

From Mums to Marketing ... and **EVERYTHING IN BETWEEN**



ARIS HORTICULTURE AT A GLANCE

Year Founded:
1920

Founders:
Ira and Menno Yoder

Headquarter:
Barberton, Ohio

Growing Locations:
Alva, Florida; Lancaster, Pennsylvania;
and Leamington, Ontario, Canada

Total Growing Space:
2.03 million square feet covered greenhouse;
2.75 million square feet shade houses;
435,000 square feet outdoor production

Management Structure:
Scott Schaefer, president & CEO; Gary Knipe,
managing director, Keepsake Plants Florida; Blair Hoey,
managing director, Green Leaf Plants; Rob Bigley, managing
director, Keepsake Plants Canada; Pat Canfora, director of sales
and marketing; Jeremy McGurk, director of operations and
information systems; Justin Wisniewski, managing director,
Must Have Perennials; Erin Mazzucco Eaken, accounting and
finance; Liz Lipscomb, human resources; Ramsey Yoder, chairman
of the board; Bill Rasbach, vice chairman

What began as a sustainable agricultural farm at the turn of the century has become one of the industry's largest vertically integrated operations today. Celebrating its 100th anniversary in 2020, let us take a stroll down memory lane and celebrate Aris Horticulture's numerous accomplishments and milestones.

BY JASMINA DOLCE

Aris Horticulture is a name that has become synonymous with the horticulture industry. With continued consolidation and market challenges, few growers have succeeded into fully integrating their operations from breeder all the way to consumer.

With roots in Ohio agriculture, Aris Horticulture totals more than 2 million square feet of greenhouse space dedicated to young plant and finished production. As the industry has evolved over the years, so has Aris. And the company is thrilled to celebrate its 100th anniversary in 2020!

In 100 years, the company has evolved from vegetable producer to mum breeder to dianthus leader to perennial marketer, and so much more in between. Big Grower had the opportunity to learn more about Aris Horticulture, the company's beginnings, where it stands today and all it has achieved since 1920. It has certainly been an incredible journey, with even more to come.

ROOTS IN BARBERTON, OHIO

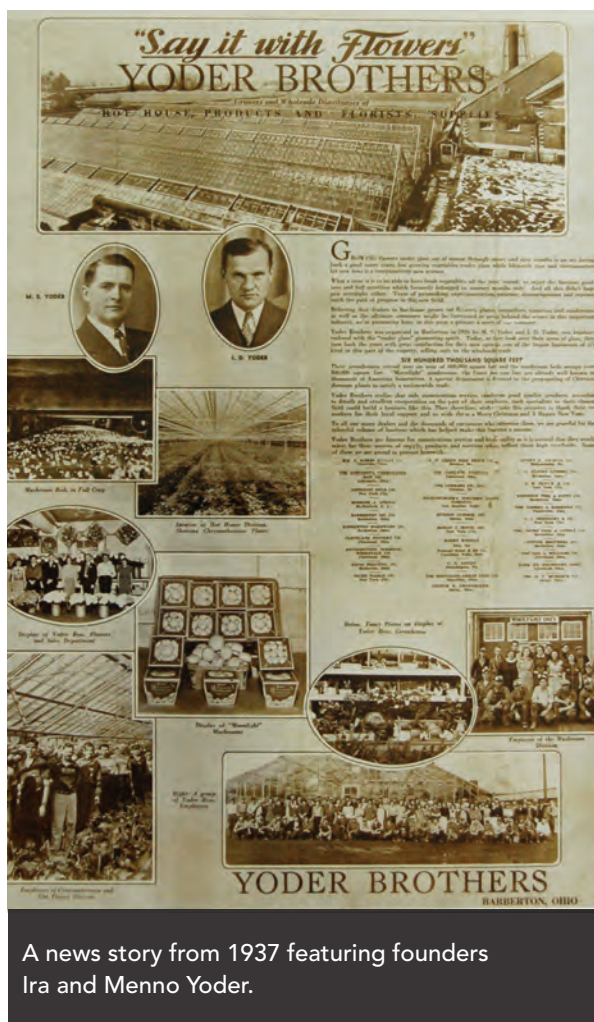
The company's history is tied to the founder of Barberton, Ohio, where Aris Horticulture's headquarters is still located today.

