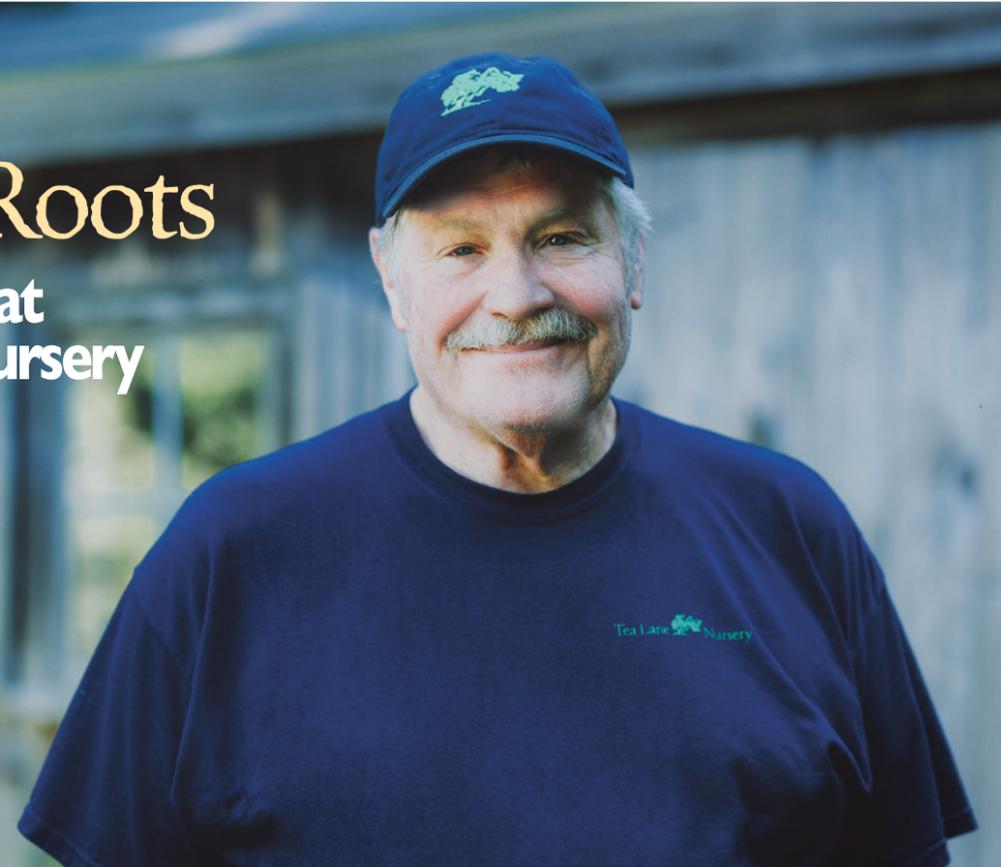


Deep Roots

Matt Tobin at Tea Lane Nursery

Profile by Jane Renzi



Like the windblown Cedar that's indigenous to Martha's Vineyard, Matt Tobin, owner of Tea Lane Nursery in Chilmark, has deep roots in the Island's soil. Matt has spent nearly 50 years living his passion for Martha's Vineyard by dedicating his life's work to preserving and protecting the Island where he was born and raised. Since 1971, Matt has pioneered sustainable, organic practices in his landscaping business to preserve the delicate Vineyard ecosystem for future generations. And, he's been doing this long before organic landscaping practices were even widely used, or fashionable.

It was Matt's formative years on the Vineyard that fueled his passion for nature and appreciation for the natural balance of

the Vineyard ecology. "I was a waterside country boy growing up," he says. "We were raised with a lot of connection with nature. My parents were conservationists and birders, and I learned a lot about gardening from my Aunt. My Father also took me down to the shore regularly and we'd forage for what he called 'the people' under the rocks. When we were done, my Dad made sure we put the rocks right back where they came from. He also took me fishing a lot, and I learned that we only kept what we needed. So, you see, I got a lot of exposure at an early age about the importance of conservation."

After a ten-year stint living with his family in Florida, Matt returned to Martha's Vineyard year-round, and he hasn't left since.

It was in his mid-teens after being away from the Island that Matt developed a true appreciation for the uniqueness of the land he left behind, and the use of organic processes to preserve it. In the 1970's before he owned Tea Lane Nursery, landscape companies were using toxic chemicals. In an incident involving a young man working for Matt's mentor at the time, the youth accidentally spilled a harsh chemical all over him and had to be hospitalized. A light bulb went off for Matt following the accident. From then on until he purchased Tea Lane Nursery in 1980, he began his quest to study everything possible about the use of organics.

"We believe that what we do is a real service to our community," Matt says. As a

community- focused company, Tea Lane Nursery also regularly donates time to maintain DAR Wayside Park and the Boys & Girls Club in Edgartown. "By using sustainable products and processes which are safe for our drinking water, children, pets, finfish and shellfish, we're protecting the Island for the next generation." For Tea Lane's customers, this sustainable approach that Matt calls, 'keeping the Vineyard like the Vineyard,' often translates into preserving the natural trees, plants and stones on a property, and integrating these into the company's landscape designs. "It would be really helpful if we could be the first ones in the door on a construction or renovation project versus the last," Matt emphasizes. "That way, we could salvage native materials that are already on the property and bring the 'property back to itself and its natural state, and the results are so much better for Tea Lane's customers. We're able to maintain lush, verdant trees, plants and lawns that are free of disease and that are growing in their natural habitat. We're also able to recycle the natural materials found on the property, such as fallen timber and use these for fence railings, steps and mulch." Matt adds that Tea Lane Nursery will cater to whatever his customers ask for. However, his preference is always to maintain as much of the natural flora and original habitat of each property as possible.

Matt's tenure at Tea Lane Nursery hasn't diminished his fervor and commitment for staying current on the latest organic landscaping technologies and techniques—despite operating his business for nearly 50 years. Matt and his team, including lead landscape designer, Dave Hill, are continually researching, learning and improving upon Tea Lane's practical, cost-effective organic processes to provide the most sustainable outcome for the Island, and best results for his clients. "For us, it's about applied knowledge gained from study, observation and experience working on Martha's Vineyard. We're from here," Matt concludes, "and we're proud to be a part of maintaining the rustic beauty, wildlife and natural ecosystem of Martha's Vineyard. It's at the heart of who we are and what we do as natives of the Island." **vs**

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