

## ROBINSON NURSERY

# An organized vision for success

By **MOLLY CRUSE**  
Capital Press

McMINNVILLE, Ore. — Step into the office at Robinson Nursery and instead of being greeted by the familiar earthy smell of mulch and fertilizer, like you might expect from a wholesale nursery, colorful sticky notes, charts, and an organized array of posters line the walls.

Josh Robinson, co-owner and sales manager of the nursery, has made it his mission to change the way people think about the nursery industry. Which is fitting, as Josh is also the current president of the Oregon Association of Nurseries.

“Trying to get people to see our perspective and what it’s actually like running a nursery as opposed to what people will think it is ... that’s the number one challenge,” said Josh. He has served on the OAN board ever since he started working at the nursery full-time.

“It’s been a long but very fun and fulfilling ride,” he said.

Robinson Nursery was started by Rick and Roxanne Robinson, Josh’s parents, in the 1980s. Josh is the sales manager, and his brother, Chris, is the general manager.

They are excited to be “carrying the torch” as the next generation of nursery growers, Josh said.

Rick and Roxanne started the nursery by growing bare root trees. But a decade ago, Robinson Nursery transitioned to growing their trees in pots.

“The reason we started doing that is because there’s a lot of cool trees we wanted to grow. But when you lift a tree out of the ground, it obviously has some impact on the health of it,” said Josh.

Making this significant shift in terms of growing technique was not without its challenges.

Josh attributes a huge part of the nursery’s success to the combined feedback, inno-



Molly Cruse/Capital Press

### Josh Robinson of Robinson Nursery.

vative thinking, and teamwork from everyone at Robinson Nursery. A huge part of the nursery’s success after making this significant shift in growing technique was due to the feedback Josh and his family received from their employees.

“What makes us unique is that I think anybody in any position at this company feels empowered to give input about improving a process that we’re doing,” said Josh. “We have the frontline workers making significant improvements on a process we’ve done for years, I think there’s something incredibly special to that. So it’s the people and their ability to make decisions and have it impact how we do a process in the future.”

One of these improvements for the nursery was coming up with an alternative potting system. Shortly after transitioning to potted trees, the team realized that the trees were getting “choked out” in solid wall pots. So instead of going back to raising bare root trees, Robinson Nursery came up with an alternative solution: air-root pruning containers and Grow Ready Liners. These containers allowed the nursery trees to have a more fibrous root system, while the liners allowed the trees to produce more consistently.

## CONFEDERATED TRIBES OF GRAND RONDE

# Reviving significant plants

By **GAIL OBERST**  
For the Capital Press

GRAND RONDE, Ore. — Most nurseries grow plants with profits in mind. Jeremy Ojua, supervisor of the Native Plant Nursery owned by the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, has a more profound mission. The Tribes are hoping to revive plants that are significant to their people.

“It’s not a commercial nursery,” Ojua said. “But we’re happy to get the seeds out on the land.”

Small lots of seed produced in the nursery are available for restoration, but not for commercial operations. Most of the seed and starts from the nursery are used on the conservation and restoration acres the Tribes now own or manage in Polk and Yamhill counties.

The nursery started in 2014 and is also a stage for education: Tribal and non-tribal groups come to the nursery to learn about the importance of native plants to the Tribes, and to the ecology of the Willamette Valley.

Many of the native plants growing in Grand Ronde’s greenhouse and outdoor nurseries have had their habitats reduced in Western Oregon, Ojua recently told about 40 conservationists, gardeners, farmers and



Gail Oberst/For the Capital Press

### Jeremy Ojua, Native Plant Nursery Supervisor for the Confederated Tribes of Grand Ronde, describes to visitors the cultural significance of the plants he grows for restoration.

local landowners.

It is no easy task to grow native plants from seed, but Ojua has had plenty of help. In addition to the Tribes, local and state watershed groups and private ecology nonprofits funded the initial set-up and ongoing operations. Many native plants grown from seed take three to five years to mature.

Today, the nursery features scores of native plant species that have been significant to the Tribes, some thriving and some not. Ojua points to the wild strawberries and camas, which began spreading once invasive plants were removed from the lower field.

“We’re still learning,” he said of growing tobacco and other plants. Many of his methods mimic those used by Native people for thou-

sands of years. Tribes, including those in Grand Ronde’s confederation, would harvest plants in a way that fostered plant and crop health over time. Imitating those methods is a work in progress, Ojua said. He said he’s still figuring out irrigation, shade and fertilizing schedules.

He’s not averse to using modern methods to foster young plants. Clay-heavy local soil in raised beds has been amended with Wilco’s professional potting mix. Modern methods of thinning and disease control are all part of the nursery’s growing toolbelt.

Responding to Ojua’s care are camas, biscuit root, yampah, native onion, yerba buena, tall dogbane, salmonberry, mugwort, tarweed and dozens of other species of plants and trees.

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