

# Mountain Grown

A young family sinks its roots —  
and its resources —  
into a new Montana nursery

By Julie S. Higginbotham

"Go West, young man," said Horace Greely. Over a century later, Brad Brown took the journalist's advice.

Much has changed since Greely praised the West in the 1850s. But the region still presents its challenges. Establishing Glacier Nursery near Kalispell, MT, has required all the pioneer instinct Brad and his wife, Desi, have been able to muster. Sometimes, says Desi, the fledgling wholesale operation has resembled "a big, dark hole sucking up your weekends, your money and all your free time, and not letting you see anything from it."

There have indeed been setbacks since the Browns hand-planted their first stock near Kalispell in 1983. The harsh climate has taught them some costly lessons. But Glacier has survived, and its initial marketing push is under way. The combination of proven plant hardiness and good local supply lines is tempting customers to consider Glacier's trees, shrubs, rooted cuttings and transplant stock.

The response has been particularly gratifying because the Browns, who hail from the Chicago suburbs, knew they were taking a big risk when they started

the business five years ago. Low population density and high unemployment have spelled disaster for many "immigrants" who fall in love with the crisp air and mountain vistas of the West.

"So many people have come out West with \$30,000 saved — they're well-educated or have run businesses — and they try to make a go of it," says Desi. "And after a couple of years pumping gas or whatever, they end up going back."

Several key factors have helped Glacier overcome the odds. They include Brad's education and experience, a Montana job and contract-growing deal that helped fund the start-up, and an inexpensive labor force of high schoolers. Most important, however, has been Desi's willingness to fund the dream.

Since Glacier's inception, her salary as a full-time administrator for a rural electric co-op has supported the household so that all of Brad's earnings could fertilize the company. "You really have to be willing to sacrifice everything; it all goes back into the business," says Desi. "Most people in our generation are not patient enough to do that."

The Browns are optimistic that their patience is about to pay off. "Three



Above: Desi and Brad Brown.

Right: A midsummer shot of containers from spring-potted cuttings, due to be sold after 1½ to two summers.

Below: Shot late this summer, these shrubs were planted in midsummer 1987. Plants grown 1½ seasons are harvested only one grade smaller than those grown two seasons in the field.





# Thriving

If you're growing nursery stock in Montana, there's no escaping one basic fact. "The climate," says Brad Brown, "really stinks. It takes a great deal of adaptation to grow here."

Brad believes Glacier's climate should be classified Zone 4. Some of his customers live in Zone 3 or even 2. Though the temperature at the nursery commonly reaches  $-35^{\circ}$ , fluctuation is the key issue — especially for B&B trees. "The number of species I can grow well is limited," says Brad. "We can have frost every month but one, and some of the old-timers say that there is not a true frost-free month. That's compounded by severity; we can get temperatures of 10 below in early November."

Springtime lows are another problem. "Ashes seem to have a critical temperature around  $26^{\circ}$ , and we get that in late May four out of five years," says Brad. Glacier delays cutting of newly budded stock until April to slow the bud push and tapes the tops of damaged two-year stock.

Not all plants need pampering. "On the bread-and-butter flowering shrubs, we don't appear to be at any disadvantage to St. Paul, Oregon or Iowa. Maybe we're off by half a year. Our midsummer planting does fantastically well; even our fall planting has worked out. Good snow cover is something you can count on."

After six years of production, Brad

"We were out driving around . . . and I saw the soil here, and I said, 'Pull over.' I got out and got a handful of it and said, 'This is the best nursery soil I've ever seen.'"

— Brad Brown

years into the business, there was no light at all," says Brad. "Five years in, we can see light at the end of the tunnel — and we're convinced it's not a train!"

The "tunnel" started back in Illinois, where Brad spent his high school weekends and summers propagating plants at Ravinia Nurseries in Lake Villa. Intrigued by the nursery business, he took a post-graduation car trip to Oregon, where he met several prominent nurserymen. Among them was Frank Schmidt Jr. of J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co. in Boring — a contact who would later prove crucial.

That fall, Brad began studying ornamental horticulture at the University of Illinois. But he was far from committed to a nursery career. After one school year, he dropped out to marry Desi, who had been attending the University of Alaska. The couple settled back in northern Illinois, and Brad returned to Ravinia as a full-time employee.

"When I went to work, I realized how much I *didn't* know," says Brad. "I'm eternally grateful to them for pushing me hard. Once I'd really decided what I wanted to do, it was Katie bar the door."

