

Plant Place serves two markets

By **SHERYL HARRIS**
For the Capital Press

The Plant Place Nursery has two locations — one retail and one wholesale — in the Olympia-Tumwater area of Washington state.

Designed for security and parking rather than visibility, either location might be missed by the casual passerby. Still, as nursery manager Jim Espedal says with marked understatement, “Once in, we have a lot of return customers.”

That speaks well of management of both locations. For instance, they try to hold plants ordered for wholesale projects for just a short time. Then they re-order as needed. This is especially true for perennial and native plants as it helps maintain plant health.

Like most businesses, the nursery experiences changes in products that are popular.

“Right now, dwarf conifers are in vogue — like this weeping Serbian spruce,” Espedal says, pointing to a nearby plant. But popularity is not all there is to keeping satisfied customers.

“We keep prices down by looking for high-quality growers,” he says.

Espedal holds a bachelor’s degree in visual arts and had no business or nursery background before he was hired by owner Kris Knudsen in 2003. Since then, he has learned the botanical names of all the plants, how to buy and sell, and what the plants need to stay in good condition. It is his responsibility to oversee the health of all nursery stock, its quality, and size. It is not a stretch to say that the health of the business is directly related to the health of the plants.

Retail displays are set in combinations that inspire creativity in customers. Espedal says groupings are set to show “how the different plants work together, what effects they have on each other, how



Sheryl Harris/For the Capital Press

The Plant Place Nursery Manager Jim Espedal shows the layering of color, texture and size used in landscaping.

they look as far as layered color, texture, and size.”

He gestured behind him.

“The Japanese cedar grows 25 to 30 feet, is narrow, and brightens a shady space. The black is black lace, about 15 feet high with a strong pink lace cap flower. It’s a good substitute for Japanese maple. The rhododendron here is Wine & Roses with a pink underside to the leaf and a cabernet-colored flower.”

A young lady was watering a section by hand.

“We battle high mineral content in the irrigation water,” Espedal says. “She waters daily using filtered water. The difference is that the foliage and flowers are no longer stained by the tannins and rust. It also saves water as it gets water directly where it is needed now, rather than

wasting it all over between the pots and in the paths.”

Espedal explained that people walk in with pictures on their phones or just the size of the area they want to work with — sometimes with specific needs. “Because we are small, we can afford to walk around with those buyers and help them choose exactly what they need.”

What is Espedal’s favorite plant? “For what?” His answer is more reasonable than the question.

Again, what is his favorite part of the job? He sighs, “Both companies are owned by Puget Sound Landscaping. We do design, building, hydroseeding, maintenance, construction, plus caring for our own plants — all those and more for both nurseries. It all works together.”

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