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In inventory, looking good, and ready to ship are hundreds of flats of 3” Silveredge Pachysandra, 24 plugs to a tray. The term ‘looking good’ is not completely accurate as variegated pachysandra is never a good looking plant. That is because all variegated plants are, first of all, in poor taste and second of all they are weaker growers and ultimately they revert. This is the same 24 count tray that another prominent nursery here in the Midwest has popularized and we are tagging along with it, \$18 a flat for the Silveredge. Usually we offer our groundcovers in a 2 1/2” SVD pot, 32 to a tray that we get from Landmark Plastic, \$20.80 a flat. This is a fine product, easy to sort, good depth, and, best of all, the company’s catalog lists it as being a 3.00 inch square pot. We find out in the catalog that the 3.00 is cell diameter. I was unaware that we were selling plants like televisions. When I lose my conscience we will start listing this as a 3”.

The reason we have so much of this good looking material for sale is because of either of two factors: I over-produced without doing market research, or, we have attracted a far too sophisticated customer base.

The market for groundcovers used to be in the rooted cutting tray, nominally 100 plants in an open tray. We dibble so there is a count and we stick 10% over to account for the vagaries of plant propagation. We do not see that market anymore; although we can custom grow in about anything. Then, there used to be a big market in the 48 cell pak bedding plant tray with little 4 pak tear-offs. It was difficult to grow a good product in this small a cell and harder yet to sort, so we have gotten away from it. The problem with growing Vinca minor in the 48 had to do with soil depth. Vinca needs some depth for drainage or it will die. We have now located a really deep 48 cell pak and thus may be tempted to go back into that production if there is a market. As mentioned before, the really smart nursery here in the Midwest, the one that popularized the 24 cell tray, offers only one size and thus they are not always out of something.

Speaking of strange trends in the groundcover business, there is now a market for one gallon pots. We have right now about 5,000 really good Thorndale ivy gallons, ones that have been trimmed back several times and are well-branched and well-rooted. They are in our way. We also have 30,000 heavy gallons of Bowles Vinca minor at \$4. We are continually trimming these back to make them saleable. We have potted up 20,000 really heavy gallons of Green Carpet Pachysandra at \$4 and are awaiting them to root down some. They are also in our way and by the time you read this will be rooted sufficiently. Actually, anything that is saleable is in our way and, I think, very few of our customers care about our personal problems as they have enough of those things themselves. We have other groundcovers in gallons: Euonymus coloratus, 20,000 gallons at \$4. 6,000 gallons of Thorndale ivy at \$4.

This spring has been different here at Twixwood than the previous ones and the reason is because I made a command decision last year and changed our business model. We no longer ship in the early spring lots of product to a big customer. Thus, we have had plenty of shipping capacity to deliver, and on time, to all of our regular customers. A regular customer is someone in the landscape business who takes delivery all year long, right up until the time the ground freezes. I am hoping that this good delivery of good product is building up good will so we will have good sales the rest of the year. Upon reflection, it may take several years to build up good will after many years of poor delivery service in the spring, because of the aforementioned big customer.

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One of our suppliers taught us a new trick and I must pass it on. You may find this to be a useful ploy in the future. We are in the vegetative propagation (asexual if you will) business and thus have acres of intermittent mist. It takes from 3 to 5 weeks to root a stem cutting. During that time the leaves must be kept moist during daylight hours using intermittent mist controlled by timers of some sort. One of the best timers we have found is one that uses a solar eye to read sun intensity and to vary the misting interval depending on time of day and cloudiness, in other words, solar intensity. This has worked so well that a few years ago we sent off some \$2,800 to purchase four more of these things. After a year of no responses I put my accounts receivable person (every nursery has one of these and they are pretty tough people) on the case. She started getting responses, mostly in the excuses range—doing development work on a new design, software problems, hardware problems, whatever. So, we gave up on ever getting the timers and started to ask for our money back. Here is the really good part. We were then emailed a photo of the supplier's last bank balance report showing \$2.66 in the account. You may find this to be a useful ploy as you go about your landscape business; just do not try it on us because we have already had the experience.