After only a year with Ravinia, Brad re-enrolled at U of I. Now dedicated to the nursery business, he completed his courses in two years and graduated with the rest of his class. Meanwhile, Desi supported the family by working at a travel agency and moonlighting as a waitress. "That was a maturing factor — me behind him with the whip!" she jokes.

The next phase of Brad's education came at a now-defunct nursery in central Illinois, where he worked a year and a half as production manager. The operation was deeply in debt, and an inside view of the consequences molded Brad's conservative attitude about financial management.

"There was a serious profit margin problem, and they borrowed more money to put in more money," he recalls. "There was not a hope in heck that they could survive when they owed \$350,000 and were only producing \$350,000."

Brad had kept in touch with the Schmidt management team at trade shows. In 1977, at age 23, he accepted their offer to run Milton-Freewater farm, the 300-acre-plus nursery that Schmidt then owned on the Washington-Oregon border.

"They trained me a month at Boring and then sent me out there," says Brad. "I'll never forget what Frank Jr. said to me: 'Brad, you're young, and it's a big job. It's not too late to back out. But if you think you can handle it, go for it.'"

Brad went for it. The Milton-Freewater job gave him a chance to practice the Schmidt production system on a large scale. He uses an almost identical method today to produce his own tree stock. (For details about the Schmidt system, see "A Tradition of Quality," March 1, 1988.)

Brad stayed at Milton-Freewater just over two years. He was enthusiastic about the Schmidt family and company, but Montana and the dream of independence were already beckoning. In early 1980, he moved closer to his goals by becoming production manager at Lawyer Nursery, a wholesale operation in Plains, MT. "It was a better opportunity, a silver platter type of thing," he says. "They essentially hired me away."

Desi, who had worked at a nursing home in Oregon, got a job in a hospital business office, further strengthening her administrative experience. "I've been really lucky to be able to move to all these rural areas and get jobs," she says. "But I have marketable skills. I never really had any doubts about being able to get job offers."

After settling in northwest Montana, the Browns spent two years' worth of

Right: Most of Glacier's varieties are chip-budded in mid-August. Frequently, two people tie behind the person cutting and placing the bud.

Below: Planting rooted cuttings. Glacier's high schoolers routinely plant 500 cuttings per hour. The planter, which adapts to varied spacing, is a replica of one used at Bailey Nurseries.



# *in Spite of the Weather Extremes*

has developed some special techniques. For example, he now protects his *Acer*, *Malus*, *Sorbus* and *Tilia* from sunscald by shielding the south sides of trunks with PVC half-cylinders. He produces these himself by splitting PVC pipe lengthwise with a table saw.

"It costs just 25 to 50 cents per tree, and my winter kill is now under 5 percent. I expect to get five seasons out of these, and it's entirely likely I could get as many as 10."

Another major adjustment has involved the nursery's rich silt-loam soil. The pH, 6.5 to 7.5, hasn't been much of a problem, though Brad has added sulfur when he's seen it creeping up over the long term. Fertilization is a different story.

"In the early years, we were doing it on an Oregon-type system. I got into nitrogen trouble because it didn't ever leach, and that killed plants because they didn't go fully dormant. With our climate, and running a weed-free nursery, you can just about halve your use of nitrogen. We're seeking a happy medium.

"I do run high levels of phosphorus and potassium, which supposedly help in overwintering." (Reducing irrigation in late summer is another technique Brad now uses to improve plant hardening.)

Though the soil offers good tilth for bare-root stock, it requires special

attention in balling. "You have to spend time on it because the soil is not heavy," explains Brad. "We strive for a nice, uniform package, and we don't cut any corners. We use 10-ounce treated burlap and heavy poly twine, put poly on the top — and I'll even put on a picture label if the garden centers want it."

Montana's climate limits the impact of pests and diseases. "Our two major pests are tent caterpillars and aphids, and they are a minimal problem. I use spot sprays only; no broadcast applications, even for aphids. Winter also tends to keep disease problems in check. The summer humidity is awfully low, so there's no mildew problem. And I buy virus-free stock whenever I can."

Glacier handles its weeds the old-fashioned way. "We try to clean cultivate and do a lot of hand hoeing," says Brad. "My hoeing costs with the high school kids are only around \$135 per acre per year, which is extremely reasonable. We do use limited amounts of Surflan and a fair amount of Poast for wild oat control."

