



Garden Centers of America: Together We're Better!

GCA's Key Connections: Member Profile

Sophy Kohler, Owner

Park City Nursery, Park City, UT

Blending 'Old' & 'New' Strategies Spells Success for New Owners of Park City Nursery



For more than three decades, Park City Nursery had been a staple in the Park City, UT, community, known for its expertise in high-altitude gardening for Northern Utah and the Rocky Mountain region. That reputation, which inspired the retailer's slogan, "We Know What Grows," is still being carried out – and expanded upon – by the new owners Sophy and Grady Kohler.

"Our vision and focus since we've owned the business for the last two years has been polishing up what was already established," says Sophy.

The husband-and-wife team is building upon the strong reputation in the area by fully utilizing the 7 acres that the garden center resides on, as well as specializing in unique plants grown locally and specially adapted for the region. The operation consists of several outbuildings, which each have their own product focus.

Park City Nursery's garden boutique resides in the Victorian homestead on-site, which was one of the first bigger projects Sophy tackled after taking over. The historic farmhouse carries tropicals, cacti, succulents, botanical gifts, cookbooks, personal care items, clothing, children's gifts and more. The Kohlers love highlighting local vendors in this space, too.

Birding supplies and bird decor take over another outbuilding, while Park City Nursery's custom wildflower seed blends turned a different structure into the "seed shed." Their specialty blends are well-known in the area.

In addition to their retail garden center, the Kohlers also operate a separate 2-acre bulk yard that sells specialty rocks, barks, sands, soils and stones by the scoop.



“We’re continuing to better utilize all of our awesome space,” Sophy says. “We have a stream that runs through the nursery, and we’ve been cleaning up a lot of the brush and underutilized areas around that, building little footbridges. It’s a really unique little spot that we want people to come hang out at.”

The retail garden center property’s giant 150-year-old cottonwood trees add to the peaceful ambiance of the store, beckoning customers to linger while they enjoy lunch or a daylong shopping trip.

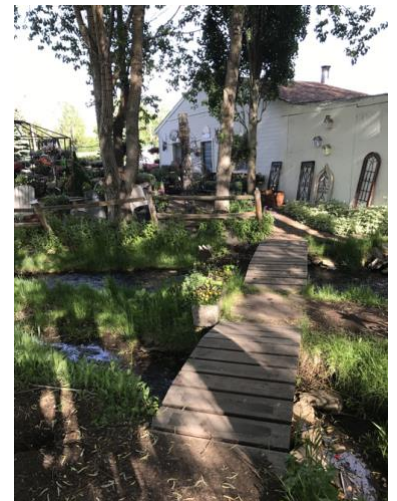
Since taking over two years ago, Sophy and Grady have made changes to the business that will continue to improve on the traditions set in place by the original owners and give them a unique twist that speaks to their new leadership. Now, the business is open year-round.

They relocated their vegetables and herbs to the middle of the nursery, increasing its footprint by three times, which helped triple their edible sales last year. “We brought in so much more, and it’s flying,” Sophy says. “The demand is there.”

In the future, they plan to ramp up their selection of indoor plants and expand their greenhouse to increase green good sales. Their potting program is taking center stage now, as they stationed their potting bench by one of the nursery’s bigger entry points to attract foot traffic to the area.

“We make the most unique pots and planters,” Sophy says. “Our designers are incredible – they’ll mix herbs with shrubs, perennials and annuals. That is something we’re known for, and they’re our best-sellers.”

The service includes special arrangements unique to each and every customer, with specifications that match the shopper’s hanging basket, pot, window box or other unique



planter. Spaces are reserved in October and November, which do fill up fast, then the pots are delivered after the last frost in the area around mid-June the following year.



The Kohlers are finding ways to differentiate their business by hosting regular family-friendly events. One of their most popular events, the Garden Stroll series, features an event every month at the nursery during summertime and it's usually paired with an in-store promotion. The series' Plein-air "Paint-Out" invited artists in the area to paint at the nursery, while guests observed and enjoyed live music, snacks and drinks.

Another of the series' successes, the Annual Garden Party showcases the nursery in its full blooming glory as they serve snacks and botanical-infused cocktails, and educate guests on beekeeping and potting.

"The Garden Strolls have been kind of a shakeup for the community," Sophy says. "My biggest fear was retaining those existing customers and making them feel like they still love it here, and I feel like we've won that. And now the cool thing is we've drawn a lot of new people here who didn't conceive themselves as gardeners."

As they navigate the waters as independent garden center owners, Sophy and Grady are sure to attend industry trade shows and involve themselves in member associations, such as Garden Centers of America. Sophy, who loved working as a florist in college and bought the garden center a couple years after moving to the area from New York City with her husband, has already felt the love from her fellow business owners.

"The industry welcomed us with arms wide open," she says. "As a national group, people are very helpful, and I think they truly want your success. I've had a couple nursery owners, who were from out of state, give me tips, and it's awesome."

