

## Wes and Briar Wiens Gemmrich W. Nursery, Niagara-on-the-Lake

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Wes was born and raised on a grape and tender fruit farm in Niagara-on-the-Lake and learned two important lessons early on in life - first, that agricultural survival is built on commitment and stamina and secondly, that agricultural success is built on innovation and adaptation. It has been both of these life lessons that have propelled him into becoming one of Canada's leading grapevine propagators.

After graduating from the Fanshawe College Agricultural Technician Program, in the fall of 2003, a local supplier and 3<sup>rd</sup> generation propagator of grapevines, Martin Gemmrich, approached him and Wes became a partner with the veteran propagator and purchased what is now Gemmrich W.

Nursery. He had four goals when he started: To provide the best quality grapevines available; to provide the best service available; to create a dedicated team of employees who share the vision for quality and service and to own the home market before expanding to other markets.



Commitment to quality supersedes all other aspects of management practices at Wes's nursery. Though they need to be able to provide quality at a competitive price, their goal above all else is to do so without compromising quality. They add value to operation by providing services such as producing potted vines, custom grafting and imported vine brokering. They are also affiliated directly with another family operation which provides custom planting, trellising and harvesting services, making them a one-stop operation. In the future they would like to add vineyard GPS mapping, soil sampling, viticultural consulting, missing vine counting and over-grafting to their list of services

Wes finds that keeping up with new developments in the industry is challenging, as there is no educational institution that deals specifically with viticultural propagation. Due to this he has made efforts to either travel or encourage employees to travel to more established wine regions around the world in order to learn more about their practices and technological advancements and how they might be applied to their situation. He has also made it a priority to have an R&D program and has embraced partnerships with educational institutions who have related programs. He is also involved with the local industry, being a director for the Grape Growers of Ontario, and is a member of the Canadian Grapevine Certification Network and the American Society of Enology and Viticulture. He and his family are also active participants in the local community helping at the Community Church, and with Niagara on the Lake Minor Hockey and Baseball.

A critical factor for the growing of grapes is soil improvement and maintenance. Every year the nursery takes soil samples and log them in their GPS data base to ensure they can receive multi-year data from the same sampling site. The data is also overlaid with petiole sampling, yield and growth pattern monitoring from the same location to give a more complete picture of soil health. As grapevine stock is an annual crop, rotation is important in order not to fatigue the soil. This is accomplished by working land once every 5 years allowing a 4 year fallow period between crops, during which green manures and soil amendments are incorporated.

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Over the last 5 years the Nursery's production has almost doubled from grafting 800,000 vines in 2006 to 1,400,000 vines in 2010. A large part of this increase is due to rapidly increasing market share outside of

Ontario. Since 2006, their out of province sales went from less than 1% to now being over 50%.

Wes and his wife Briar have four children, Kaityn (8), Berlin (6), Rowan (4) and Addisyn (1).