Not surprisingly for a nursery in the mountains, wildlife has sometimes caused trouble. Glacier combats deer with a "New Zealand style" fence made of used phone wire. Alternating hot and ground wires make it effective no matter where an animal makes contact.

Glacier has been fortunate when it comes to another crucial Western concern: water. The primary source is a 300-foot-deep well. The nursery also has a creek, though drought made it unusable this year.

All the production acreage is set up for movable overhead irrigation lines. "We're a candidate for drip, but so many of our crops are two-year crops that it's hardly worth the setup. Water has not been a problem. The summer drought made for a lot of dust, but we did have a satisfactory growing season."

The company's cultural practices are all dedicated to producing top-of-the-line stock. "Growing high quality stratifies who you will sell to," says Brad. "There's also a difference between growing high quality and delivering high quality, and that's where your culls come in. There's always a certain amount of bad stuff. You try to keep it to an absolute minimum, but you really have to bite the bullet with your culls."

To reduce any temptation to sell marginal stock, Brad hacks off bad plants right in the field. "If you've got junk in the field, people who visit may think you're going to sell it to them. We want the place itself to be a selling point. A clean nursery is a marketing tool; as a small business, that's something you can do to separate yourself from the others."



weekends scouting potential nursery sites. One day, a field in the Flathead Valley east of Kalispell caught Brad's eye.

"We were out driving around looking for land, and I saw the soil here, and I said, 'Pull over,'" he recalls. "I got out and got a handful of it and said, 'This is the best nursery soil I've ever seen.'"

The Creston silt-loam turned out to be almost 3 feet deep, with a near-ideal pH for ornamentals. To Brad, the inky black dirt looked like pure gold.

The Browns had saved up "some money, but not much." With some loan assistance from a friend, they purchased a 20-acre parcel from the farmer who owned the property.

Wasting no time, Brad and Desi bought 500 shade tree liners from Schmidt and quietly planted them during May 1983. "We lined it out ourselves with clothesline and stakes, dug the holes ourselves, leased a tractor to disc it," says Desi. "For a year and a half, we were here every weekend. To water, we'd haul 50-gallon drums to the creek, fill them, and then come back up and siphon the water off."

Brad continued to work at Lawyer, a 100-mile drive away. He explains, "The plan was to grow [the liners] on for specimen shade trees while I looked for a job close by. They would require a reduced amount of care and could grow a while before harvest."

The long-sought local job opened up in March 1984. Mike Mower, owner of an area Christmas tree nursery, had acquired a large new farm, and he needed a production manager. "Mike's an absentee owner who's in the oil business," says Desi, "and he really helped us out a lot."

Mike knew about Brad's commitment to the newly established Glacier Nursery but hired him anyway. "It was a foregone conclusion that I'd only be there for three years, which turned out to be four," says Brad.

The tree farm offered Glacier what Brad calls "a giant side benefit" — free use of all the heavy equipment. And Mike eventually demonstrated his trust in the Browns by offering to buy into their company. Though tempted, the couple said no.

"We've never felt like we had to sell a part of the business to take on more capital," says Brad.

Adds Desi, "It's hard when they're

throwing money at you, but we don't want anyone telling us how to run our business down the road."

Once Brad's new job was secure, the Browns set up housekeeping in a trailer on the nursery property, which still serves as both living and office space. They planted another 1,000 shade trees, as well as liners and seed that would form the basis of their budded-tree operation. A shrub stock block was another 1984 planting project.

Brad's tree farm earnings funded Glacier Nursery. Desi supported the family with her administrative job at the electric co-op. The couple could only care for their nursery stock on evenings and weekends. "The first few years, we just busted our butts," says Brad. "We didn't even spend \$150 on labor."

Keenly interested in learning from other growers, Brad took a Midwestern trip shortly after Glacier's first planting. A meeting with a longtime acquaintance, wholesale grower Richard Schroeder of Grayslake, IL, resulted in an arrangement that has helped finance Glacier's start-up.

Explains Brad, "Dick was looking for two things: No. 1, a place to grow his bare-root whips on to later plant out for finished stock because he was essentially out of land, and No. 2, a supplier that could get him the stock he needed for fall planting. He couldn't do that with Oregon stock, but with our climate, I can get dormant stuff to him before Oct. 20. It's nice for him not to have to worry about getting it in in the spring and having to plant it during shipping."

Dick adds, "We had been buying in trees from the West Coast, planting them about 3 feet apart, leaving them a season or two to develop a better root system, and then transplanting them to eventually produce specimens in the 4-inch range. I wanted Brad to do that for me so we could release some of our land for other things.

