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You don't realize how big this country is until you drive across it. My husband and I set out on the last day of August and headed west on an eight-week road trip. I had been granted professional development leave and was looking forward to exploring production nurseries, botanic gardens and other horticultural sites across the country, sizing up what sustainability means in different regions and looking for that elusive sense of place in America's landscapes.

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# Searching for a Sense of Place...

– a Horticultural Road Trip.

Our first scheduled visit was Willoway Nurseries in Avon, Ohio. I thought we were lost, driving through what seemed to be a residential neighborhood, but soon we found the entrance and the long driveway lined with display gardens which shield the 1000+ acre nursery from public view. Willoway was one of the first northern nurseries to go into pot-in-pot in a big way, and now about half their tree shrub and evergreen production is in the pot-in-pot system, ranging from 3- to 45-gallon container sizes. I've been a proponent of pot-in-pot production for the last ten years and wanted to see it on a large scale. My other reason for visiting this nursery was to see their tree liner production in retractable roof greenhouses<sup>1</sup>. Starting from seedlings or rooted cuttings, in one year, six-foot tree liners shoot straight up then are topped to promote branching. Most of these trees go out the next year into the pot-in-pot system. The beauty is that the nursery has control over cultivar selection, quantity and quality of their product from propagation through finished material.

We drove around Chicago in a rush-hour rainstorm, not a pretty site. I would return later for a conference, but for now we wanted to make tracks for Minnesota where I had scheduled a visit at Bailey Nurseries. Along the way we discovered the Univ. of Wisconsin Arboretum<sup>2</sup> in Madison and enjoyed the beautiful restored tallgrass prairie on a brilliant September afternoon.

Bailey Nursery headquarters is located in St. Paul, Minn., on an old farmstead. The production nurseries are scattered around the countryside nearby and in several other states; all together they



## Member Profile

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Summer' mixed amongst endless beds of perennials and small shrubs in containers. Next we drove to Magren Farm, which is nearly all pot-in-pot production with a small bare root field production area as well. The flat topography and sandy, well-drained soil is ideal for easy installation and maintenance of pot-in-pot systems<sup>4</sup>, though this location did require deer fencing around the entire farm.

We headed west of the Twin Cities about fifty miles to Chaska, Minn. to explore the University of Minnesota Landscape Arboretum<sup>5</sup> and Landscape Development Center. What a great surprise! The large modern visitor center and size and diversity of the gardens make the arboretum a popular destination for family outings and provide

tered Ash Anxiety<sup>8</sup>, a caged model of the "most wanted" threat Emerald ash borer. Even the parking lot was educational, with stormwater runoff directed into vegetated infiltration areas, and signage to educate the visitor about the use and maintenance of rain gardens on a residential scale.

Now we were heading for Yellowstone National Park<sup>9</sup> and had to cover a thousand miles across the entire widths of South Dakota and Wyoming. We appreciated the vast farms and plains and sparse traffic on the highways. We made a quick stop in Mitchell to see the unique Corn Palace, then headed for the Badlands<sup>10</sup>. Talk about erosion! At first, all you see are the rock layers, but then you notice the dry grasses and small wildflowers that hang on to life in



claim to make up the largest wholesale nursery in the country. Many of our New Hampshire nurseries and garden centers buy bare root trees and shrubs from Bailey's for potting up in the spring, but they also produce finished shrubs, perennials and trees in containers. We went to "Container West"<sup>3</sup>, where I was introduced to 'Twist and Shout', the new reblooming lacecap hydrangea, and saw thousands of blue pots of 'Endless

gardeners with a great educational resource. I truly admired the extensive signage and special exhibits such as Treeology<sup>6</sup> – a tree trail with stops and signs to make you think about tree biology. And the sustainability exhibit, Grown Home<sup>7</sup>, a rustic retreat made of salvaged river birch logs with living willow furniture meant to be grown, harvested and moved indoors. Further down the woodland path, we encoun-

a very harsh environment. And in the shelter of the eroded gullies, junipers add strokes of green to the landscape palette. It is actually a very diverse ecosystem, but one not immediately evident to day trippers.

Not much further west, the Black Hills rose up, green with spruce and oak where there's ample moisture, and then

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## ... a Sense of Place

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the drought-tolerant Ponderosa pine forest. Of course, we had to see Mt. Rushmore even though it was raining. All the granite made us feel quite at home. But then it was time to hit the highway again, through miles of rangeland in northeastern Wyoming, until the Big Horn Mountains challenged us. We drove through the pass in the first snowstorm of the year, and down the steep western slope, across the dry, austere landscape of central Wyoming and eventually reached Cody, gateway to the eastern entrance of Yellowstone.

Yellowstone is probably the most stunning landscape I'll ever see. Not on a grand scale, although the views are beautiful, there are many comparable mountain vistas in the world. It's the thermal springs and geyser fields and their associated flora and fauna that are truly unique and unworldly—the paint pots colored by thermophilic bacteria<sup>9</sup>, the texture of algae and mosses, the thin limestone crust around the geysers, the contrast between life and death, the noise and mystery of mud pots and geysers, the steam drifting up from hot



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springs .... How fortunate we are that this has all been preserved for us to see.

Denver was our next destination, but along the way I wanted to see the annual trial gardens<sup>11</sup> at Colorado State University (CSU) in Fort Collins. Over 1100 annuals were entered in the trials, testing their performance in the high light, low moisture conditions of the region. Hundreds of people visit the park-like trial gardens at the edge of campus and industry attends a field day each year to vote on the best of the best. These are awarded the Plant Select label, and are promoted and marketed throughout the state. I noted some new things to try at home – 'Joey' ptilotus<sup>12</sup>, 'Piglet' pennisetum and 'Capriccio' grass, 'Denver Daisy' rudbeckia<sup>13</sup>, 'Red Shift' coreopsis, and 'Ruby Moon'<sup>14</sup> climbing hyacinth bean to name a few.

