

POINTS TO CONSIDER WHEN SELECTING A SITE

Most new growers have a farm prior to selecting a crop to produce. This may restrict what ventures can be developed at the site. Some points to consider when evaluating the suitability of a site for nursery production are:

Parcel Size: Nurseries come in all shapes and sizes. Retail production nurseries are commonly less than 10 hectares. Wholesale production nurseries vary tremendously in size, and range from less than one hectare to hundreds of hectares. The size of the operation is strongly influenced by the relative amounts of container and field stock produced. For nurseries in BC, the average area of container production is 5 hectares and of field production is 30 hectares²⁶. An allowance for future expansion should be taken into consideration.

Location: Proximity to hydro, phone lines, service roads, labour supply, and, if you choose to direct-market from the farm, proximity to a large population base is important. Approximately 83% of a garden centre's customers are drawn from an 8-24 km radius²⁷. A recent US survey found consumers to rate store location more than twice as important as plant quality, plant selection, and customer service²⁸. Store location was the #1 consideration for repeat customers²⁹. However, a similar survey conducted in BC found only 1.5% of respondents to rate proximity to a retailer as an important factor in their buying decision³⁰.

History of the Site: Becoming informed about previous uses of the site may uncover potential problems before committing to the capital outlay of developing and stocking the site. Valuable information to gather includes previous crops, contamination problems, underground structures, drainage history and location and condition of subsurface drainage installations.

Soil Requirements: The site should have a slight slope, have no frost pockets, and be well drained. Drainage systems, including pumps for very low areas, must be installed before planting. Additional soil requirements that apply for field-grown stock include:

- good soil structure and free of stones,
- a loam top-soil of at least 60 cm depth; clay loam is required for the production of balled stock, whereas sandy loam is best for bareroot production,
- freedom from serious pests or pesticide residues that may be injurious to newly-planted stock, and
- a pH of 5.0-7.2, however, if the pH is outside this range it can be corrected.

Contracting soil surveys and testing can help to determine quality, character and usefulness of the site. There are several soil test labs in BC (see *Laboratories*, Appendix 2). These labs can analyze soil for crop nutritional requirements, and may also be able to investigate concerns about soil contamination or evaluate soil physical properties such as texture, porosity or particle size distribution. Refer to the [Ministry's Soil Sampling factsheet](#) (Reference # 611.100-1) for more information on when and how to collect a soil sample.

²⁶ *The Nursery and Landscape Industry in British Columbia*. 2002. BC Landscape & Nursery Association.

²⁷ D. Ference and Associates. *Profile of the BC Nursery Industry*. April 1991. BC Nursery Trades Association.

²⁸ Jim Van Dellen, "Advertising Analysis". *American Nurseryman*. November 15, 1998, pages 50-54.

²⁹ Jim Van Dellen, "Advertising Analysis". *American Nurseryman*. November 15, 1998, pages 50-54.

³⁰ B. McTavish and J. Jarvis. *British Columbia Garden Products and Services Consumer Survey*, February 1999. BC Landscape & Nursery Association.

Contact the BCLNA for a listing of consultants that can provide professional advice on the suitability of the soil and the topography.

Water Source: The availability of sufficient quantities of reliable, good quality irrigation water is very important. Before purchasing farm land, you should have the flow rate and water quality of the irrigation source tested.

The water supply system should have a minimum capacity of 40 litres per minute. Water quality parameters to test include dissolved solids, pH, alkalinity, and the levels of total salinity and specific salts (e.g. calcium carbonate, sodium, and boron). Refer to the Ministry's factsheet titled [Irrigation Water Quality for BC Greenhouses](#) for information on factors that affect water quality, treatment methods to improve water quality, and on irrigation water quality guidelines. The *BC Trickle Irrigation Manual* also contains excellent information on assessing water quality, flow rates and water requirements, and design, selection, installation and maintenance of trickle irrigation systems. It can be purchased from the Irrigation Industry Association of BC.

Laboratories in BC that do water quality testing are listed in Appendix 2.

Detailed information on drainage and irrigation systems is available from the Ministry's Resource Management Branch in Abbotsford, or on their [BCMAL web site](#).