Our customer base may wonder, and with good reason, about the future of Twixwood now that Dianne and I have taken over, unexpectedly and rusty from years of leisure. We will let the customers guess as to whether or not we still have all our marbles. As for planning for the future and taking the business seriously, here is what I have been doing. We have gotten patent rights to propagate as many plants as we can and are planting the fields full of the following: *Andropogon* 'Blackhawks' (PPAF) and 'Indian Warrior' (PP#24,999), the *Pennisetum* 'Piglet' (PP#19,074) and 'Ginger Love' (PP#26,442), *Allium* 'Windy City' (PPAF), *Panicum* 'Ruby Ribbons' (PP#17,944), and *Bouteloua* 'Blonde Ambition' (PP#22,048). Also we have planted out lots of the three *Molinias*; *Moorehex*, *Mooreflamme*, and *Variegata*.

There are many other plants going into the field this year; about 300,000 into fumigated ground. This is a major investment, but it allows us to produce plants cheaper in many various sizes, and we get to check them for being true-to-name during the two year growing cycle. Hopefully this information indicates some seriousness about the business along with our commitment to making an investment in the future. The rest of this newsletter will advertise items that we have too many of, thus reflecting an overly optimistic opinion of the market. Please refer back to the 'marbles' comment.

Speaking of optimistic, in order to make room for cleared ground for fumigation last fall we dug everything that was in the way. Some of it was useful stuff such as *Allium* 'Summer Beauty' (40,000 extra 3 1/2" pots at \$1.75) and *Stachys* 'Humelo' (10,000 extra 2 1/4" cell at \$1) and *Carex pensylvanica* (100,000 cells, none extra, all needed). Some of what we dug were geraniums. These grow from root cuttings in the winter and we do not throw anything away, not in the face of reality or practicality or anything resembling rationality. If it is a plant, we dig it, and once we dig it we chop it into little pieces and make more plants. In this situation, lots more, which is the reason we have hundreds of flats of little plants growing from root cuttings of geraniums. Let us know what size you want us to pot these into so that you can purchase them from us. The varieties are: *Geranium* 'Striatum' (formerly 'Lancastriense') and *Geranium* 'Alpenglow'. Besides those varieties, we are in good shape on the 'Bevan's Variety', Max Frei, and *Magnificum* in 3 1/2" pots and now in gallons.

When you call and ask the sales persons about how to go about purchasing all of these liners from us, you will need to be persistent. The sales people were trained by the previous management team. They look at the computer and sell only things that show up on the computer as saleable and that have the pricing all figured out. When we grow liners, they do not show up on the computer as something available to sell. This is because of the software system we purchased some years ago that has a three-letter name. After making the decision to purchase this expensive software, most of the decision makers left the company. There is a lesson here. Anyhow, we are stuck with the software, and all I want to know is how those people are able to sleep at night.

On the facing page we have listed our current availability of perennials in a new size—this is the full 1 1/2 quart half gallon square pot that comes 8 to a tray. We call it the 8 Count. You will note that we have, for your convenience, sorted our availability out into the numbers of plants that we have. For the next month or so we are selling these for \$2 a pot, a really good price. Try to not cherry pick us. These will be easy for the landscaper to plant because they are going to come in recently cut back to about 4" tall. Have photos ready to show your clientele what they will look like next year. It is not possible to space out a square pot that is in a tray, hence they are either a very tall or a recently cut back product. It was my idea to produce these plants in this tray so try to avoid telling the sales staff or my wife what you really think of the idea. These were ready to sell three months ago, so they are well established by now.