In his retirement, town founder Ohio C. Barber, a wealthy industrialist, built what was one of the first sustainable agricultural farms in the country, according to Christine Kelleher, marketing director for Aris Horticulture, Inc. It covered 3,500 acres, and included 20 acres of greenhouses. He hired Ira and Menno Yoder to manage the greenhouse operation. When Barber passed away in 1920, the Yoders purchased the greenhouses and started the Yoder Brothers company. It is still family owned, with third and fourth generation family members involved today.

INNOVATING MUMS AND CROP HEALTH

"Initially, they grew both vegetables and flowers," says Kelleher. "And over the years, the product lines evolved to meet market changes, but the thing that they have been most known for is the chrysanthemums."

According to Kelleher, the Yoders really built up the mum market in the 1930s and 1940s.



A news story from 1937 featuring founders Ira and Menno Yoder.



Green Leaf Plants has established strict harvest protocols to ensure disease-free dianthus production.

At the height of it, they were the largest mum producer in the world. They started with cut mums and expanded into potted mums and later garden mums.

One of the biggest takeaways from the Yoders' venture into mums was crop health. When World War II broke out, they were forced to switch over to produce to support the war effort, says Kelleher. The mum stock was sent up to Canada for safekeeping until the war would be over and they could bring it back home. When it came back, it was infected with a stunt virus. They hired a pathologist and worked on finding a way to remove the virus.

"They came up with a virus indexing program and developed it," says Kelleher. Thankfully, the program was successful. It provides a strong foundation for what is done in the industry today and carries over into other areas of Aris including hibiscus, dianthus, hydrangeas, and mandevilla, adds Scott Schaefer, Aris CEO and president.

"This program is the basis of everything that is used to this day in our industry," adds Kelleher.

EXPANSION CONTINUES

Into the 1950s and 1960s, the Yoders found it necessary to expand production. They added new locations and also added to their product lines. As air freight became possible, they were able to add greenhouses in Florida.

The warmer climate was a huge advantage, which helped the company diversify their product line. "For the longest time, mums were the main crop. With the new facilities, they added crops like carnations, snapdragons, zonal geraniums and foliage."

In the 1970s, they expanded north and purchased an existing facility in Leamington, Ontario, Canada. "We wanted to get into the retail market," shares Schaefer. "That's when we expanded into potted plants for supermarkets."

Up to that point, they were primarily growing young starter plants. With the entry into the retail market, the Yoders decided to expand their breeding program and introduced Keepsake Azaleas and Tradewinds Hibiscus.

Today, the Florida facility is referred to as Keepsake Plants Florida and the Ontario facility is Keepsake Plants Canada. Both divisions work together across North America to provide a mix of finished products and liners, including Keepsake azaleas, Tradewinds hibiscus, Sun Parasol mandevilla, hydrangeas, poinsettias, garden mums and asters, and more.

And the Tradewinds hibiscus and Keepsake azalea breeding continues to be quite successful. Today, the company offers 19 commercial varieties of Tradewinds hibiscus that boast extraordinary flowering and prolific budding all season. The plant habit is ideal for flowering pots, beds, borders and upscale containers. Aris is also proud to set industry standards in keeping quality in azaleas through its Keepsake breeding, including development of the Rozalea, a Keepsake azalea with a unique rose-petal flower form which is always in high demand. Gary Knipe, managing director of Keepsake Florida adds, "Through our own proprietary breeding or licensing, we are continuously seeking to bring to market new and improved varieties that fit with the subtropical Florida growing environment."

