



Rainbow Nursery

Maple Ridge BC



Contributing to Canada

Every day, thousands of cars drive by a wheelbarrow full of flowers, parked at the end of a driveway on Maple Ridge's Dewdney Trunk Road. Besides flowers, the wheelbarrow also holds the story of a family's success.

When Tom Zhang was growing up, his family farmed land for cotton, vegetables, wheat, corn, beans, and sorghums, among other things. Later, at 16 years of age, Tom graduated from high school and was asked to teach chemistry because his grades in that subject were the highest in his graduating class. After teaching high school for three-and-a-half years, Tom left to go to university.

He attended Beijing Agricultural University. "Even though you can choose from different universities, there really is not much choice. You go to the university where you are accepted," Tom comments. He found, however, that he enjoyed his studies there. "Because I grew up on a farm, I knew of some pest problems. For the farmers, pests damaged their plants—causing a loss of yields—so my specialty became plant protection, the control of pests and diseases."

After Tom obtained both his bachelor's and master's degrees, his high marks and prior teaching experience meant that he was again asked to teach, this time at the university. He stayed there, teaching and researching, for ten years, an experience he did not particularly enjoy. "I like to work in the field and observe

the crops," Tom explains. "I hated the pure research, the research where you publish your paper and do the research again. You don't know how far you have to go before you have something of benefit to the people, to the country."

In 1992, Tom was finally able to obtain a student visa and come to Canada. On receiving his second master's degree from the University of Alberta, he did research for a short while for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, located near Washington, DC. But only a few months later, Tom quit his job and returned to Canada to work for a nursery in Pitt Meadows.

In June of 1999, he purchased a house and two acres of property, and, at last, he had land of his own. That year, in his spare time and in partnership with his wife, Shuping Liu, Tom began his own nursery. "When we started the farm, we just wanted to use my knowledge to contribute something to the community, and also make money," Tom comments. Quickly thereafter, however, they discovered that the farm gave Shuping, who had previously worked for 11 years as a civil engineer in China, the opportunity to work during the day when she was at home caring for their youngest daughter.

Now, situated on just one acre of land is Rainbow Nursery, a collection of two larger greenhouses and four smaller ones, all constructed by Tom and Shuping. The greenhouses may not be elaborate or technologically advanced, but they evidently work well. In these shelters, 35 to 40 varieties of roses and about 15 other varieties of shrubs are growing. Although in the year 2000, the nursery's first year of sales, they sold plants to the public, they now sell their plants almost exclusively to other nurseries, including the nursery where Tom works fulltime. Initially, Tom was asked by the nursery to propagate about ten varieties of roses but had such a high success rate that he was asked to triple the number of flowers he grew. The business is now doing so well that Tom and Shuping plan to use their other acre of land to expand their nursery in the near future.

So it is that Tom is finally doing something he enjoys. "In Canada, most people like flowers, and if you make plants and floral shrubs, you can serve people and improve the environment," he explains. "I really enjoy that and, as a Canadian, you have to contribute something to Canada. That's our contribution."

FARM FACTS

Employed –
seasonal: 2
year-round: 1

Gross Farm Sales –
\$7,625

Land Owned –
2 acres

Land Leased –
0 acres