8 count Square Pots - 1 ½ quart size - \$2 each

750 Flats 6000 pots

Calamagrostis a. 'Karl Foerster'
Lavandula a. 'Munstead'

300 Flats 2400 pots

Lavandula a. 'Hidcote'
Echinacea p. 'Pow Wow White'

275 Flats 2200 pots

Hosta 'Earth Angel'
Hosta 'Minuteman'
Rudbeckia f. 'Goldsturm'

250 Flats 2000 pots

Hosta 'Fragrant Blue'
Digitalis 'Foxy Hybrids'

200 Flats 1600 pots

Echinacea 'Cheyenne Spirit'
Hosta 'So Sweet'
Stachys 'Hummelo'

175 Flats 1400 pots

Coreopsis g. 'Baby Sun'

150 Flats 1200 pots

Hosta 'Guacamole'

125 Flats 1000 pots

Aster n. a. 'Purple Dome'
Hosta 'Barbara Ann'
Hosta 'June'
Geranium s. 'Lancastriense' (aka var. striatum)
Echinacea p. 'Prairie Splendor' (TM)
Veronica Royal Candles (s. 'Glory' PP)
Hosta 'Whirlwind'
Hosta 'Winter Snow'

100 Flats 800 pots

Hosta 'Pilgrim'
Nepeta f. 'Kit Cat'
Lavandula 'Ellagance Pink'
Hosta s. 'Elegans'
Hosta s. 'Frances Williams'
Verbena t. 'Homestead Purple'
Gaillardia a. 'Arizona Sun'
Athyrium filix-femina (Lady Fern)

75 Flats 600 pots

Digitalis 'Carillon'
Hosta 'Lakeside Cupcake'
Geranium 'Johnson's Blue'
Armeria 'Dwarf Ornamental Mix'
Echinacea p. 'White Swan'
Physostegia v. 'Miss Manners' PP
Hibiscus m. 'Luna (TM) Pink Swirl'
Leucanthemum x s. 'Snowcap'
Salvia n. 'East Friesland'
Hosta clausa

50 Flats 400 pots

Hosta 'Fire And Ice'
Salvia n. 'Caradonna'
Salvia x.superba 'Merleau White'
Stokesia l. 'Blue Danube'
Echinacea p. 'Doubledecker'
Heuchera v. 'Pistache' PP
Agastache 'Golden Jubilee'
Coreopsis g. 'Presto'
Echinacea p. 'Pow Wow Wild Berry'
Lavandula a. 'French Perfume'
Astilbe a. 'Snowdrift'
Eupatorium r. 'Chocolate'
Hosta f. 'Aureomarginata'
Hosta 'Rainforest Sunrise'
Penstemon s. 'Violet Dusk'
Coreopsis g. 'Domino'
Salvia n. 'Snowhill'
Salvia n. 'Marcus' PP
Veronica s. 'Icicle'
Hemerocallis 'Night Beacon'
Campanula p. 'Takion Blue'
Gaillardia a. 'Arizona Red Shades'
Hosta 'Francee'
Sedum 'Bertram Anderson'
Hosta 'Saint Elmo's Fire'
Hemerocallis 'Cinnamon Pleasure'
Delphinium 'Black Knight'
Heuchera a. 'Marvelous Marble'
Hibiscus m. 'Luna (TM) Red'
Geranium s. 'Max Frei'