"I'd already known him for about 15 years, and I had a pretty good feeling about him. The guy's got plant sense in spades, and that's something not everyone has."

Brad and Dick forged an agreement whereby Schroeder's Nursery buys the whips and Brad arranges shipment to Glacier. He plants the trees in spring, grows them for one season, digs them when they go dormant, and arranges shipment back to Chicago in time for Dick to plant them that fall. Dick pays Glacier a flat fee per plant, delivered.

"We probably do it more economically than he can do it," comments Brad. "Our overhead is less, our soil type is right for it, and we can really devote full attention to it throughout the growing season."

The first year of the agreement, 1984, Brad planted 1,000 of Schroeder's whips. The number has now reached over 6,000 a year.

According to Desi, despite Glacier's firm policy of destroying poor stock, the cull rate on these plants is only about 10 percent. Says Dick, "The quality has just been superb and has exceeded my expectations."

However, such successes seem remote in 1985, the period Brad calls "the bottom." Mike's Christmas trees — over 150 acres of Scotch pines — were booming, requiring devoted attention. Glacier was moving more boldly into production, with the Browns constructing some temporary mist beds to root their first shrub cuttings. The pressure was unrelenting as a virtually unrewarded, since Glacier had nothing to sell.

The Browns lost a lot of plants that year, including about 250 of Schroeder's 'Emerald Queen' Norway maples. Brad had planted the stock in 1984, the pushed it with generous amounts of nitrogen and water. The following June it became evident that the winter of '84-'85 had wreaked havoc. "It was a related injury combined with overfertilization and overwatering," says Brad. "They leafed out, but they'd been burned at the snow line, and they got stressed in June and died."

Even more sobering than these losses was a tractor accident that nearly cost Brad his life. "It scared us," he says "but I guess it wasn't my time to check out."

That year, recalls Brad, the nursery grossed "a pittance: under \$500." But the Browns stuck it out, and so did Dick, their key customer. "It was a disaster but we had the answer to the problem and we changed things immediately," Dick says. "I stayed with them, and intend to stay with them." (See the sidebar on page 31 for more about Glacier's current cultural practices.)

Since 1986, when inventory began to mature, things have steadily improved. Sales have risen from the "pittance" to over \$100,000 this

year. The '85 experiment with rooted cuttings was a success, and the shrubs thrived in the field. Encouraged, Brad spent a week at Bailey Nurseries in St. Paul, MN, studying the production system that would become the basis of his own shrub operation.

"We've tried not to reinvent the wheel," he says. "I'm just blown away by growers who never even visit the nurseries around them. You get so many things out of it. You can learn enough in one visit to save five years of errors."

Glacier erected permanent rooting beds and subsequently added two poly houses to start a container shrub operation. The nursery was finally big enough to justify a larger investment in labor.

Brad started expanding the payroll three years ago with high school workers who had previously sheared Christmas trees at Mike's farm. Positive experiences have led him to continue using this labor pool.

Typically, Glacier hires five to 25 teenagers on weekends for labor-intensive tasks like planting, trimming and hoeing. Brad's main contact, who is in charge of recruiting friends for the Glacier jobs, receives \$4.75 an hour. The other workers get \$4. "We have at times given them an extra dollar an hour to accomplish some pre-determined task," says Brad.

Adds Desi, "It only costs us \$50 or \$60 more for the day, and boy, that work gets done. We're really demanding with them, and when they work, they work hard."

The Browns stress that finding the right kind of students is important. "These kids come from Columbia Falls, where there are a lot of [lumber] mills," says Desi. "Their dads are blue-collar workers, and they're hard-working kids. There's a certain amount of peer pressure, and they motivate each other. They have taken an interest in the nursery and call it their farm."

Says Brad, "Having these kids return year after year has just been invaluable to us."

Even at a small nursery, not all jobs can be done in weekend blitzes. Continuous care has become essential, especially since the nursery has expanded. In 1987, Mike and the Browns began jointly leasing a 63-acre parcel behind Glacier's existing property; Glacier uses 18 acres. Last spring, the Browns signed a lease-purchase agreement with the farmer who

owned their original 20-acre parcel for an adjoining 15 acres.

Brad's increasing presence has helped provide the attention the larger production area demands. He cut back to part-time at the Christmas tree farm in 1987 and was able to quit that job completely this year. One of Glacier's veteran high schoolers, who served apprenticeships at Schmidt and Shroeder nurseries, has returned to become the Browns' first full-time employee. The company has also added a part-time secretary-bookkeeper.

