

NCNLA
MEMBER
SPOTLIGHT

Five Minutes with Cline's Nursery



Andrew Marks provides a guided tour of nursery production and facilities for the Future Farmers of America of our local high school.

Cline's Nursery
1901 Fallston Rd.
Shelby, NC 28150

Owner
John Cline

In business
Since October 2007

NCNLA member
Since 2015

Number of employees
15

How did you get into the business?

I entered the nursery business after retiring from a corporate career that spanned 30 years. Pursuing my interests in business sales, marketing and management after leaving my family farm in 1971, I never anticipated returning to my roots. However, circumstances led me back to our farm, which has been in our family since 1857. Selling the property was not an option for me — I was determined to turn it back into a thriving operation. In this challenging farming environment, however, holding onto the land while moving toward implantation of farm production was a difficult task.

During my research, I came across a friend who was growing Japanese maples, and my love for these trees sparked my interest in the nursery industry. Starting a business from scratch in the 2007-2009 period was particularly challenging, due to the unfavorable economic climate of the time. However, we persevered, and that time actually provided me with invaluable opportunities to further develop my knowledge and expertise.



Willie Bass grows quality material for our customers!

What is a typical day like for you and your staff?

A typical day at Cline's Nursery involves a variety of tasks and responsibilities, including the following:

Nursery maintenance: We start the day by tending to the nursery grounds, ensuring that the plants are well maintained and healthy. This includes inspecting, watering, pruning, fertilizing and general upkeep.

Customer service: Welcoming and interacting with customers is an essential part of our day. We assist them in finding the right plants for their needs by evaluating their landscape goals and mapping the best course to achieve their vision, answering questions and providing landscaping ideas and guidance on plant care.

Inventory management: Keeping track of stock levels, ordering new plants and organizing our inventory are all vital aspects of our operations.

Sales and marketing: Promoting our products and attracting new customers is an ongoing effort that involves maintaining an online presence, participating in local events, and reaching out to past and potential clients.



Fun at Cline's 'Run for the Roses'.

Administrative tasks: Much like any business, our administrative tasks include managing finances, handling paperwork, scheduling deliveries and maintaining records.

Continued learning: Since the nursery industry is constantly evolving, we dedicate time each day to staying up to date on the latest trends, attending industry workshops and participating in educational programs to enhance our knowledge and skills.

While this gives an overview of a typical day, the nursery business can be unpredictable, running the gamut from fast-paced and exciting to challenging and stressful. We meet challenges head on by drawing upon industry experiences, adapting, prioritizing and implementing tasks to ensure that the nursery keeps running smoothly.

What has been the most rewarding part of your career?

The most rewarding part of operating Cline's Nursery has been engaging with our customers and employees. Building relationships, sharing our knowledge and providing customers with exceptional service all bring me a sense of fulfillment.

Moreover, seeing our customers' success in expanding their own gardens, businesses or projects brings me a great sense of pride. It is truly rewarding to witness their accomplishments and know that Cline's Nursery played a part in their journey. Whether it's providing them with the right plants, offering guidance and advice, or simply being a reliable partner, we truly enjoy supporting our customers in any way we can.

Engaging with our employees has also been a big source of fulfillment for me. Building a dedicated, passionate team and creating a positive work environment are crucial to success. Seeing our employees grow professionally and personally, and knowing that we have played a role in their development, is incredibly rewarding.



Incredible support is given by local Master Gardeners for our events.

What is your company best known for?

Cline's Nursery is known for its excellence both as a grower for wholesale customers and as a trusted destination for retail customers. This unique combination allows us to serve a wide range of clientele and meet their specific needs.

As a grower for wholesale customers, we have established a strong reputation for providing high-quality plants to landscaping professionals, garden centers and other nurseries. Our dedication to cultivating healthy, robust plants and providing reliable service has earned us a strong reputation in the wholesale industry.

