

LEALETTE

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LATE SUMMER 2015

This newsletter is being written by Tom Kimmel because the nursery is being run by his wife, Dianne, who is the brains of the outfit and she is thus busy working and worrying about the money so I am the person with the time and psychic energy.

Dianne and I now own Twixwood. I was out of the business for fifteen years as we had a young hard working manager who we then sold the nursery to. The terms were one hundred percent owner financed and then the recession hit. Because we are agriculture we operate on cash basis accounting for tax purposes, thus, we are quite the authorities on, not to mention quite the experienced in, the selling of a nursery for nothing down if anyone out there is interested in asking us about it. When one is cash basis there is quite the ordinary income tax hit when it is sold, particularly if there is a lot of inventory sitting around. I told the young ambitious fellow we were selling to that it was easy and fun to own a nursery and then the recession came upon us. Sometimes my conscience almost bothers me.

There is more to the story but first we need to make some money, so here is some inventory information. We have 45,000 very heavy gallons of Vinca minor 'Bowles' and do not ask me why. It seemed like a good idea at the time. There is a good supply of Galium odorata, about 2,500 2 ½" SVD trays (32 to a flat). This is Sweet Woodruff to regular people and it is a cool weather grower which means it keeps barely alive during the heat of August. It cannot be trimmed then or it dies immediately, therefore at this time of the year it looks a little floppy and that is the way we are going to keep it. There are also several thousand flats of Asarum canadensis left over from last year that look a little shop worn what with the edges of the leaves turning black and all. We have drenched it a couple of times with Daconil, Mancozeb, Medallion, Pageant, or Palladium. And finally my conscience almost prevents me from mentioning the good supply of Pachysandra Silveredge we have; it is such a dog, weak grower plus reverts a lot but we do need to make some money this year.

Anyhow, the plans for our golden years are all disrupted and, besides that, the business has become all complicated in the meantime. A lot of water has gone over the dam and under the bridge since I used to deliver plants for my parents. I do not want to get all sentimental and teary eyed but I remember visiting with Carl Wilson during every delivery, talking with Adam Fritz, avoiding running over Bill Koehn with the truck at Rosemont Nursery, getting advice from Ed (Fast Eddy) Fasel on trimming and spacing euonymous, and spending half of my life driving down Army Trail Road delivering to Midwest. When I really want to brag I bring up delivering to Ron Iverson's mother and surviving the experience.

The business has changed since then. These days customers complain when the pachysandra is too tall. With pachysandra there are many opportunities for the customers to complain because the plant just naturally puts on a growth spurt of 4 to 5 inches every Spring when

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it sends up a new shoot and makes a new whorl of leaves on top. People such as me think that this is nature's way of doing things, plants growing and all, and, in fact, that is the main reason people buy plants in the first place. Even if they do not want them to grow it should not be a surprise when it happens.

I am told that other groundcover nurseries offer much better looking plants, all trimmed up and short. I am trying to find out which nursery started this trimmed and short pachysandra business so I can write them a letter sharing my opinions with them about unnecessarily raising customer's expectations. I know that it is against the law for businesses to collude about pricing; however, the FTC (Federal Trade Commission) must have something better to do with their time than to prosecute nurseries for colluding about the trimming pachysandra.

And so I learned something interesting the other day about our new nursery business. Actually, that last sentence should be translated into English for the benefit of the reader. The correct translation is: "I was shocked and horrified by what I accidentally found out about my newly acquired business." Our customers have found something new and different to complain about other than tall pachysandra. Incidentally, we stick 5 million cuttings of Pachysandra 'Green Carpet' a year with the capability of sticking twice that many whenever the market can bear it. So, now back to something new and interesting about customer complaints; we are now getting on our smart phones side by side comparison photos of our's and the competition's pachysandra trays with theirs being shiny and green and ours being kind of yellowish. The usual complaints accompanied the photos and so I asked my grower about it and he said that he was tired of getting complaints about too tall pachysandra so he was not fertilizing it any more.

The first thought was to write a nice letter to put in this grower's personnel file about how nice it was of him to use initiative thought and analysis to solve a problem without bothering the upper management with such trivialities. My second thought was to write a letter for the file that expressed how I really felt deep down inside. Then came the third thought which was to write letters to the other

groundcover growers suggesting that we collude on fertilizer applications. The FTC has to be too busy worrying about IBM and General Motors monopolies to bother us nurseries who are trying to save a little money on fertilizer, and, after all, making nitrogen fertilizer leaves a large carbon footprint, and, besides, the plants will naturally green up after being planted on the job site leaving the customers with good feelings about their green thumbs.

I have volunteered to point out to picky and complaining customers what I think of their complaints about yellowish and longish plants, but the sales personages, whom we used to call sales girls before the modern age descended upon us, do not let me get anywhere near the phone when customers call. That is why I am beginning again to write these regular newsletters; it is the only means of communication I can have with the customer base.