25 Flats 200 pots

Veronica 'Waterperry Blue'
Coreopsis g. 'Sunray'
Hemerocallis 'Catherine Woodbury'
Digitalis x. m. AGM 'Tetra'
Liatris spicata
Phlox p. 'Bright Eyes'
Scabiosa j. 'Ritz Rose'
Hosta 'Stained Glass'
Heliopsis h. 'Summer Sun'
Hosta lancifolia
Bergenia c. 'Winterglut' (Winter Glow)
Campanula g. 'Joan Elliott'
Coreopsis v. 'Moonbeam'
Coreopsis g. 'Early Sunrise'
Echinacea pallida
Coreopsis r. 'American Dream'
Sedum rupestre 'Angelina'
Hemerocallis 'Little Wine Cup'
Heuchera s. 'Chatterbox'
Hibiscus m. 'Luna (TM) White'
Hosta 'Great Expectations'
Lobelia x s. 'Fan Burgundy'
Heuchera 'Blackout' PP
Hosta 'Fragrant Bouquet'
Echinacea purpurea
Sedum 'Vera Jameson'
Agastache 'Blue Fortune'
Hemerocallis 'Happy Returns'
Rudbeckia ful. var. sul. 'Little Goldstar' PP
Dicentra spectabilis
Hemerocallis 'Strutters Ball'
Nepeta f. 'Blue Wonder'
Prunella g. 'Frelander Blue'
Agastache x 'Bolero'
Astilbe a. 'Erica'
Dianthus d. 'Confetti Carmine Rose'
Aster laevis (aka Sympyotrichum laevis)
Coreopsis g. 'Sunfire'
Coreopsis lanceolata

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Twixwood has a wholly owned subsidiary in the green roofs and green walls business. It is a separate corporation because there is always the possibility of some roof collapsing under the weight of these things because the specifications call for 3 ½" of some heavy aggregate made from fired shale and fired clay. The recipe was developed over in Germany and sent to us. Maybe they are still upset about losing the war. Green roofs have some strange requirements such as no irrigation and no organic matter in the roof trays. The no irrigation makes some sense because of union plumbers and union landscape people needing to be on top of skyscrapers keeping things going. No organic soil makes some sense because without the irrigation it would get dry and the wind in Chicago would blow it all away and then the trays would blow away. It is a tough substrate for plants to grow in.

We have some half a million dollars' worth of these trays sitting out there growing so that the roots are all through the media and the tops of the trays are solid plants. We have some 40 or 50 varieties of sedums available to accommodate any recipe that anyone would want. That variety of sedums makes little sense to me because, first of all, few people are on top of a skyscraper admiring the sedum varieties and second of all, everyone wants these things on about a 30 day notice and it takes half a year to get them well established after someone wants a special recipe grown which is why we have so many out there growing at any one time.

When we are not worrying about growing these heavy roof top trays we are growing something called 'sedum mats'. Sometimes these are grown on a coir mat. Coir is coconut husk fiber and it is organic and comes from India by the container full. Sometimes we grow these mats in a plastic tray without any mat hoping that the roots will intertwine enough to hold the soil, and the mat, together. We are looking at growing on some thin felt-like frost mat material; whatever the customer wants or will pay for.

We try to not dwell on the rationality of this whole green roof business and we try to not tell our customers what we think. We just keep reminding ourselves that without any money there will be no golden years ahead and that if we did not grow these things some other nursery would.

Anyhow, the green roof business has morphed from some sedum sitting up there twenty stories high without any water to other things. As one example, we made last winter 800 of our one foot by two foot injection molded roof module trays chock full of *Pachysandra Green Carpet*. I hope these are going in the shade someplace and I do not want to try to imagine a roof in the shade and I hope there is some irrigation around. Because *pachysandra* is

our one big money-making crop, we always produce lots extra and have a bunch of overgrown several year old plants around that we can pack in tightly to make up these trays. Keep us in mind if you or your customers ever get the urge.

Speaking of the newer green roof plant mix, nowadays people are planting all kinds of stuff in them; from alliums to native prairie grasses. And so we are getting ahead of the game, having seeded many cells of *Bouteloua gracilis* 'Bad River' ecotype.