On the other side of the business, our retail customers recognize us as a go-to destination for their gardening and landscaping needs. We offer a wide variety of plants, including our renowned Japanese maples, to homeowners, gardening enthusiasts and anyone looking to enhance their outdoor spaces. Our knowledgeable staff is always ready to provide personalized advice, recommendations and guidance to help customers make informed choices and achieve their gardening goals. To foster goodwill and help educate the community, we also host events led by master gardeners and other experts. Covering a variety of topics, these well-received events often include hands-on activities for children and adults.

We also serve as a re-wholesaler, connecting growers and retailers in the nursery industry. Our extensive network and expertise allow us to bridge the gap between these two sectors.

What issues are you concerned about as a company in the green industry?

The industry is likely to face several challenges in the future, especially in terms of increased demand for sustainable and environmentally friendly practices. Customers are becoming more concerned about the impacts of their choices on the planet, and they expect the nursery and green industry to follow suit. This means finding innovative ways to reduce water usage, minimize chemical inputs and promote biodiversity.

Another significant challenge is the industry's current shortage of skilled labor. As older generations retire, we will need younger individuals to enter the field and acquire the necessary knowledge and skills. Encouraging education and training programs can help address this issue and ensure a steady supply of qualified professionals.

Weather fluctuations also pose a significant threat. Rising temperatures, changing weather patterns, and extreme events like droughts and floods can have detrimental impacts on plant health and production. Adapting to these changing conditions and developing resilient plant varieties will be crucial.

Increased competition and changing consumer preferences also present challenges. With the rise of e-commerce and online plant shopping, nurseries will need to find ways to stand out and provide unique experiences to attract customers. Additionally, staying up to date with the latest trends and offering a diverse range of plants and services can help meet consumers' evolving demands.

What advice do you have for someone interested in or just starting in the industry?

Although my knowledge base may not be as extensive as that of generational nurserymen or those with horticulture degrees, I have continuously strived to learn and grow in this field. You can learn something new every day, so you should always strive to keep yourself open to new ideas that can enhance your understanding of the industry.

Hard knocks also can be a great teacher, as long as we learn from them. Since the nursery business is one in which you must continually adapt to change, staying stagnant is not an option. By embracing the challenges and lessons that come with each setback, and utilizing the educational opportunities NCNLA provides, you can always grow and improve.



Our 'hands-on' TLC is the reason we have exceptional Japanese Maples.

What are your favorite offerings from NCNLA?

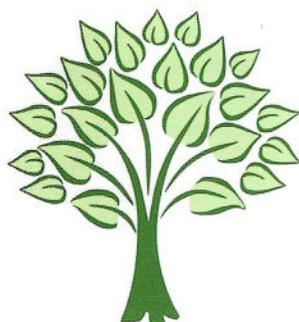
Being involved in NCNLA has been an incredibly rewarding experience for me. Through my involvement, I have gained a wealth of knowledge about the nursery and landscape industry, as well as valuable insights into local market and industry trends.

One of NCNLA's main benefits is the opportunity to network with professionals from various sectors of the industry, including growers, landscapers, suppliers and educators. Those connections have expanded my professional network and provided me with invaluable guidance and mentorship.

Moreover, NCNLA offers a wide range of educational resources and programs, from workshops and seminars to conferences and industry tours, that have enhanced my knowledge and skills in areas such as plant production, landscape design and sustainable practices. This continuous learning has made me a more well-rounded professional and enabled me to stay up to date with the latest industry advancements.

Another significant benefit has been the advocacy and support NCNLA provides. The association works tirelessly to promote the interests of the nursery and landscape industry at the state and national levels, giving members a platform to voice their opinions and help shape policies and regulations.

Lastly, NCNLA has given me a sense of belonging and camaraderie within the industry, enabling me to connect with like-minded individuals who share a passion for plants and the environment. The friendships and connections I have made through this association have been invaluable, both personally and professionally.



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