



## Reflections From Summer 2021 at Sevenoaks Nursery

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A conversation with Sevenoaks Nursery owner Scott Anderson

### **How are the current drought conditions impacting your nursery or other nurseries you've seen?**

I feel like the droughts don't really affect nurseries in terms of water use, nurseries use water and there's no way around that and we use a lot of water. So in that regard, I think if you didn't have a good source of water or water rights you wouldn't be able to have a nursery. I think the only thing that would be affected would be the choice of plants to grow, like maybe they'd want to grow more drought tolerant plants because of demand or that's just the better plant to be growing. I don't really see drought affecting nurseries totally because everybody needs the water. Being in Oregon we're a little lucky because there's more water here than in California, but you still need to have access to it. So you have to have

property where you can use as much as you need, so I think in California, those guys are probably really having a problem if they have to use less water or if they only get X amount of water, they'd probably have to grow different crops, but up here it's not as much of an issue.

The other thing that heat and big weather events do is, for us, we collect seed and I feel like the more extreme the weather the more challenges there are with the seed crop. Like last year there were no acorns so we had challenges like that. Like for example we were growing a lot of dogwood cornus and with heat events and continued stuff like that it would make it hard to get enough seed to grow what we need to grow, and we already see that this year, a lot of seeds are ready a lot earlier or are just acting a lot different because of the heat wave and the drought also. No rain forever just makes certain plants

react differently and not set seed so that comes into play. So that's something that we worry about. If we contract to grow a lot of stuff, we still have to find seed for it, and hope that it's available. We do the seed collection on site and have spots we go and we do buy some, but like last year we just couldn't find any acorns anywhere. And that does happen every six or seven years with that plant, but the lack of rain over the last few springs eventually is going to affect that quite a bit.

### **How was the heat wave for you? How did it affect your operations?**

The plants don't like that, so we had a lot of plants where the tops died or got burnt back. It didn't kill a lot of stuff in our case but it did burn tops a lot. I personally think that has to do with having the pot as wet as possible,





everything is soaked and then its 110°, if you take out the root ball it's like 100° in the soil and all of those roots are boiling. So I think that is where most of the damage we saw showed up just from the roots being so hot. Although we do have a lot of plants in the ground that grow around here and have been around for 10 years and they still got burnt tops which is kinda crazy. And then besides the normal start early and end early, which is what we do when it's like that so employees don't have to be out in it. It's brutal. I don't think there will be a long term impact. I think they're feeling the damage that they had and that will be the extent of it. Now if we had several of these every year, I don't think that would be the case.

### **Are you adapting your practices and operations to these weather extremes?**

Not so much. We don't have as high tech of greenhouses and stuff that we could use to keep things cool, so we're kind of stuck with what we have. We can't even adapt what we grow, that would

be hard to do and I wouldn't even know where to begin. I just don't think that it's happening, like climate change or whatever is happening so fast that in five years we won't be able to grow red flowering currant because it's too hot. I don't think we're going to change much. Long term we might think about that. People talk about assisted migration which I don't know if I love so that's where I stand on that. I don't want to start planting redwoods up here because I think they'll be up here in 50 years, but some people do think that, a lot of people do think that. For us, I don't think we'll change much of what we grow.

### **What are the biggest challenges you're facing as a nursery?**

Labor is always an issue, we have people who have been here a long time, but we need seasonal people like every nursery. We fortunately get a lot of the same guys back, but sometimes you just don't know if you have enough people to get what you need to get done. That's probably on our mind the most.



*Madrone Seedling.  
Credit: Scott Anderson*

**The Target Seedling Concept refers to a set of specific quality characteristics as targets for seedlings as they leave the nursery, aiming for the long term success of seedlings at reforestation sites.**

With a changing climate, how might we need to revise and rethink these standards? Will smaller overall plant sizes or bigger root to shoot ratios become the norm? Will these targets need to be adjusted in general or for each individual species?



*Seven Oaks Nursery. Credit: Scott Anderson*