

## Trying Hard to Stay Small

### Ray Swanson

Boulevard Nursery, 2021 Boulevard Rd., Olympia, Washington 98501

Many of us entered the industry because of our interest in the beauty and diversity of ornamental plants. I bought Boulevard Nursery, a small retail garden center in Olympia, Washington, and have spent the last 15 years increasing the size of the inventory and creating appeal for the customers. It involves things that are not plant related like making more display areas and designing parking lots.

For more control over what we offer, we needed facilities to grow some of the short term, or non-woody, crops. For that we have greenhouses at another location.

A few years ago we built an insulated room for germinating seeds early in the season primarily to save on heat costs. It has racks for the trays and fluorescent lights on some of them. We are able to control the temperature with simple equipment. A 1500 watt household heater, a 20-in. box fan for circulation, and an exhaust fan for most days. We recently put in a household air conditioner to keep the room cool for summer germination of primroses.

Difficulties in finding and keeping interested and productive personnel made us think about more efficient ways of getting the work done.

We did not want to invest so much and get so large that we had to develop a wholesale marketing effort.

We were pleased with the results of using our insulated room and had extra space so we decided on going to plug trays. We bought a Van Dana seeder and set it up for 288-square plug trays. We have since used it for direct seeding 12 packs and 6 packs with good results. We use a dislodger for the plug trays.

The filling of flats for transplanting has always taken a lot of time. To fix that we bought a small flat filler. It was easy to use but we ended up with pallets full of trays and no way to move them. We bought a pallet jack and it makes for a good operation.

A couple of years ago we installed roller conveyors along one end of the houses. For smaller quantities or limited spaces we use two-wheeled flat carts.

Now with half the employees, less training time and supervision we have more uniform crops to sell at our garden center. We can still enjoy being in the ornamentals business, close to our products and our customers.