

BRANCHING OUT

Nursery business grows
across the state

Staff Photos by *Jeff Adkins*



Every fall, Brian and Heather Byers grab their backpacks, their Ziploc bags and their kids, and head to Bur Oak Canyon and other tree-packed areas across Nebraska. During these trips, they collect 10,000 to 15,000 acorns and other seeds, which they sow in their greenhouse. By spring, nearly 8,000 of them will be growing into trees that the Byers will sell through their wholesale business, Great Plains Nursery near Weston in east-central Nebraska.

Their operation, which focuses on trees that are native to Nebraska, is part of the state's growing nursery and landscape sector.

"Our state has great local garden centers where homeowners can buy trees that are native to Nebraska and produced in Nebraska," says Brian Byers. "Some of the trees that grow particularly well here include Bur Oak, Red Oak, Kentucky Coffeetree, Hackberry trees and 10 to 12 other species of oak trees."

ARBORETUMS TAKE ROOT

The Nebraska Statewide Arboretum system, a one-of-a-kind program in the country, showcases many of these varieties and more at 100 affiliated sites across the state from Falls City to Chadron.

"For 30 years, our goal has been to get diversity of trees and shrubs planted throughout the Nebraska landscape," says Bob

Brian Byers, operations manager at Great Plains Nursery in Weston, checks the progress of young trees growing in a greenhouse.



Great Plains Nursery starts with seeds from native trees and works to grow a healthy product for customers.



Henrickson, horticulture program coordinator for the Statewide Arboretum. The simple fact is most people are not content with buffalograss, he explains, but on the prairie, they may not be sure what is best to grow.

"The average person doesn't have the luxury of time or resources to plant a bunch of trees and then wait to see what survives," Henrickson says. "That's where our arboretum system comes in. Our idea is to have a variety of places across the state where people can actually see an eclectic mix of trees and plants that are relevant to them, where they can literally bump into these plants, see what they look like and envision them in their own landscape."

SEEING IS BELIEVING

"We show Nebraskans the wide variety of beautiful plants that grow well here, and they go into local nurseries looking for them, which creates more opportunities for the industry," Henrickson says. "So, the industry thrives and consumers get a product that's more likely to be successful because it is native to the state."

And Nebraska growers deliver. Plus, they do it right, Henrickson says. "At Great Plains Nursery, for instance, they start with seed from native trees and pay close attention to the root system in their production process, which makes for a healthy plant."

HEALTHY STOCK

Julie Van Meter, state entomologist for the Nebraska Department of Agriculture, has a role in helping the industry stay healthy, literally. As the manager of the program that inspects all perennial and woody nursery stock in the state, she knows when it's done right. Ensuring plant health is the number one priority.

"For the consumer, the

licensing requirements and inspection and certification process of growers and dealers ensures the product they are buying is sound, healthy nursery stock," Van Meter says. "Plus, it reduces the spread of exotic plant pests and even the more mundane, native pests."

And that's a win for consumers, the local nursery industry and the environment. More trees and plants mean more diversity within the landscape and a more beautiful Nebraska.

- Cathy Lockman



ABOUT THE NEBRASKA STATEWIDE ARBORETUM:

NSA is a nonprofit focused on education and resources for sustainable home and community landscapes. Programs include more than 90 affiliate sites where Nebraskans can discover native plants.

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