

Features

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Only the Best

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Sussex County, Delaware, is known for its beach towns, and while there's nothing like a day at the beach, visitors and residents alike also get a treat heading inland to visit the nearby East Coast Garden Center and RSC Landscaping, all under the Cordrey Companies in Millsboro, Delaware.

East Coast Garden Center and RSC Landscaping founders and owners (left to right): Rick, Chris, Valery, Steve and Ryan Cordrey.

On a sunny April day at East Coast Garden Center when I visited, customers were shopping for their favorite plants. Delaware's "slower, lower" property taxes and no sales taxes have made it a favorite place to live for retirees, first-time homebuyers and Millennials. Because of the growing housing market, East Coast Garden Center is a favorite spot to shop for the best plants in Sussex County.

On that April day, I talked with second-generation Chris Cordrey, the operations manager for RSC Landscaping. His parents Rick and Valery, along with his Uncle Stephen, started the landscaping and growing divisions in 1990, and began the garden center in 1999.

Choosing Only The Best Plant Material

Chris said people shop their garden center because of the "quality and variety of material" that East Coast Garden Center sells. The Cordreys attend trade shows and monitor trends, looking for the best disease-resistant varieties with the newest and longest blooms to grow and sell in their garden center.



The Cordreys grow their plant material in the Perennials/Grasses & Shrubs Growing Division located on their property. This allows them to control the variety and quality that produces the healthiest plants. The growing division provides the plant material for the garden center and the landscaping division. RSC Landscaping installs perennials, shrubs and ornamental grasses, knowing the plants will withstand sandy soil and hot summers.

The garden center entrance, with pavers, gorgeous mixed containers and decorative hardscapes greets customers looking for beautiful, healthy plants to put in their gardens and landscapes.

Sussex County also has many waterways around southern Delaware; the Cordreys sell salt-spray-tolerant plants for landscaped beds and containers.

Knowledgeable Staff

Chris said that their employees have diverse knowledge, including Rick's expertise in ornamental plant science, and Valery's passion for educating customers on plants and the pleasure of gardening. Other team members' specializations include horticulture, plant biology and shrubs. Many of his employees train for the Proven Winners certification, as well.

"We're the largest, single operation for getting certified in Canada and the U.S. We care about education," said Chris.

April showers bring May flowers: Colorful umbrellas greet Proven Winners Annuals Department customers.

He further explained that the Proven Winners certification helps customers trust the company regarding plant material and the employees' expertise in gardening advice. The Cordreys also benefit from "what Proven Winners will be marketing during the year and ensuring we have that plant material. We can also tell our clients what the 'Annual of the Year' and the 'Perennial of the Year' will be," Chris said. (Side note: Those are Supertunia Mini Visa Yellow and Brunnera Jack of Diamonds, respectively.)





Additionally, the garden center sends its customers Proven Winners' Gardener's Idea Book for inspiration.

Chris's favorite department—the tropics.

Tropics and the nearby beach go together as outdoor decor.

"We send out the PW Idea Book to customers for all types of gardening inspiration. There are certainly lots of container ideas, as well as landscaping, plant selection ideas and gardening ideas," Chris said.

The Cordreys' 20-year relationship with Proven Winners allows them to work with PW reps for in-house workshops. The previous weekend, Chris and the local PW rep tag-teamed on a \$55-per-person container gardening workshop. Twenty-five people attended to learn about the dos and don'ts of container gardening, and go home with a 14-in. pre-made container for either sun or shade (that they indicated in their registration).

They also host a First Fridays event (you guessed it, the first Friday of every month) with food trucks and special sales, as well as other plant-specific celebratory events like Fern Festival Weekend. (Find out more about their events on their website at eastcoastgardencenter.com.)

Below left: Houseplants are the focus during the winter at East Coast.

Below center: The garden center's layout includes Proven Winners organized as annuals, perennials, shrubs, shade and full sun, to name a few categories. The employees and owners are invested in education, which builds trust with customers.

Below right: East Coast Garden Center sells other plant material brands. The company oversees the entire growing division to ensure it provides its customers with the healthiest plants and the brightest, longest-lasting blooms. The Cordreys stay on top of trends by attending trade shows and watching developments in new varieties coming on the market.



Before I left, Chris said their summer season began the next day, April 30, and employees were busy setting everything up for the big selling season ahead. Let's hope it was a good one! **GP**

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