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NURSERIES
 grow your own

Landscape architect Ian Payne, OALA, not only has deep roots in the plant world—at age 14, his first job was at a nursery—but he knows plant roots intimately. “As a kid, I learned how to identify species by their below-ground growth,” he says, just one of the benefits of spending his high-school March breaks potting bare-root shrubs at Weall and Cullen Nursery. Another benefit was learning early on about the business side of the plant world—an experience that spurred him on to start his own landscaping company, with his brother, while still in high school. “In the beginning, we did maintenance, but then we moved in the direction of construction. When we switched to construction, I would sell a job and then figure out how to build it.”

Clearly a go-getter, Payne didn’t let obstacles get in the way of his chosen path. When he decided in the late 1970s to apply to the University of Toronto’s landscape architecture program, he wasn’t deterred by the fact that the program was already at full enrollment. He and a friend built their own drafting tables and erected a loft-like structure in the faculty’s fifth-floor design studio. “That year, the class had two extra students,” he says with a grin.

With his own landscape business and commuting to school using the company truck, he must have seemed a rather precocious student. “One of my first-year teachers said, ‘Why are you even here?’” Payne admits, though he also confesses, “I wasn’t what you’d call a good student. I didn’t get great marks.”

Marks aside, Payne’s entrepreneurial spirit has taken him far, and his design/build company, Enviroscope Inc., has flourished

over the decades. Recently, he’s added a new project to the mix—starting a native plant nursery on his 47-acre property near Creemore, in the Mulmur Hills. “As a landscape architect, I could see the demand for native trees and shrubs and the difficulty in sourcing them. I’ve always loved growing plants, so I decided to start a nursery.” Specializing in container-grown native trees and shrubs, Payne’s Not So Hollow Farm has found a niche selling to community groups doing naturalization projects. “Because of the size of our plants,” the bulk of which are in 1- to 2-gallon pots, “they’re especially good for use in community plantings done by volunteers,” says Payne. Another growing market is municipalities and conservation authorities: “They’re putting out tenders asking for plants from a specific seed zone,” Payne points out, noting that his nursery tracks seed provenance and is concentrating on local seed sources and specifying seed zones on his plants lists.

Of the connection between his work as a landscape architect and his endeavours with the nursery, Payne sees it as a natural progression—from growing plants to design services and vice versa. When a project calls for trees that are generally hard to source, such as American beech or basswood, he knows where to find them—in the more than 20,000 containers currently comprising his nursery stock. “I’ve started collecting my own seeds, too,” says Payne, who has set himself the goal of propagating the notoriously difficult-to-propagate native shrub leatherwood (*Dirca palustris*): “I like the idea of growing species that aren’t commercially available.” And he adds: “yet.”

For more information on Not So Hollow Farm, email natives@enviroscope.on.ca.

TEXT BY LORRAINE JOHNSON, AUTHOR OF *THE NEW ONTARIO NATURALIZED GARDEN AND 100 EASY-TO-GROW NATIVE PLANTS*.

