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Growing Community at Pinder’s Nursery

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When I was in Stuart, Florida, helping my mom with her garden, there’s one place I inevitably ended up: Pinder’s Nursery in Palm City. As a fourth-generation garden center owner, I’ve spent a lifetime visiting nurseries across the country. Every once in a while you walk into a place that feels familiar in the best possible way. The first time I shopped at Pinder’s, I felt the same energy that surrounded my own family’s garden center in New Jersey.

Pinder’s grows about 70% of its own product, allowing them to adjust production schedules with consumer demand.

Anyone who’s spent years in this industry knows that feeling. Running a garden center asks a lot of you, physically and mentally. But when it all works, there’s nothing quite like it.

Established in 1975 by Marvin Pinder and his father, Robert Pinder, the family nursery recently celebrated its 50th anniversary. In 1975, Marvin was dating Terri, who supported the young business before officially joining the company in the early 1980s. Terri later played a major role in shaping the retail side of the nursery and ultimately opened the garden center in 2005. Today, the operation spans roughly 7.5 acres, combining a vibrant retail garden center with a substantial growing operation behind the scenes.

Like much of Florida’s Treasure Coast, the region around Palm City continues to grow rapidly, bringing a steady stream of new homeowners and gardeners into the area. Over the past 50 years, the business has evolved along with the region, but the heart of the nursery remains deeply rooted in the Pinder family.





While Marvin built the growing side of the operation, Terri helped shape the welcoming spirit that customers experience when they walk through the gates. Her vision was to create not just a place to buy plants, but a place where gardeners could gather, learn and feel part of something larger. That idea continues today with the next generation stepping into leadership roles, including their daughter, Kenleigh, who oversees retail and community programs, and their son, Ian, who manages the nursery's production fields.

Kenleigh didn't originally plan to return to the family business. Her early career was in culinary arts, where she worked as a chef for nearly a decade. But the demanding pace of the restaurant industry eventually led her back to the nursery in 2017.

Examples of signage and color around the Florida retailer.

"My passion is nurturing," she told me during our walk through the nursery. At first she thought that instinct expressed itself through food during her years in the restaurant world. But at Pinder's she realized that nurturing extended much further. She now helps nurture the staff as they develop new skills and confidence, works alongside the team that nurtures the plants themselves, and shares knowledge that helps customers nurture their own gardens at home. That idea seems to shape much of how the nursery operates today.

A Grower–Retailer Advantage

One thing that immediately stands out at Pinder's is how much of what they sell is grown on site. According to Ian, roughly 70% of the plants customers see on the retail floor originate in the production area behind the garden center. That grower-retailer relationship provides a level of flexibility many garden centers envy.

Earlier this year that flexibility was tested when a severe cold snap pushed temperatures down to 19F, one of the coldest events the nursery has experienced in decades. Preparing for it required a full team effort. Retail inventory was moved into buildings and classrooms, greenhouses were sealed, and nearly an acre of exposed production space had to be protected using improvised pipe structures and ground cloth. For three nights the Pinder family and staff stayed on site, cycling irrigation systems and monitoring temperatures inside the houses. It was a stressful stretch, but the quick action saved the vast majority of the crops.

Because so much of the product is grown on site, the team can also adjust production schedules based on what they see selling in the garden center. Edibles, for example, have been expanding steadily in recent years, with tomatoes, peppers and vegetable starts occupying a larger share of production space than they once did. Weekly meetings help coordinate that balance between production and retail. On Mondays, the family reviews what crops are finishing, what needs to move to the sales floor and which plants might benefit from additional promotion. On a quarterly basis they take a deeper look at sales trends to determine what should be expanded or reduced in the coming seasons.



Marvin's Magic Mix

One product that perfectly reflects that grower-retailer mindset is Marvin's Magic Mix, the nursery's proprietary soil blend. Many garden centers talk about developing their own potting soil, but in practice the bags often end up looking generic, with little differentiation beyond a private label. At Pinder's, the soil program has been taken much further.

Co-founder Marvin Pinder (center), with the next generation in the business, Ian and Kenleigh.

