

# Paradise in Monmouth

A trip to Dancing Oaks

**T**here is no doubt that the queer community likes to garden. There is also no doubt that we have made a big impression on the world of horticulture. Throughout this winter I am going to visit some gay-owned nurseries in the area—some familiar, some not.

This is going to be very hard for me, because checking out nurseries, buying plants and talking to really smart plant people is not my thing. You know I'm totally kidding, right? I love this.

I set out to visit a nursery that I had never been to before, Dancing Oaks in Monmouth. Two cups of coffee, as many doughnuts, an egg sandwich and a pit stop or two later, I was driving up the long gravel road to the nursery. Through a gate made of colored glass and metal bits, past a long row of eucalyptus, I was greeted by two of the nicest plantsmen I've met. Leonard Foltz and Fred Weisensee made me feel welcome the moment I closed my car door. A quote from the late great plantsman J.C. Raulston hung on the door of the office: "If you are not killing plants you are really stretching yourself as a gardener." I knew this was my kind of place.

We set out to explore the beautiful and quiet four-acre display garden. The guys started planting 10 years ago and have created a lovely garden. Plants were well-labeled and combined wonderfully. Through a maze of gravel paths, we came upon a long cedar pergola draped in climbing roses and various vines. Huge purple fruits hung off an Akebia trifoliata, making me stop to check them out a little closer. At the end of the pergola was the first of two water features in the gar-



## Get Dirty with Dan

BY DAN YOUNG

den. Water trickled out of rocks almost hidden by rushes. Carnivorous and hardy pitcher plants edged the koi-filled pool. Everywhere I turned and looked, there was something great to look at.

Around another corner were gravel-mulched beds full of hardy cacti and agaves. One more turn and we passed a few new beds with bamboo and towering *Nicotiana glauca* from Mexico. The whole time I kept wondering what would be blooming here and there earlier in the year. Yet fall color and structure are not overlooked in this garden.

Past all this, we came to the pavilion: a big, open-feeling house surrounded by a wrap-around porch and lots of windows that look out onto the gardens. We settled down there for coffee and chatting. Tiny kittens tugged at my shoelaces as I started to learn the story of Dancing Oaks.

Ten years ago Fred and Leonard decided to move back to the family farm where Fred spent his boyhood

summers working. Leonard had taken a few plant identification classes and worked at a wholesale nursery for nine years. Fred is a full-time doctor of internal medicine in Corvallis.

These guys are busy. According to their Web site, they are members of eight plant societies. In their "spare time" they like to vacation, but for them a vacation is a wildflower tour in South Africa or a trek into the mountains of Chile to collect plants.

Their love of greenery is obvious even before they start talking about it. There was the mock orange phase, the *Rosa rugosa* period, the *Phormium* year . . . and now 2006 will be the year of the *Kniphofia*. Judging by the newest beds in the garden, it doesn't look like bamboo is that far away from becoming an obsession, either. As they put it, "We have no discipline to specialize."

The garden and the retail nursery seem to go hand and hand here. Being able to see a plant in the garden is a great selling point, and having the nursery allows them to grow plants for their garden. "We are like heroin junkies with our own pharmacy," Fred says.

Their addiction is infectious. Throughout the spring, summer and fall, they are busy hosting classes and giving lectures on gardening, both at their nursery and at garden clubs. Along with the lectures, small group teas and after-dark garden tours are also on list of things to do at their nursery. Both fill up fast, so if you would like to take part, plan well in advance.

I definitely would recommend taking the 90-minute



**The magical scapes of Dancing Oaks make the trip to Monmouth worthwhile.**

drive from Portland to Monmouth; I know I'll be back. The drive out there is beautiful enough, but when you arrive you won't be disappointed. The garden alone would be reason to go, but the plants for sale will definitely leave you without enough money to go out the next weekend. Even I—who have told myself, "No more new plants this year!"—couldn't resist. Oh, well, I never was one for great feats of self-control. 10

*DANCING OAKS is open from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday through Saturday between March 1 and Oct. 31. Fortunately, if you need a little plant fix in the winter, you can call to set up an appointment. The nursery has a Web site, [www.dancingoaks.com](http://www.dancingoaks.com), where you can find directions, get a little sneak peak at their garden and browse the plant list. They are located at 17900 Priem Road and can be reached at 503-838-6058.*

To reach DIRTY DAN, e-mail  
dirtydtbegardener@yahoo.com.



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