

Magnificent magnolias

Is there anyone in B.C. who knows as much about magnolias as Paul Reimer?

BY THE VANCOUVER SUN APRIL 11, 2008



ONLINE: Remember, you can download an *In the Garden* podcast by Steve Whysall from vancouversun.com/podcasts.

Is there anyone in B.C. who knows as much about magnolias as Paul Reimer?

As we tumble headlong into magnolia season with magnificent purple, white and pink blooms bursting into flower all around us, it's the perfect time to talk to Reimer, the man who grows all of the best cultivars at his nursery in Yarrow, outside Abbotsford.

Moreover, he is also the owner of one of the biggest magnolia arboretums in the country with more than 180 different kinds.

"Yes, we have that many, but we don't propagate them all. Some of them look great, but they don't sell," he says.

"And, anyway, who needs 30 varieties of yellow magnolias? Our job over the years has been to identify the best ones and to make a decision about which ones perform best in the home garden."

Reimer was born into the nursery business. His grandfather, Nickolai, was the first to start growing plants for sale not long after he came to B.C. from the Ukraine in 1928.

In the mid-1930s, Nickolai started to grow fruit trees and roses. "It was always his dream to own a nursery," says Paul.

To keep the business running, Paul's father, Nick, was basically press ganged into service. "He was told, 'You have to quit school to help me on the nursery, or I have to quit the nursery'. He could have done many other things, but he loved plants and he wanted to do as his father asked."

Floods nearly wiped out the nursery in 1948 and heavy frosts in 1955 also dealt a death blow to valuable stock. But the nursery survived and experienced significant growth through the 1950s to the