This is a shorter native prairie grass. The seed selection is out of the University of North Dakota. It is commonly called blue grama grass and is good for forage. We also have plenty of the little bluestems. With a little advance notice we can make up any recipe of plant material for a green roof tray. We will try to not think about the poor plants sitting up there in the sun and the wind without any organic matter for their little roots. The green roof people must be so busy feeling good about themselves for making the world a better place that they have not studied cation exchange capacity (CEC) which is something that the rest of the world worries about. It is possible, theoretically, to provide CEC by using finely ground charcoal, also known as biochar. Unlike organic matter, which is mostly cellulose or lignin and thus made up of long chains of the glucose molecule, and thus break down by oxidation over time, bio-char remains intact forever. No one has asked me for my opinion and I have been waiting patiently.

This green roof and green wall business has some potential. At the least it is not yet a commodity like *pachysandra* and *coloratus*. However, the customer base is entirely different than our traditional landscape-based customer. It is all big building architect designers and general contractors, none of whom know us or have any loyalty to us. Therefore the marketing is tough. Always hoping for sympathy.

I fear that in the last few years we got a reputation for being out of *Chasmanthium latifolium*. We have over-compensated lately and because this native shade-tolerant grass grows from seed, greatly over-compensated. Let us know what size you would like this potted up into. I used to say that it was cheating to grow a plant from seed instead of from a stem cutting. Those days of idealism are long gone.

In planning for the future we did lots of plugs of *Sesleria autumnalis* last winter. This grass appears to be the latest thing in landscaping in the Chicago area and we are prepared, both psychologically and in reality, to flood this market. At first blush *sesleria* appears to be just another shorter stiffer green grass and so I have no idea what or where the attraction is. We have learned to not ask embarrassing questions anymore as we are trying to make a living here.

Speaking of grass-like plants, we are going long on the Carexes or Carex or however one says lots of them and specifically Carex flacca 'Blue Zinger', also known as blue sedge, gray carex, glaucous sedge, or carnation-grass. That is why we use the Linnaean Binomial Nomenclature. The 'Blue Zinger' selection is bluer and clumpier than the straight species. The best description comes from North Creek. Any time you want to learn something useful about a plant look up what North Creek has to say on their website. Someday we aspire to be almost as good. In the meantime we suggest that you take advantage of all of their good work. This plant is native to Europe and North Africa, so it is native somewhere. As an aside, we are rapidly building up our stock of real American native carexes for future offerings. Let us know of any varieties you will want us to grow and we will get them started in the field.

Speaking of other grass-like plants, we are making Liriope spicata as fast as possible, having great amounts of it in the field. For a brief period this spring we were short of gallons of this liriope and it pained us greatly. When shortages happen we usually, almost always in fact, over-compensate by over-producing, and this is the case with liriope. It likes hot weather, and so will be produced throughout the summer in three sizes: 2 ½", 4 ½", and gallons. If anyone wants it in any other size, let us know.

There are a couple of things to keep in mind when growing grasses and grass-like plants. First of all, weed control is easy in grasses as long as the weed is not another grass. If it is a broadleaf problem, then we spray with Confront®, a non-phenoxy weed killer that is similar to the old 2,4-D except that it is not as volatile and thus it can be used in the same county as where grapes are grown. It is bad manners to spray 2,4-D around promiscuously and kill the neighbor's grapes.

The problem with Confront® is that the sprayer persons may think that everything that looks like grass, such as liriopes and carexes, are grasses (maybe that is, is grass) and catastrophes of great proportions will ensue when this error is made.

A near-ideal groundcover is bearberry, kinnikinnick, or, to be Linnaean about it: *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi* 'Massachusetts' strain. It is hardy, evergreen, low-growing and spreading, and it has little flowers and berries. Our stock plants are growing out in the field and do pretty good considering that we cut them way back every December when they are propagated. Sometimes they look chlorotic, which means yellow in English. We toss on a little iron sulphate and hope. They keep on growing.

We have wired the propagation process. We have 3,000 good looking gallons and 6,000 good looking 2 ½" pots. We stuck 3 cuttings per pot and then hoped.