"We have a lot of history over Aris' 100 years and that has really helped us get where we are today," says Rob Bigley, managing director of Keepsake Plants Canada. "We rely on our customer service, continuous improvements and our consistent quality products to satisfy the needs of retail market customers including grocery, mass retail and specialty internet fulfillment."

Bigley also says that Leamington's location in the heart of southwest Ontario's greenhouse vegetable production and related transportation



Dianthus, azalea and hydrangea are three main crop categories for Aris Horticulture.

infrastructure is an important advantage for the business, as they are able to reach key population centers in the Northeast and Midwest.

Schaefer adds, "The synergies between Keepsake Plants Canada and Florida in many crops provides important advantages in quality, service, distribution and competitive pricing."

PERENNIALS EXPLODE

In the 1990s, the perennial market started to grow significantly. The company purchased Green Leaf Enterprises, adding a new location (Lancaster, Pennsylvania) and perennial starter plants to the mix. The division name was later changed to Green Leaf Plants. According to Schaefer, "Bill Rasbach, former CEO, was at the forefront in development of Aris' perennial

business model with a focus on clean stock, product line breadth, breeder support and selling across all channels. Strong support and execution from the Green Leaf Plants team led to a wide array of liner products. Implementation of lean manufacturing with its emphasis on quality, elimination of waste and employee engagement helped solidify its leading position, something everyone at the site should be proud of."

"From then on, the perennial line just kept growing for us," said Schaefer. The company currently carries more than 1,200 different perennial varieties.

"Green Leaf Plants grows and ships nationwide a comprehensive offering of perennial young plants to both small and

large big box producers," says Blair Hoey, managing director of Green Leaf Plants.

"With over 200 dianthus varieties under license from leading breeders around the world, we are the largest supplier of dianthus cuttings, both rooted and unrooted, in North America," says Hoey. Other varieties offered include herbs, hosta, ornamental grasses, exacum and lisianthus.

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Schaefer emphasizes that the company took its plant health process and applied the clean stock protocols to perennials, which no one else was doing at the time. "We were the first in the industry," he says. "We have a TC-based clean stock program and source clean material

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Must Have Perennials works with breeders globally to bring new plants to the market. Pictured is the division's trial garden.

from leading offshore suppliers using rigorous cutting standards to make sure the plants are disease free."

With the popularity of perennials, the company took its business international and entered into an agreement in England introducing the Blooms of Bressingham brand in 1995. The name has since changed to Must Have Perennials.

"Must Have Perennials manages intellectual property for the industry, and is responsible for many notable perennial introductions, including geranium 'Rozanne'," says Justin Wisniewski, managing director for this product line. "We will be celebrating its 25th anniversary in 2020."

