

FEATURED MEMBER ✦ Carol Kinsley

Fieldstone Nursery, Inc.



“Even though we are on a busy road, we’re kind of hidden away here, we have people frequently stop by who say they have been driving by here for 20 years and when they finally stop in are pleasantly surprised at the scope of our operation.”

Mark Sullivan



Fieldstone Nursery pond

“If you grow it, they will come,” is the philosophy of Mark Sullivan and his wife, Maripat Neff, owners of Fieldstone Nursery Inc. in Parkton, Maryland.

In 1988, they purchased 12 acres of what had been a 200-acre dairy farm and moved, with their three sons, into what had been the old homestead. The house was built in 1852. The property, which is in northern Baltimore County near the Pretty Boy Reservoir, just 6 miles from the Pennsylvania line, included a barn and a pond.

The rolling hills, at 800 feet above sea level, are off the beaten path. “Even though we are on a busy road, we’re kind of hidden away here,” Mark said. “We have people frequently stop by who say they have been driving by here for 20 years and when they finally stop in are pleasantly surprised at the scope of our operation.”

The land was part of a development where no houses had been built yet, and some neighbors objected to a nursery being located there. What was then the Maryland Nursery and Landscape Association was helpful in that struggle, Maripat said.

“They’ve been very helpful from the outset,” Mark added.

“MNLGA is a big resource for information, what’s going on politically, diseases, insects and things pertinent to Maryland right now — all the terrible things plant people are up against these days, including labor issues,” Maripat said. “They’ve also helped with business planning.”

Neither Mark nor Maripat had a horticultural background. Both have a Master of Fine Arts degree in sculpture from the Maryland Institute, College of Art. That art and design background, they believe, gives them “a unique perspective on selecting beautiful, interesting plants and executing exciting and innovative landscape design.”

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FEATURED MEMBER (Continued)

Mark does the growing, propagating and maintenance. Maripat does the majority of the customer relations, doing designs and running the landscape crew. They have also recently gotten involved in hardscaping, including two very impressive labyrinth projects.

Mark also has a background in construction, having renovated historic houses in Baltimore as a business. Renovating the old homestead was a challenge, Maripat said. They recently added a significant addition to the house.

As for horticulture, Maripat said she has always enjoyed growing and gardening. It comes naturally to her.

“Mark is self-taught,” she continued. “My husband can do anything he puts his mind to.”

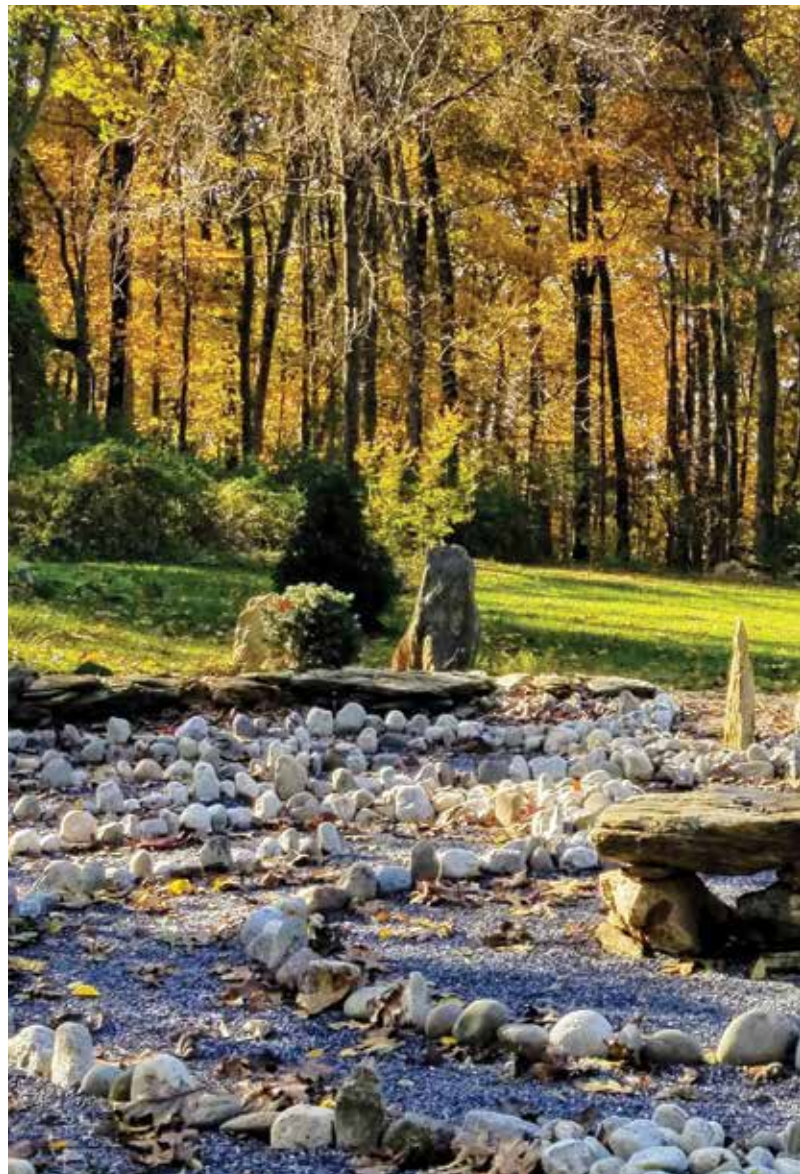
Mark started by visiting nurseries and was really taken with them, especially those with interesting plant material. They decided to create a specialty nursery, to produce things that are generally unusual and harder to find.