Some of them look real good. I want to pot all of the liners up into gallons but we have people on the staff who think and analyze and study and worry. They want to sell the gallons we have before making more. I say the market is unlimited for good looking gallons and that being prudent is not what made Twixwood great. Probably one of us is right.

I have learned something about *Arctostaphylos* and that after making the same mistake ten years in a row; which is that this plant will die if the roots are disturbed during the planting or transplanting. It takes a while to die and there is no logical reason for the dying or any way to prevent it. Our SVD's, the aforementioned 2 ½" pots, are very well-rooted and so the roots hold the dirt together during the transplanting process. I am going to make three times this many liners next December when the people who think, analyze, study, and worry are pre-occupied with something else.

I just noticed that we have several hundred flats of 2 ½" SVD's of *Hemerocallis Stella de Oro* and *Happy Returns*. These are a bargain at \$0.75. The pots started out being square and are now getting rounder and rounder. I have been admiring them for over a year and notice that they are still here. I thought that because no one else was growing daylilies in such a small pot that there would be a real market niche here and we could monopolize it. We now monopolize it and I no longer wonder why no one else is growing them in that size.

I had thought that the landscapers might plant these instead of gallons and tell the customer all about how they would grow and how the customer would get psychic gratification from watching the landscape develop right there in their yard before their very eyes over several years. That reminds me of why I have never been and never will be in the landscaping business. I am the kind of person who, when someone wanted a tree, would sell them a handful of acorns and wish them good luck.

I should drive around more often because I recently noticed lots and lots of one and three gallon *Rhus aromatica* 'Gro-Low', \$6 and \$16 respectively. We do not have a reputation for growing woody shrubs, but a few years ago this plant was in such hot demand in Chicago that we grew it because it was easy to sell, albeit difficult to propagate. I am wondering if the bloom is off that particular rose. Whomever used to beg us to grow it, please remember us now.

This walking around looking at the plants is harder than driving around, but allows a more detailed observation. We used to be short of *Chasmanthium latifolia*, as mentioned, and now we have gallons. They are so healthy in fact that they are about as tall as I am. I hope this is what the market likes. And that brings up the subject of

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availability and shortages. What happens in this business is more psychological than rational. When we are short of a plant the customer tends to think that we are always going to be out of it whereas any time we are short of a plant we first of all tear up (that is pronounced something like crying) and then we go out and over-produce it just because we do not want to feel that bad again. So, as you can see, there is a psychological problem. Someday I will figure out which one of us has that problem.

A few years ago we were short of Pennisetum Hameln. Part of the reason is because we were then over-wintering the grasses outside and they either died during the winter or were very late in greening up in the spring. So, last fall I had several minimally heated houses filled with grasses. They are still full of them, and probably because of whichever psychological problem has been going around.

While wading past the Hameln I noticed lots of very heavy gallons of Carex Evergold and Sesleria autumnalis. I am sure there was a lot more varieties in there but identifying them would have involved bending over to read the name tags. It is easier to advertise the plants that I could identify while standing up.

While on the subject of over-producing plants that we did not have there is Calamintha nepeta nepeta. For some reason this is, or was supposed to be, the latest hot plant that would sell by the thousands and so we got in some stock plants and took cuttings. There are 3,500 gallons on the ground and another 4,000 on schedule to be potted up from liners that are on hand. I hope these sell or I will be tempted to print the name of the person who told us to grow it in the next issue of this newsletter.

Earlier this spring we were short of Coreopsis verticillata 'Zagreb', which is the more orange-yellow version of Coreopsis v. Moonbeam, and now we have all kinds of it including several hundred flats of liners in the 2 1/2" SVD pot that are for sale. There appears to be a trend of some kind going on here if I could ever figure it out.

That is about it. We have lots of stuff plus a well-oiled machine to get it picked up, sorted, tagged, and shipped. We worry about the one gallon perennials and yet the profit is all in the trays of groundcover. Keep us in mind. We are taking the business seriously.

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