

# 5 MINUTES —WITH— CHRISTINE FORTMAN AND MELINDA WALTON

By Teresa McPherson



Christine Fortman and Melinda Walton are the third generation to own and operate Berridge Nurseries in Phoenix, Arizona.

**You grew up in the industry and are third-generation owners-operators of Berridge Nursery; how do we encourage the next generation to be interested in horticulture as a career?**

We actively support our elementary and middle schools with in-person visits and product donations to classrooms and school gardens. We feel the continued education on the benefits and uses of plants in our homes and surroundings will encourage the next generation to respond positively to a future in the industry.

Additionally, through the Arizona Nursery Association Foundation (ANAFund), we have two named scholarship funds that are awarded annually to students enrolled in a horticulture-related curriculum at a university, community college or continuing education program.

**What do you love about your job?**

**Melinda:** I enjoy improving my employees' job satisfaction by ensuring they have the necessary tools to be successful in their individual role. I have come to appreciate how providing the proper equipment, manpower or process can dramatically reduce employee stress.

**Christine:** In Arizona, our busy fall season can start as early as Sept. 1, so we use the summer to organize and design our vignettes for a fresh new look with pottery, statuary, and plants throughout the nursery. There's tremendous satisfaction in seeing your vision completed and ready for customers to stroll through and be inspired for their upcoming planting projects.

**What keeps you up at night?**

Economic outlooks keep us up at night. Regardless whether it is a relatively positive or a general leveling off report, we are most concerned to be ready for an adverse economic environment. The cyclical eventuality of a downturn forces us to constantly evaluate our staff levels to help ensure we have a strong foundation.

**As a family business, what measures do you take to separate the family part from the business part?**

Zero. None. This nursery is the history of our family, as well as our future. We love being in this together and resultantly, we have a wonderful professional relationship and family dynamic.

**If you weren't in this profession, what would you be doing?**

**Melinda:** Most likely I would be a project manager of sorts, organizing a job site or project to ensure proper job flow.

**Christine:** Before joining the family's business, I had a 15-year career working with corporations, nonprofits and startups on messaging and events, so I think I could very happily return to that field.

**Favorite plant to grow? Why?**

**Melinda:** The dwarf jacaranda is by far my current favorite. The large fern leaves and manageable 15-foot size is perfect for every garden. The purple flowers are like no other!

**Christine:** I'm all about my flowers and planting my geraniums each fall is my favorite. If I plant my decorative containers at the end of September and fertilize once a week, I have full, showy blooms for the holiday season. 🌸