Maripat said, “Land is precious space for us!”

They grow both deciduous and coniferous plants that have unusual growing habits, weeping, dwarf, columnar, variegated, or special colored foliage, bark, or flowers. Some of the more interesting selections include Kousa dogwood, styrax, beech, fir, redbud, dawn redwood and false cypress. In addition, Fieldstone Nursery offers a complete line of quality general nursery stock, including cold hardy trees, shrubs, perennials, and ornamental grasses

Mark explained, “The nursery began with grafts from several local wholesale nurseries, but that was expensive, especially in the start-up years. Now it is more about having control over what we produce. It takes years of invested time, grafting and growing plants from tiny rootstocks. Sometimes you’re looking at 10 to 15 years to produce a tree. We’re not like production nurseries that turn over every three to four years. The plants we choose to grow are slower growing, so to get to a product of optimal size, it needs to be in the field longer.”

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TOP LEFT: Howell's bicolor spruce
TOP RIGHT: Japanese maples and sales area
LEFT: Labyrinth in woods with local fieldstone and river jack
ABOVE: Farmhouse Gardens

FEATURED MEMBER (Continued)

Maripat added, "Selling plants we have created and grown provides both satisfaction for us and our clients. They know that they are working with knowledgeable and hands-on growers. Honestly, because we grow it, we can often offer cost saving to our customers." Fieldstone Nursery operates more like a farm than a garden center.

"We have a lot of mature plants, so when customers want very large trees, their landscaper can pick them up, we can deliver them, or we can install them," Maripat said. Container stock ranges from one-gallon perennials to trees in 25-gallon pots.

Fieldstone Nursery has had a 36-inch tree spade for 20 years or more to remove and plant field-grown stock, but some of their trees, such as a 20-foot evergreen, might take bigger equipment to move.

Mark has a special interest in and affection for Japanese maples. Over the years he has collected more than 150 different cultivars, with both field grown and those in containers ranging in size from 3 to 45 gallons.

Maripat said, "Fortunately or unfortunately, Mark wanted to plant one of everything we grew, so we have a beautiful display of specimen trees, many over 30 years old. This makes it easy for visitors to envision what their plants will be like. Someday, when we are

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Maripat Neff



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP OF PAGE 27:

Display gardens

Retail cold frames, perennials

Japanese garden and labyrinth

Bicycle and boat sculptures from Fieldstone wedding, 2018

Retail cold frames, Japanese maples



FEATURED MEMBER (Continued)

gone, someone will have a beautiful property, like an arboretum.”

Others already appreciate the beauty of the property. There have been three weddings held there, for two of the couple’s children and for a former employee. “There are still bike sculptures here from Miles’ wedding,” Mark said. “He and his bride met at a Baltimore Bike Party.”

Whether any of their sons would like to keep the business going is yet to be determined. Only one, Miles, is working in the nursery. He is a foreman.

“It has always been a struggle to have workers, since we don’t need them year-round.” It is nice, however, to have downtime in the winter after working seven days a week in season, Maripat admitted.

She said she enjoys working with people — it provides a lot of satisfaction — but it’s a lot of work and she has small grandchildren she wants to “hang out with.” Maripat added, “My husband tells me he still enjoys it and does not want to stop yet.”

In addition to landscaping services, the nursery offers design packages for those who want to do the installation themselves. Consulting services also are available, for a fee, to help customers with advice

on renovating an existing landscape or adding hardscaping, pools, ponds, garden beds and so forth.

Despite COVID-19, 2020 has been a surprisingly good year, Maripat said. “People are home more; there are more do-it-yourself sales. We generally cater to older customers, and most of our referrals are in the same age group — people who want to pay you to do the work. But this year we’re seeing people in their 30s. There are no kids’ sports or activities so parents are home, not running around. It would be nice to think (the increased business) will happen again in the fall. We consider ourselves very fortunate to be able to stay

RIGHT: Display gardens and retail cold frames

BELOW: Japanese maple varieties



open through all of this. It has been very easy, since all our business is conducted outside. We can manage to socially distance.”

The only problem is showing visitors plants in the ground spread over a large area. “We can’t walk people down 1,000 feet. That’s taxing in hot weather. And we can’t all sit in a golf cart together,” Maripat said.



Most of their marketing is by word of mouth. “We have an excellent reputation in this business,” Maripat said. “Mark does the Ladew Topiary Garden Sale every spring hoping to increase visibility. Our website brings in many customers, too. We have seen an increase of people finding us on the Internet since the pandemic, especially for Japanese maples. Some come as far as Philadelphia, Virginia and Delaware.”

Maripat’s rule is to only work for nice customers. Her approach is, “If you make them happy, they will come back and tell their friends.”

She said, “We are very proud of our nursery and derive a great deal of satisfaction from growing and offering superior plants to our customers.”

Learn more about the nursery’s offerings at fieldstonenurseryinc.com. ✦

Photos: Marupat Neff



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