



Plants thrive inside one of seven greenhouses at Mayhan's Garden Center in Liberal. The Mayhans grow all of their plants from seeds and unrooted cuttings and have been meeting the needs of local and area customers for the past 25 years. L&T photo/Ron Davis

By EARL WATT • Leader & Times While the seasons continue to bounce from winter to summer and back again, a season Kansans have come to know as spring, it is always summer inside the greenhouses Mayhan's Garden Center. Harold and Zelda Mayhan have been doing more than growing the seeds and unrooted cuttings for the past 25 years.

They planted their garden center seed when Beech Aircraft discontinued business, and from one tiny greenhouse they continued to nurture their customers and plants until they had to branch out. Today, they have seven greenhouses filled with plants they raised themselves.

"We work in one of them, and we grow in the other six," Harold said. "We grow everything we sell. We don't buy anything in plantwise. We raise it from a seed or unrooted cutting."

When they first started serving Liberal, they sold out quickly with what they could grow in one greenhouse, which forced them to expand to another, and another, and another.

They have learned what works on the high plains and what doesn't, and that is helpful advice for those wanting to bring life and color to the landscape.

"It depends on conditions," Harold said. "Geraniums are the best out here. We sell tons of geraniums."

To fill the space around geraniums, Harold had a variety of options that can handle the drought-like conditions.

He should know. While most people escape the winter by huddling close to the fireplace, Harold heads to his greenhouse.

“It is summer year-round in here,” he said. “I get to work in shorts any time of the year.”

After a bad experience in the early days of buying plants that were diseased, the couple decided to grow their own, and every plant in their greenhouse sprouted from their own green thumbs. That uncanny ability to make plants grow is helpful to those who struggle with keeping their own plants alive.

“A lot of it is knowledge,” Harold said. “A lot of it is way plants are watered. You can under water or overwater pretty easy. The soil makes a difference. We use a high grade potting soil which we also sell. It’s the best potting soil there is. That has a lot to do with it.”

The Mayhans are almost like parents when they sell their plants, providing sound advice to the new owner on how to care for the new life.

“They give me all the time I need, and good recommendations on where to plant at the house,” customer Aland Duncan said. “They keep me coming back. They took good care of me.”

That helpful advice usually comes from Zelda on what type of plants a customer wants. Many bring their containers to her, and she plants them herself.

“I just had a man in here, he was wanting to go a certain way, but I know how men are,” Zelda said. “I told him it would be easy to do, but if he wanted something to plant, give it water and fertilizer, they could do it.”

The two complement each other, with Harold doing the planting and growing, and Zelda helping the customers pick the right plants. Not only have the two been growing many of the flowers seen in Liberal, and their fledgling business from one greenhouse to seven, but they have grown their marriage as well.

“Me and Harold have been working together for 25 years, 24 hours a day, and I love him as much as I did the day I married him,” Zelda said. “Very few women could say that. We get along wonderful. Every once in a while I throw something, but he ducks.”

Located just north of the tracks on Clay Street, across from M&M Tire, the two planted a seed on a rocky piece of land, and they brought life to where none existed before.

“We couldn’t raise all we could sell,” Harold said. “We ran out early, so we put up another greenhouse, then outgrew that, and put up another one. We have grown with the business. It outgrew the facility, so we had to add greenhouses to raise enough to supply the customers.”

With Mother’s Day approaching, the couple were busy building hanging baskets, and interviews weren’t their priority.

“We’ve got customers to take care of,” Zelda said.

And the relationships, and business, continued to grow.