, but the Waggie grows six inches, if lucky, a year. The first five years are painfully slow,” he said.

The nursery is getting more customers from Northeast Portland because homeowners there have bigger lots and gardens, and have been fixing them up this year, he said. Parsons also sells to hotels and restaurants with Cuban, Mexican or Asian themes that want to make their business more attractive and inviting.

“We’re trying to focus more on the private homeowner,

and working with the general public. Just meeting new people and helping them beautify their landscape and make their home beautiful. Just that personal touch with homeowners is rewarding, I think.” Parsons said.

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