

Sweet Meadow Greenhouse Meets Specialty Needs

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(Cumberland Co.) - Patti and Corey Noggle have watched their business grow along with their plants at Noggle's Sweet Meadow Greenhouses near Mechanicsburg.

Even though the Noggles' can't offer the variety or the volume of plants offered by the bigger nurseries around, they can offer a personal touch that's hard to find these days.

"We can deal with details," Patti said.

The Noggles' business actually was born long before they bought their first used greenhouse in 1982.

Patti said her interest in horticulture first was sparked when she was a 4-H member in Cumberland County. She took horticulture projects in her local club and also participated in flower judging competitions at the local, state, and national levels.

During her years of judging, she became a state champion.

Her interest in horticulture carried on into her college years. Both she and Corey graduated from Penn State University, where they majored in horticulture.

Their greenhouse business began when Patti bought her first greenhouse from a Lancaster firm that was going out of business. That was when she first learned that she had a lot to learn about the greenhouse business, Patti said.

"We took it down and it looked like all the pieces were the same, so we threw everything together," Patti said. "But when we got it home and started putting it up it was a different story. Everything did have a specific place and we had to sepa-



Patti Noggle showing some of her favorite colors in this field of mums.

rate everything."

"It was quite a project," she said.

The Noggles since have added two greenhouses, one in 1988 and one last spring. Patti started the business herself, but Corey joined her in it full time about three years ago.

Patti said she started the business by supplying mostly annuals, hanging baskets, and a few perennials. A large part of her business consisted of wholesaling to start, she said.

However, over the years, Patti said their business has grown to meet the different needs of its wholesale customers and the regular consumer as well.

They have increased the selection of their annuals and make a special effort to offer annuals that you won't find in many other greenhouses.

Patti said they also try to offer 100 really reliable perennials, because they know they can't com-

pete with the big nurseries when it comes to sheer volume. They also offer a solid selection of herbs and vegetables.

Heirloom vegetables are becoming a big part of their operation too, Patti said.

When fall comes, she said, mums become a cornerstone at Noggles. This year, Patti said, they grew 9,000 mums of 82 varieties.

"We offer more varieties than the larger nurseries and as a wholesaler

we can take care of small details for our customers," Patti said. "Some of our customers might want 25 plants with as many varieties as possible or another customer might want 50 plants with the majority of the colors being yellow. We can do that."

All that takes a lot of hard work.

They grow all their plants in the three greenhouses under 10,000 feet of plastic and have set aside half an acre with drip irrigation for the mums.

"We have about two months where we don't have a lot of greenhouse work, but we need that time for paperwork, researching plants for next season, and ordering everything," Patti said.

Patti and Corey are constantly learning about new growing techniques and new plants. They do a lot of research during the winter, go to Longwood Gardens, and a variety of gardening shows to see if they can pick up a few new tips.

"We are constantly doing our own research here at our own greenhouses, finding out what does well in our climate, if a plant is disease resistant, if it produces well and so on and so forth," Patti said.

Their work also carries over into the lives of their two children, Tristan, age 5, and Chelsea, age 9.

The children's classes from school come out to the greenhouses every year and Patti has helped teachers with projects relating to plant science. She said she feels that helping people learn about the environment is very important.

Patti said that every year, she and her husband learn something new that helps them survive against their larger competitors.

"You can get your share, but you have to do a good job," she said.

Tilling The Soil Helps Prisoners And Community

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Not all the inmates in the Bradford County Correctional Facility are idly biding their time. Some are helping repay their debt to society through an innovative gardening project sponsored by the Towanda-Wysox Kiwanis Club, the Bradford-Sullivan Farm Bureau, and various county businesses.

The project, dubbed the Bradford County Prison Harvest, incorporated the use of donated seeds, plants, and tools from area nurseries and businesses, input from the Penn State Cooperative Extension of Bradford County, approval from county officials and hard work from area farmers, and inmates. The Northern Tier Career center also donated a small shed for tool storage that was trucked to the site by SPE, Inc., a local John Deere dealer.

Produce from the one-acre plot is divided among the area food banks.

"I read about this," said Frank Bertrand, coordinator for the project. "A county jail did this in New York state."

The garden was located on a piece of land owned by the county, but rented by a local farmer.

"This spring, I went out and talked to the farmer who rents the land from the county," said Bertrand. "He agreed to donate the land. Another farmer agreed to plow it up, and in the meantime, I was coordinating the project with the sheriff, Steve Evans, and the jail warden, Dale Brown."

Once everything was in place, the project only needed willing hands to till the soil.

Two inmates were assigned to the project. With donated seeds and plants, they planted potatoes, cucumbers, squash, tomatoes, corn, peppers, and beans.

Inmates are selected for work projects based on the length of time they will serve and the nature of their legal charges. Their behavior while they are incarcerated is also taken into consideration. After they are selected, their applications are submitted to the sentencing judge. If it is approved, the prisoners are released to work in various areas.

Besides the gardening project, prisoners work with the Northern Tier Solid Waste Authority's recycling program and with township crews to help with stream rebuilding or other tasks.

In essence, prisoners are released to work on the various projects and must report back at a designated time.

Although the project sounds like an idea that will benefit everyone, there are some problems to work out.

"The biggest problem we had was that we got a late start. It was the second week of June before we really got started. The other thing that probably created a problem was that I underestimated the manpower needed. We probably should have had more manpower at planting time and worked down from there," said Warden Brown.

Another problem, or potential problem, is the risk of the prisoners not coming back to the facility.

"When doing a project like this, the questions that come to mind initially are issues of security. Basically that's the biggest concern as far as I'm concerned," said the Warden.

"Essentially we have inmates who are working there unsupervised for a period of time. There have been a couple of problems that have come up in the past when inmates have gone to the worksite and failed to come back. We had a situation this summer where an inmate working at the landfill project just left the worksite. That affected this program (garden) because we had to shut down our release programs for a period of time until the person was apprehended.

"The other problem with a county facility is generally people who are good candidates for a release program are here on a short-term basis, so we have kind of a high turnover in terms of inmate labor and that makes it hard to maintain continuity."

Yet another blow to this year's harvest was the wet weather. At one time this summer, the plot was completely under water and was often too wet to work in.

All the difficulties added up to a tiny harvest for the workers. The potatoes didn't come up at all, the corn, although tall, didn't develop ears, and numbers of cucumbers and squash were small.

"The problem was getting a quantity of stuff that would make it worthwhile to deliver. We had squash that would come on sporadically and some other things," said Brown.

In spite of the difficulties encountered, plans are already in place to try again next year.

"I look at this year as a real learning experience," said Brown. "We have to look at it and say this is what we had, these were the problems we had. It was not an overwhelming success this year, but I think the idea is still real good. We'll take what we learned this year and try again next year."

The first step will be to move the garden to a drier place. Hopefully with better conditions and more produce, the effort can benefit the 600-1000 needy families in the county through the local food banks.

"Donating the food to the local food pantries was what I saw as the

biggest plus. It could give the inmates a sense of giving something back. That's a real positive thing. We really had an overwhelming response to the idea," said Warden Brown.

The inmates want something to do with their time. The project provided them with something to do and a sense of accomplishment."

Added Bertrand, "I think this gives these guys something to do other than sit around in jail all day. We had land that was not put to its best use and had people sitting idly across the highway...and why not help the needy in the community."



Bradford County Prison Warden Dale Brown checks on the squash in the garden, which was a cooperative effort between area businesses, agencies and inmates. Even though wet weather put a damper on this year's project, plans are already being made to try again next year.

Homestead Notes