Today, Must Have Perennials has taken a two-brand marketing approach. "The Must

CELEBRATING A CENTURY OF SUCCESS

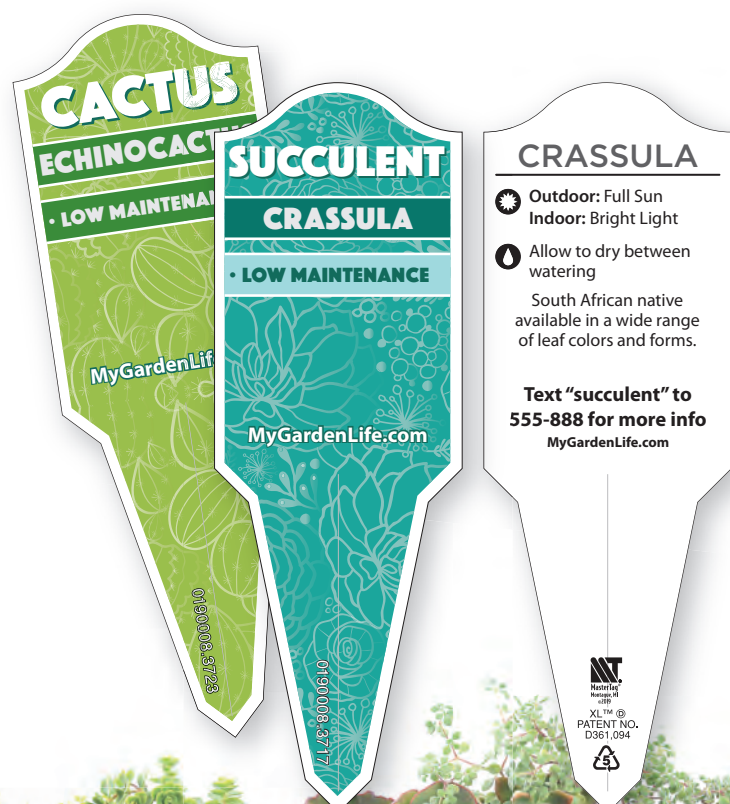


While Aris Horticulture is incredibly proud of reaching its 100th anniversary, they also are humbled by the fact that few companies achieve this milestone. In 2020, the company invites its customers, employees, colleagues, friends and all connections past and present to join in the celebration.

"When you've been around 100 years, you have so many connections in the business, so many people over that time," says Christine Kelleher. "They all have stories to tell. A lot of people actually started out at Aris and moved on to other companies."

So the company has set up an email address — **100th@arishort.com** — where people can share their favorite stories and memories of Yoder/Aris. If you have shared any memorable experiences with the company over the years, share your experience at the email address above.

"We are so connected," reflects Kelleher. "Our industry is like a giant extended family."



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Have Perennials brand is the industry trade brand, but we wanted something that was more consumer friendly for the marketing at retail and consumer levels," explains Wisniewski. "That's how we came up with Rozanne & Friends, based off the popularity of geranium 'Rozanne'."

Through both brands, they work with breeders around the world to bring new products to market. "We have 44 licensees that produce the varieties in our offering," says Wisniewski. "Point-of-purchase materials are available, including garden designs, bench cards and signage, for retailers to promote the product. There's also a pretty strong social media program with Facebook and Instagram along with e-newsletters."

INTRODUCTION OF "ARIS"

It's no surprise that consolidation within the horticulture industry has led to many changes. For Yoder Brothers, it led to a major refocus of its product lines and a pretty drastic name change.

"Consolidation has been a powerful driving force for more than two decades at all levels of the industry," says Schaefer. "You could write a book on the massive impact of big box retail on consolidation and restructuring of the supply chains, alignment of producers, breeders, brokers and economics."

One prime example is the sale of the Yoder mum business to Syngenta in 2008. "Syngenta approached us to see if we would be interested in selling the mums, and we were because of changing market conditions," explains Schaefer. "Because we built up the Yoder brand of mums to such a level that it was so widely recognized, they wanted the name, too. As a result, we needed to come up with another name for the company. That's when Aris Horticulture, Inc. was decided on."

Aris Horticulture was not hindered by this change and rather viewed it as an opportunity. According to Schaefer, the sale of the mum business to Syngenta in 2008 as well as the sale of the company's Colombian perennial unrooted farm to Ball in 2014 "allowed Aris to refocus resources and build stronger positions in faster growing market segments, including Green Leaf Plants perennial liners, Tradewinds hibiscus and hydrangeas while at the same time building business in niche finished-product segments."

Today, Aris is a diversified, vertically integrated producer and marketer of horticulture products focused on delivering industry-leading quality and service at competitive prices. Aris sales support and marketing teams work in coordination

with the production divisions to successfully manage programs with key distributors and accounts.

Schaefer adds, "Aris' success starts and ends with its talented, dedicated employees (past and present), now 650 strong, who make it happen every day, and also our

customers. We work hard to fulfill our mission and keep their trust. With continued support of the Yoder family, we are looking forward to the next 100 years. We might even have enough time to realize our vision — to have Tradewinds products in every home." ■

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