Because the high schoolers are unavailable during the week except in summer, Brad hires seasonal weekday workers through Job Service. "We usually keep five people during the spring, and I work out there with them, so there is someone motivating them. But I'm going to do less and less field work every year. In May and June, I have to be out on the road, working with the customer base. The people we want as customers are ordering that far in advance.

"So our goal for next year is to try to get some good people in. We know that people are a major capital investment."

The Browns have been extremely cautious when it comes to other types of expenditures. They have reduced overhead and limited their long-term debt by building things themselves, renting equipment and storage space, and delaying major purchases until they become necessities. For example, instead of putting up a cold-storage area for fall-dug bare-root stock, the Browns pay \$150 a year to rent a cellar once used by a seed potato grower.

The Christmas tree operation eventually grew so large that the equipment-sharing arrangement was no longer practical, but Glacier turns to other local sources for several key pieces. For instance, another Kalispell nursery owns a 44-inch Vermeer spade that Brad can rent for trees requiring large balls. Last year, Glacier purchased its own Caretree 32-inch spade, which is big enough to handle most of the company's stock.

"Before, we had to hire someone to custom-dig, and scheduling him proved to be a logistical problem," says Brad. "And you can't go out and get a spade just anywhere."

To operate the spade, however, Glacier rents a Bobcat skid-steer loader. "That, you can pick up anywhere. We'd like to have one, and it will be our next major purchase, but we couldn't yet justify the expense of buying one when we could lease it. Our annual payment

would be \$5,000, and we rented one for \$2,000 this year."

The Browns' most recent big-ticket purchase was a new Kubota BF500 tractor. "We were needing it all the time," explains Brad. "We try to make good sound investments with a rapid payback period, but we also try not to be shortsighted."

Adds Desi, "It's those big purchases on the front end that eat up all your capital. How many days you'll use an item out of the year is the big thing you have to consider. We still rent a lot of equipment from farmers by the day."

Brad's former work experience in an insolvent company, plus advice from seasoned nurserymen, definitely made a lasting impression. "Dick Schroeder once told me that putting a lot of money in things other than trees doesn't make a lot of sense if you're in the tree business," he concludes.

The Browns have spent the past five years honing their financial philosophy and devising a production system to fit the climate. Since 1987, however, they have focused on an area of paramount importance: marketing.

"People are used to using their regular suppliers, and there's no real reason for them to change," says Brad. "A gimmick won't do it; you have to go out and earn their trust. Thinking people owe it to you is crazy. You have to grow quality, and you have to deliver quality."

The most fundamental aspect of marketing is figuring out who your customers are and what they want to buy. So far, most of Glacier's customers have been Montana retailers — though many of these buyers end up installing some of the plants in landscape jobs or reselling them to other landscapers.

"In Montana, more often than not, the larger garden centers are also doing landscaping," explains Brad. "There are maybe only a half-dozen to a dozen genuine landscape contractors, and we do sell to some landscapers. But the majority of the smaller landscapers make buying arrangements through garden centers."

The nursery's stock list now includes B&B specimen trees; bare-root and field-potted shade and flowering trees; bare-root, field-potted and container shrubs and vines; small transplant stock; and rooted cuttings. The selection has been greatly influenced by Glacier's customer base. For example, Brad says he will always grow B&B trees even though the market price on them is "not super-

lucrative.”

“It’s not very economical to grow them here in a big way. But there’s a demand for them here in-state, so I’ll continue to handle them. People want to buy stuff that is hardy in this climate, and my plants are more in sync with their weather.

“Ultimately, I think trees will be equal to or just slightly less than shrubs for us in terms of dollar value. But certainly in terms of units, the shrubs will dominate. They’re in the tens of thousands annually; the trees are still in the thousands.”

**T**he container operation is another effort to provide complete service. “When you go out and visit, you see the demand,” says Brad. “For instance, the amount of bare-root potentilla sold here is pretty minimal. The trend seems to be containers, so I shifted to containers. Then my customers started asking for junipers and wanted to buy from a single source, so we started doing some evergreens.

“We’ll grow some shrubs bare-root, field-pot the larger material and grow the little ones in containers.”

Deciduous shrubs have proved to be such a hardy and profitable crop for Glacier that the Browns hope to market them regionally, instead of solely in-state. “They just do fantastically well here,” says Brad. “You can grow just as good a shrub here as anywhere, and it’s an extremely economical operation. We’re right in there cost-wise with Bailey’s.”

