

## WORTH THE DRIVE

When Niagara's fruit trees are in bloom and the plant selection is best, leave your garden behind and head to the area's specialty plant nurseries. TEXT AND PHOTOS BY THERESA FORTE



**T**UCKED BETWEEN the Niagara Escarpment and the shores of Lake Ontario, Vineland Nurseries has happily kept company with vineyards. Fruit orchards and well-kept farmhouses for more than 30 years. Inconspicuous white signs lead visitors along rustic side roads to a brick bungalow nearly hidden by lush nursery stock. For plant enthusiasts, Jim and Simone Lounsbery's two-acre nursery is a treasure trove of dwarf and unusual evergreens, Japanese maples, rhododendrons and bamboos.

"We strictly carry plants: you won't find bags of fertilizer or rocks for sale here," Jim says.

A guided tour of the facility is like walking through a living textbook of unusual conifers, viburnums, hydran-

geas and glorious trees, such as fringe-trees (*Chionanthus* spp.) and *Parrotia persica*. With the confidence of a teacher taking attendance, Jim rhymes off plant names and their characteristics as we tour the nursery.

Now in his 25th year managing the Horticultural Continuing Education program, as well as teaching plant identification at Mohawk College in Hamilton, Ont., Jim is a familiar face from his days at Royal Botanical Gardens in Burlington, his guest appearances on gardening television programs and his enthusiastic lectures at garden clubs. His wife, Simone, is a graduate of the Niagara Parks School of Horticulture. Their knowledgeable advice and distinctive plants draw visitors from Ontario and elsewhere.

Vineland Nurseries began as a part-

time venture in 1975. "Very few nurseries were into rare and unusual plants when we started out," Jim says. "Back then, most nurseries carried two Japanese maples—one red and one green. We now offer 87 varieties."

Jim views today's customers as more knowledgeable, but still looking for advice. "A person may have taken a course in horticulture, know what a dogwood is and want one. But they might not know some of the newer dogwoods or how they grow."

Variegated pagoda dogwood (opposite page, middle) and 'Sekkan Sugi' Japanese cedar (opposite page, bottom) draw in the plant-obsessed.



Jim and Simone Lounsbery (left) stock a tempting selection of Japanese maples, dwarf evergreens, viburnums and rhododendrons.

#### HOW TO GET THERE

#### Vineland Nurseries

4540 Martin Rd., Beamsville, ON L0R 1B1. Phone: 905-562-4836. Plant purchases can be made from April to December and inquiries are welcomed year round. Call ahead for seasonal hours. Website: [vineiandnurseries.com](http://vineiandnurseries.com).



It's understandable a gardener looking for the perfect dogwood could easily be overwhelmed. Vineland carries giant dogwood (*Cornus controversa*), two varieties of pagoda dogwood (*C. alternifolia*), a whopping nine varieties of Kousa dogwood (*C. kousa*) and newer cultivars of bloodtwig dogwood (*C. sanguinea* 'Midwinter Fire') and redosier dogwood (*C. sericea* 'Cardinal').

"It's important for a nursery person to be knowledgeable, too," he says. "Knowledge not only sells a product, it allows the person to go home and be successful."

Understanding the soil, moisture, light and space conditions you can offer is critical to its success, Jim adds. "I will turn someone down [and not sell them the plant] if they don't have the right spot."