Over the years Marvin has continuously tweaked the blend so it performs specifically for growing conditions in their region of Florida. The mix works equally well in containers or garden beds, and the nursery also purchases it in bulk to use throughout their own growing operation. That connection between production and retail gives the product credibility because customers are using the same mix the nursery relies on to grow its plants.
The origin story of the name is refreshingly simple. Years ago a local kindergarten teacher used soil from the nursery for a classroom tomato project. When the plants grew dramatically better than previous years, she returned asking for more of "Marvin's magic." The name stuck.

Today, the nursery sells close to 20,000 bags each year. Unlike many private label soils, the bags are colorful and professionally designed using the nursery's brand colors and logo, reinforcing the identity of the garden center rather than looking like a commodity product. The soil itself is blended by a regional manufacturer using Marvin's specifications, ensuring consistency from batch to batch. From a garden center perspective, the product performs extremely well. The nursery enjoys strong margins on the soil, and because it's the same mix used throughout their growing operation, the recommendation carries credibility with customers.



Designing a Garden Center That Works

Walking through Pinder's Nursery, another thing immediately stands out to me. The layout makes the garden center remarkably easy to shop. Wide concrete pathways connect the various sections of the nursery, allowing customers to move comfortably through the space with carts and plants in hand.

The private label soil blend is also bought in bulk to use in the growing operation, lending it even greater credibility.

Some of the concrete infrastructure came together in a practical way. During periods when construction was booming in the area, concrete trucks occasionally had leftover loads that were used to pour pathways through the production areas. The retail garden center itself, however, was designed much more intentionally. When the retail space was developed, Terri played a major role in shaping the layout so it made sense for customers. Drawing on her own understanding of retail and advice from industry leaders in the early 2000s, she helped create the wide, logical pathways that guide customers comfortably through the garden center today.

Behind the retail space, the production areas flow logically from greenhouse to field to staging zones where plants are tagged, organized and prepared for the sales floor. Plants are typically pulled from production several times a week and processed through a staging area where staff verify counts, apply labels and prepare them for display.

The Community Garden Center

While the growing operation is impressive, what truly defines Pinder's today is its connection to the community. The family often refers to the retail operation as "The Community Garden Center at Pinder's Nursery," reflecting the idea that the nursery isn't just a place to buy plants, but a place where gardeners can gather and learn.

Classes and events play a major role in bringing that idea to life. Each month, the nursery hosts a variety of programs ranging from educational classes to hands-on planting workshops and community gatherings, such as plant swaps or themed gardening events. One unique feature of the nursery is that they have both an indoor classroom space and an outdoor teaching area, allowing programs to take place in either setting, depending on the topic. Many of these classes are paid events, helping offset the time and resources required to host them while still delivering value to participants.

Kenleigh has also experimented with formats that encourage customers to purchase plants during the class itself. Potting workshops charge a modest participation fee while allowing attendees to choose and purchase the plants they want to use. Many participants leave the event with multiple plants and finished containers.

Beyond the direct sales impact, the classes bring in a steady stream of new customers, with some attendees traveling from as far as Vero Beach and West Palm Beach—both more than an hour away—after discovering events through the nursery's marketing. That community connection extends into their Flower Child loyalty program, which provides access to special promotions, events and email updates. Combined with a newsletter database approaching 18,000 subscribers, the nursery maintains an ongoing relationship with a large base of gardeners across the region. (Find out more about their programming at pindersnursery.com.)

Looking Ahead

When interviewing Kenleigh and her brother, Ian, I was struck by the enthusiasm they have for the business and its future. After decades in this industry, that kind of energy stands out. Running a garden center isn't easy. It carries physical and mental demands that are very different from most retail businesses. But when you can connect with your community through the simple act of nurturing plants and nurturing the customers who care for them, it makes the work deeply rewarding.

That joy is also visible in the staff. Every time I visit the store, someone greets me and asks if they can help. In many garden centers, there can be a disconnect between staff and customers. I've visited stores where not a single employee approaches to say hello. At Pinder's, the experience is very different. The friendliness of the team reflects the culture the Pinder family has built over the years. That kind of joy shows up again and again in the best garden centers. **GP**

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