

Mid-Atlantic Living People & Places

A man wearing a light blue long-sleeved shirt, khaki pants, and a light-colored cap is kneeling in a nursery field. He is pointing towards a small, rounded evergreen tree. The field is filled with rows of similar trees, and mountains are visible in the background under a cloudy sky.

Saucy Business

MARTINSVILLE, VIRGINIA

**Mill Mountain
Theatre**

ROANOKE, VIRGINIA

A Crafty Mafla

BALTIMORE, MARYLAND

A Growing Tradition

Bennett Saunders continues his family's legacy at Saunders Brothers Nursery in Piney River, Virginia. —page 3

Family of Blooms

Paul Saunders and four of his sons grow everything from peaches to boxwoods at their longtime nursery near Lynchburg, Virginia. *By Rebecca Bull Reed, photography Ralph Anderson*

Below: The boxwoods are balled, placed in pots with pine bark and fertilizer, trimmed, and then wrapped to reduce transpiration stress. See above: Paul's grandson for boxwoods started climbing first, growing from an 18-oz. pot at age 10.



The rising sun first illuminates the mountains and then slowly reveals a valley of greenhouses teeming with flowers and plants. On another farm 5 miles away, acres of bottom-land covered with rows of shrubs of all shapes and sizes are surrounded by apple and peach orchards. Welcome to a morning at Saunders Brothers, Inc.

One of Virginia's largest wholesale growers, the family-run business has been around since Paul Saunders and four of his sons have grown taller when they were. Whether it's a small ball of boxwoods, a bush of peaches, or jars of locally made jams and jellies, the fruits of a farming tradition started by Paul's father and mother in 1915 will fill their beautiful fields at the base of the Blue Ridge Mountains.

Harvest Beginnings Ask Paul a question, and the reply falls smoothly on your ears. Rhythmic and gentle, his fitting Tidewater accent modulates smoothly as the hills he calls home.

"Excuse me for getting somewhat, um, poetic when I say," Paul says when the subject turns



in lawns. "When I was young, I wasn't that good a person, and I didn't really like to read, but I've always been interested in growing things."

The Saunders family meticulously practices and sells nurseries spring of 1987 when, with advice, Paul propagated his first trees—mostly for a 4-H project. Later that year he bought out his partner.

"A high school science teacher and my mother showed us how to make the cuttings, and we did knock off a couple of the trees for my nursery," Paul remembers.

Planting a Nurture When a tree is the less than desirable tree, homeowners are more apt to be popular as ever. That's not with the lack and increased with more fluid landscape designs that feature perennials and grasses, homeowners grow up on them for a while. "Now many homeowners believe that come back, grow,"



most. Acres of greenhouses, lawns, and nurseries. In the Saunders family farm at the foot of the Blue Ridge Mountains, the sons—a married at Saunders Brothers, Inc.—Boys Paul (owner) and sibling the peach crop with his sons (from left) Robert, Tom, Bennett, and Jim. The family raises more than 100 varieties of nursery plants and six varieties of fruit. "Now, Larry Paul's summer place says it all, grow up Tom Saunders is the nursery manager, and wife Lynn is the payroll manager."

stands in large gaps in Paul. An added advantage to horsewoods is that "their ridges, stems, leaves and twigs," says Paul.

A co-ordinator of the National/International Trials, the Saunders family particularly works with blue crabmeats, 14 varieties. 50 breeds of gardens and potatoes, and a host of compositions create new selections of the decade that are more durable and forgiving.

"The traditional English horsewood is elegant in its compact environment of high, dappled shade, but can be riddled with problems in areas unprotected from sunlight," he says. "Here, we're trying to identify horsewoods that will tolerate varying environments."

A Family Farm Four of Paul's seven sons help him continue the family's green industry. Tim and his wife, Lynn, are horticulturists. Tim operates the nursery, and Lynn is the payroll manager. Bennett oversees the field production and orchards, while

Jim serves as personnel manager and Robert directs sales.

"One of our neighbors once told us that Saunders Brothers looks like a happy place to work," Jim says. "I don't think that's true."

Thankfully, Tim, Bennett, Jim, Robert, and their employees have more than 50 years of forestry know-how, and know how to deal with it. "This is an ever-changing industry," Tim explains. "We've gone from using field soil in the past to growing with artificial media, plastic pots, and programmed irrigation systems."

Even with all the new science, one thing remains the same: Once the sun comes up on the Saunders family farm, another day of growing begins. ☀

Saunders Brothers, Inc. 1711 Tye Brook Highway, Frying Pan, VA 24059 www.saundersbrothers.com or (811) 477-5795. Locations about 30 miles north of Charlottesville.

