

Features

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Keeping it Fresh

Jennifer Zurko

I've been traveling to Seattle off and on for over a decade since my sister moved there, and over the years, I've tried to hit the multitude of garden centers in the great state of Washington. This past trip, I combined the personal with some work to coordinate it with Smith Gardens' field trials event. On my way back down to where my sister lives, I made a quick stop at McAuliffe's Valley Nursery in Snohomish.

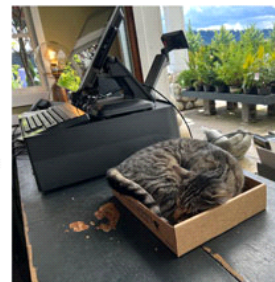
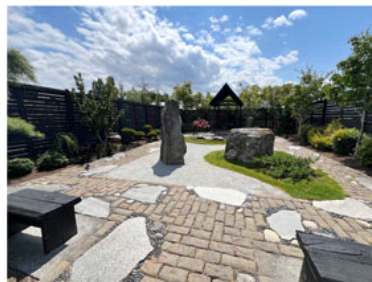
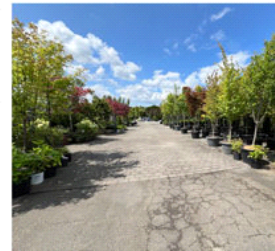
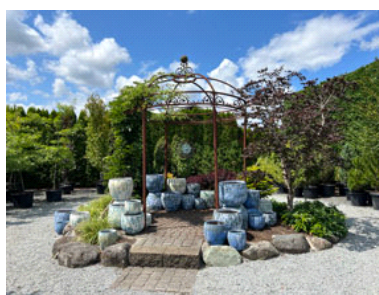
Back in 2018, Jen Polanz visited McAuliffe's when they were a stop on the Garden Centers of America Summer Tour, but I wanted to see them for myself. And, man, I'm glad I did.

Pictured clockwise from top left: Each display has a strategy

behind it. The goal is to make it easy for customers to shop and come back for more. • McAuliffe's could have just used regular ol' bricks to build structures around the garden center, but they went with something different every single time. It's a simple thing that can make the most important finishing touches. • The smooth, wide paths make it easy to navigate and push a cart around. • Every good garden center has a cat. • The Japanese-inspired garden is one of the vignettes at McAuliffe's that pleasantly surprise you. And everything in there is for sale. • As with any journalist worth her salt, I love a good play on words (Little Shop of Soils).

As I made my way around the garden center I was continuously impressed and surprised. Just when you think you've seen it all, you turn around a corner and there's something else that catches your eye. There are displays and vignettes that make for a clever shopping experience, and little touches that you may miss the first time, but that you keep finding every time you walk through.

The McAuliffes opened the business from scratch after they bought land in Snohomish in 1999 and wanted to start a



nursery.

"I wanted to slow down and sell a few plants," Jamie said laughing because he soon learned that "slow down" aren't words many garden center retailers use to describe as a reason to get into this business.

McAuliffe's officially opened in 2001, and Jamie and his wife Tiffini have been slowly adding on and creating new sections of the garden center, with Tiffini using her creativity and artistic knack to design thoughtful displays.

"Everything is curated to offer a unique experience of nature's beauty," said Tiffini. "We have an amazing, talented staff who help keep designs full and fresh, and with their knowledge can assist customers through making selections for their own homes."

That's why one of the keys to McAuliffe's success is because they're constantly changing things up. Each vignette has a strategy behind it and everything looks like it has its specific place. Whether it's a collection of plants that go well together, care information or ideas on how to incorporate accessories into your backyard, the goal is to keep people coming back to see what's new and making it easier for them to shop.

The constant change and new additions provide those finishing touches meant to attract and charm customers, but they also keep Jamie and Tiffini's team busy and engaged all year round.

"We come up with projects to keep people going all year," said Jamie. "We've got a great crew." **GP**