

PAUL COWAN

Highland Heather



Janice Leinwebber

By Curt Kipp

When she was a little girl, Janice Leinwebber was a daydreamer. “When I got to school,” she said, “I would think about what I would do when I got home from school — outside.”

Kids like that usually grow into adults who can’t wait for the weekend. Janice, however, owns her own nursery and takes a different attitude.

“Every day I get up and I look forward to doing the work,” she said “because it’s what I enjoy doing.”

Highland Heather Nursery is located on one acre outside Canby, Ore., and as the name would suggest, it specializes in growing dozens of different varieties of heathers and heaths, which bloom in a rainbow of colors.

“There’s so many heaths and heath-

ers that people don’t know about,” Janice said. “They bloom at all different times of the year. We’re one of the few nurseries that offers some of them. There are more than 1,000 varieties out there, and many not in wide circulation. I try to pick out the best ones and grow those.”

Rooted in a love of plants

Leinwebber grew up on a farm in northern Idaho. “As a small child, I grew up loving plants,” she said. “I made moss gardens in jar lids. All of my science projects included plants.”

Her family then moved to an irrigated farm in eastern Washington. “I grew up as a teenager changing water,” she said. “I drove a wheat truck.”

After high school graduation, she attended Washington State University and studied fine arts, but transferred to

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Founded: 1994

Principals: Janice Leinwebber and Dennis Bauermeister

Known for: Heathers, heaths and companion plants

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www.highlandheather.com

The Evergreen State College, a liberal arts college in Olympia, Wash. that is known for self-directed learning.

"I got a general bachelor of arts," she said, "but I remember taking a class on native plants and really enjoyed that."

After she got married, she moved to Oregon where her husband had found employment. "When we moved down here, the heart of the nursery country, I really was in awe," she said.

She took a job as a bank teller in downtown Portland. "The banking was driving me crazy," she said. "I was inside all day."

She soon started applying to nurseries and landed a series of jobs. For five years, she gained experience while performing all sorts of duties. At the same time, she took classes in ornamental horticulture from Mt. Hood

Community College and learned about nursery production. Her goal was to learn enough to start her own business. "I felt like between the experience and the education, I was looking for a niche," she said.

She settled on heaths and heathers, and started collecting plants. In 1994, she founded Highland Heathers.

"This was something that was not being grown," she said. "It was a small plant, it was interesting, it flowered, it had interesting foliage, it's drought tolerant, it's deer resistant, it's resistant to pests. I felt it was an underutilized plant. I could grow it without a lot of equipment in a small area."

Two years later, the nursery moved to its current location. Business has been good ever since. All production takes place in containers on about one

acre of land. Leinwebber propagates all of her own plants from cuttings.

"As it turns out, it was a pretty good choice," she said. "It all worked out pretty well."

Janice's husband, Dennis Bauermeister, has a day job in software engineering, but helps out with the business as he can. He does bookkeeping and computer work, lays out the catalog, builds greenhouses, and works on irrigation systems and wiring.

"He grew up on a farm, so I think he enjoys it," Janice said.

She joined the Oregon Association of Nurseries in 1998 in order to take advantage of exposure and learning opportunities, including the *OAN Nursery Guide* and the annual Farwest Show.

"OAN has been a huge help as far as the marketing," she said. "It's our main form of advertising. It's really been important to the growth of our business."

Branching out

Highland Heather sells wholesale to landscapers, garden centers and plant brokers. Janice has customers all over the United States, with a good portion in California and on the East Coast.

"I have sent plants to probably almost every state," Janice said.

Leinwebber also sells at retail plant sales in the Portland area. Her heathers have proven popular with customers.

"When I take them to a plant sale, the comment always is, 'Oh, I had no idea there were so many heaths and heathers,'" she said. "They're just not available."

Recently, she has begun to expand her plant line beyond her bread and butter heathers. Her new, non-heather offerings generally are other members of the Ericaceae family, including some smaller *Pieris* selections, as well as pernettya (*Gaultheria mucronata*).

"I'm looking for small, interesting shrubs that will fit into smaller yards," she said. "That's the way they're building things."

"Starting a nursery has been a good choice," Leinwebber said. "It's what I enjoy doing, so I'm glad it's my job." ©



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