Denver Botanic Garden in September was beautiful, loaded with ripe grasses and perennials amongst a framework of trees and shrubs. The garden's mission emphasizes dryland gardening, appropriate for an area that gets less than a foot of rain in a typical year. The first public xeriscape demonstration garden was established here in 1986. I loved the dusty, rusty colors of the dryland mesa area, but also admired the more formal (irrigated) cutting gardens, Japanese gardens, perennial borders, woodlands and water features. My favorite feature was the blue pots<sup>15</sup> of papyrus in a shallow water feature reflecting the bright blue sky—or, maybe, "pots on a hill"<sup>16</sup>, where ice plant and blue fescue spills down hill from weathered clay pots imbedded in the hillside.

My reason for being in Denver was to attend the joint eastern and western region meetings of the International Plant Propagators Society (IPPS) – the conference title this year being "Propagation with an Altitude". IPPS did a remarkable job in integrating growers, plant enthusiasts, propagators and academics into a program themed around natives, alpenes and exotic new plants. Tours out to Fort Collins Nursery, Little Valley Wholesale

Nursery and Timberline Gardens provided great opportunities to see wholesale and retail operations, western style. We also returned to Fort Collins for another look at the trial gardens and a special tour of the National Germplasm Preservation Lab where zillions of seeds are stored, some in cryogenic tanks, to preserve their genetic diversity for future generations.

After Denver, we headed south and west to the town of Pagosa Springs and settled down for a week or two, making day trips out to hike and explore. As in and around Yellowstone, there were massive tracts of dead and dying old stands of pines and firs. Climate change and bark beetles seem to be to blame.

Conserving water in the landscape is a ubiquitous theme in the West. Water catchment systems such as cisterns and rain barrels are common. New development limits use of turf, restricts irrigation and preserves at least a portion of the natural vegetation in this arid environment. At Coronado State Monument I saw a rock mulch demonstration, a system used by the native Americans to grow crops. The cool nights make moisture condense on the warm rocks, then drip downward into the soil.

To be concise, I'm going to skip ahead a few weeks (and three states) here and move on to the hills of Texas. Our daughter lives in Austin, so we spent a few days there and in surrounding environs. A pleasant day trip west took us to the LBJ ranch along the Perdinales River. I never realized that President Johnson, a cattle rancher, was quite the environmentalist and conservationist. Lady Bird Johnson is well-known for her work with conservation and establishment of the Wildflower Center<sup>17</sup> named after her, which we visited late in the day.

Most of the wildflowers were past and the gardens were smaller than expected, but we learned that the Center has a new, broader mission, sustainability. They are one of the partner organizations behind the Sustainable Sites Initiative, currently in draft form, which provides guidelines and performance benchmarks for sustainable land development and management practices. Something like LEED standards for landscaping, it could affect the way you do business in the future, so give it a glance at [www.sustainablesites.org](http://www.sustainablesites.org).

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### WEBSITES

Pesticide Side Effects

[www.biobest.be](http://www.biobest.be)

Biological Control: A Guide to Natural Enemies in North America

[www.nysaes.cornell.edu/ent/biocontrol/](http://www.nysaes.cornell.edu/ent/biocontrol/)

Green Methods

<http://greenmethods.com/site/>

Koppert Biological Systems, also Pesticide Side Effects Database

[www.koppert.com](http://www.koppert.com)

Biological Control of Insects and Other Pests of Greenhouse Crops, University of Wisconsin (108 page book)

<http://learningstore.uwex.edu/pdf/ncr581.pdf>

Greenhouse IPM Manual with an Emphasis on Biocontrol, Penn State (108 page book)

<http://paipm.cas.psu.edu/63.htm>

Buglady Consulting (Handout from Biological Control Program)

Suzanne Wainwright-Evens spoke at the Sept. program.

<http://www.bugladyconsulting.com/> ■

## ... a Sense of Place

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That's a good segue to my return to Chicago (by plane this time) where I visited the Chicago Center for Green Technology as part of an urban horticulture tour. It was one of the first platinum LEED certified rehabilitation projects in the country, an old waste dump that's now been turned into a demonstration for everything green, inside and out. The native meadow landscape is unusual at first, but grows on you. Rain cisterns, pervious surfaces, bioswales and a retention pond capture stormwater and keep it on site. For those interested in green roofs, there is a very nice demo of various types of modules (on the ground where you can see them!)

The tour was for a conference called The Landscape Below Ground – all about tree root development in urban soils. We also saw the beautiful parks of Chicago; I was very impressed by the meadow<sup>18</sup> at Lurie Park, quite

striking even in fall. We visited the first emerald-ash borer infested neighborhood and learned about the extensive tree replacement program the city has undertaken, had lunch with a landscape architect at Sandburg Village (all built on top of parking structure) and looked at the challenges of tree plantings in a city with tons of traffic and tons of snow (and salt).

We eventually returned home, driving east from Texas through green and hilly Arkansas, crossed the Mississippi at Memphis, stopped briefly to see the conservatory at Gaylord Opryland Resort in Nashville and drove up Skyline Drive through the Shenandoah National Park. We hit a lot of rain from Virginia northward and even though fall colors may have been at their peak, we could hardly see them. On the final day of our trip, the sun came back out and we saw that the familiar New England farms and forests still held their charm, 9150 miles later. ■

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