**W**hether the customer is regional or local, Glacier offers a fairly short haul — something Midwestern and West Coast suppliers can’t provide. Though the nursery is rather isolated, Brad has never had a problem arranging shipment.

“Montana is a net importer, and the truckers are always looking for a back haul,” explains Brad. “The [truckers] I work with have the Coors contract out of Denver, and they run empty loads all the time. They’re always looking for something to haul. And Coors is shipped in refrigerated trucks, so that’s worked out very well.

“I can’t always get things out on the exact day I’d like, but I’ve always been able to do it within a reasonable time frame.

“If you don’t arrange the shipping, and make it economical for the customer, you’re out of business. A nursery-

man out here once told me that shipping was the customer’s responsibility. He’s not in the business any more.”

Informing potential customers of such benefits is now a high priority. Brad uses a Smith Corona word processor to generate a monthly schedule for contacting customers. “Every month, each customer gets a call or letter from me, or a monthly availability list. I’ve seen a real correlation between this effort and the response I have gotten.”

This summer, Glacier published its first small catalog. The company produced the interior pages on the word processor, and a local vendor assembled the catalogs. “I felt like we finally had enough stock to have the catalog, plus continuing the monthly availability list,” says Brad. The 34-page catalog is full of information about the plants’ overall performance, going well beyond the traditional descriptions and hardiness designations. In a typically pragmatic introduction, Brad writes: “Much of this information comes from the experience of making errors that have cost us money, so take note.”

**T**he nursery’s recent history has been encouraging for the Browns. They’re now contract-growing shrubs for another nursery in Kalispell, and they’ve received a new contract to grow 20,000 shrubs to the finished stage for Schroeder Nursery. Orders for next spring are about a third ahead of those for spring ’88.

Brad hopes that Glacier will ultimately produce \$250,000 to \$275,000 in annual income, with production expenses of about \$150,000. He believes that expansion will not be a problem with either leased or purchased land.

“The farmer who owns the parcel Mike and I are leasing is at an age where he’d still have years to farm it, but I’m optimistic that there will eventually be an option for us to purchase it. And we can now lease land just about anywhere.”

Adds Desi, “The people in the community see us working all the time, and they respect what we’re doing. They know that if they lease something to us, it’s going to be kept impeccable.”

In addition to hiring employees, an important short-term goal is computerizing financial records and inventory. “The word processor can generate our mailing list, correspondence, lists of telephone numbers,” explains Desi. “But all the bookkeeping is manual right now.

“We’d love to have a computer, but

we’re waiting until we can afford what we really want. I have no doubt that we could benefit from one.”

Says Brad, “I think we should get something that will adapt to handle the business at the ultimate size I want it to be. We do have our data all organized so that it can eventually go into a computer without too many problems. And we’re learning more and more what we’re going to need out of one.”

The family’s most immediate priority, however, is more personal. This month, a new baby is due to join the Brown’s toddler, Carly (pictured on the front cover). Both Brad’s and Desi’s parents have retired in Montana, and a combination of child care and family babysitters allows the Browns to balance parental responsibilities with work.

“Carly’s been a blessing. She pulls us away from the business,” says Desi.

“It’s a good excuse to take a little time off,” grins Brad.

**S**o far, “a little time off” has been all the Browns have usually been able to manage. Even Desi’s vacations are scheduled to coincide with regional trade shows. “But doing that keeps me motivated, thinking that someday it’s all going to be there for us,” she says.

Despite their single-minded attitude about Glacier Nursery, the Browns haven’t forgotten the reason they first decided to go West. From the trailer or the fields, the Rockies are always in view, silent symbols of endurance and stability.

“The mountains are not a complete cure-all for your feelings, but being out here does help a tremendous amount,” says Brad. “You can stand on our front porch and two hours later be out casting on a mountain lake in the wilderness.”

Concludes Desi, “I’ve been happy and enjoyed the areas we’ve been in, and we’ve always been involved in the community. We both enjoy skiing, hiking, fishing. Things have always worked out well for us.

“When we started the business, I guess I expected it to require a lot of us. I wasn’t prepared for the amount it would absorb, though — everything for five years. But this [business] is something that’s ours. I have faith that everything will work out.”

*Julie S. Higginbotham is feature editor of American Nurseryman. Photos provided by Glacier Nursery except where otherwise noted.*