Speaking of selling things, we have a large great over-supply of 2 ½" grass liners: Calamagrostis 'Karl Foerster', Schyzachrium 'Blue Heaven', Panicum 'Shenandoah' for sale. These were divided last winter. We heat these about mid-February and get them well rooted by mid-May. If anyone wants us to custom grow some of these next winter let us know before the ground freezes in November. We cannot dig the field clumps when the ground is frozen. Besides the above mentioned varieties we have a nearly unlimited quantity of Pennisetum 'Hameln', Miscanthus 'Strictus', and Miscanthus 'Silver Feather' in the field. The alert reader may wonder why, if we have so many of these plants in the field, we were short of them this spring and the answer is that I had no control over nursery production until May 2015. If I had any decision making capability we would be grossly over-supplied with everything and, possibly, even broke. Dianne and I have many interesting discussions on how to run a nursery and we have been having them ever since 1978 when we started working together after taking the nursery over from my parents.

Speaking of selling things, or, more precisely, not selling things that we should have had to sell, this spring season we were short of *Euonymus coloratus*, a near catastrophe in my opinion, that I am still recovering from psychologically. I had no control over nursery production in 2014 and thus

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Here is what we have available in grass containers. We want to sell them all this fall. Those we do not sell we plan on over-wintering under poly and some under minimum heat so they are flushed in the spring and so we do not get any more photos sent from smart phones showing how the competition does it. With most of these plants we have an over-supply of big clumps out in the field. These we dig and divide in the middle of winter. It is a great success when done on that schedule. Let us know before the ground freezes if you want large truckloads of these custom grown in whatever size pot you desire. Actually, we have many varieties in the field in large clumps. These are not easy to sell as clumps because the miscanthus varieties tend to die out in the middle, so you will want us to divide them and get them growing and then sorted. We have lots of many of Miscanthus 'Silver Feather' and 'Strictus'.

One Gallon Pots

900	Andropogon gerardii	900	Miscanthus 'Gold Bar'
700	Bouteloua gracilis 'Bad River'	2,500	Miscanthus 'Gracillimus'
1,000	Calamagrostis 'Avalanche'	1,200	Miscanthus 'Little Kitten'
10,000	Calamagrostis 'Karl Foerster'	1,200	Miscanthus 'Morning Light'
1,000	Calamagrostis 'Overdam'	700	Miscanthus 'Puenktchen'
1,800	Calamagrostis brachytricha	1,800	Miscanthus 'Autumn Red'
1,900	Carex 'Blue Zinger'	1,900	Panicum 'Heavy Metal'
5,000	Carex h. 'Evergold'	4,000	Panicum 'Rotstrahlbusch'
3,000	Carex m. 'Ice Dance'	7,000	Panicum 'Shenandoah'
7,000	Carex pensylvanica	20,000	Pennisetum 'Hameln'
1,000	Chasmanthium latifolium	900	Schizachyrium 'Jazz'
900	Deschampsia c. 'Schottland'	2,000	Schizachyrium "Blue Heaven"™
700	Elymus a. 'Blue Dune'	4,000	Schizachyrium 'The Blues'
3,500	Festuca g. 'Elijah Blue'	10,000	Schizachyrium scoparium
1,900	Helictotrichon s. 'Sapphire'	2,000	Sesleria autumnalis
900	Imperata c. 'Red Baron'	8,000	Sporobolus heterolepis
1,000	Miscanthus 'Dixieland'		

Three Gallon Pots

4,000	Calamagrostis 'Karl Foerster'	700	Miscanthus 'Autumn Red'
400	Calamagrostis 'Overdam'	200	Panicum 'Heavy Metal'
200	Calamagrostis brachytricha	200	Panicum 'Shenandoah'
300	Erianthus ravennae	2,000	Pennisetum 'Hameln'
500	Miscanthus 'Gold Bar' PP	500	Pennisetum alopecuroides
900	Miscanthus 'Gracillimus'	500	Sporobolus heterolepis
500	Miscanthus 'Morning Light'		

7,500 flats of little plants for sale

Here is a listing of plants that we have a lot of and that we, concomitantly, desire to sell. The alert reader will notice that the common characteristic of all of these plants is that they are short and creepy. There is a story there someplace.

These plants are in various small pots and cell packs and thus not really saleable as is. They are, however, very easy to transplant into another pot, preferably a 4" or 4 ½" quart kind of a pot, if the customer can use them in that size pot. If not then we can slice the plant into smaller units and transplant into a 2 ½" SVD, as an example, or even some kind of a plug tray.

Some of these plants have common names, but we do not have enough paper to print those things, which is a problem because the morphologists keep changing the Latin names. Hope you can figure out what is going on and what has gone on and that you want some of the product.

This is a more delicate listing of plants than we usually grow and they thus do not shade out weeds very good. Many of them, mostly the thymuses and sedums, grow best in full sun and sandy soil. The rest are all over the place. They are all groundcovers and thus something that you should use more of and more often.

Acorus g. 'Minimus Aureus'	Persicaria a. 'Himalayan Border Jewel'
Ajuga 'Chocolate Chip'	Sagina s. 'Aurea' (Scottish Moss)
Anacyclus d. 'Silver Kisses'	Sagina subulata (Irish Moss)
Arabis sturii	Sedum acre
Armeria m. 'Rubrifolia'	Sedum album 'Coral Carpet'
Carex s. 'Velebit Humilus'	Sedum hispanicum var. minus 'Purple Form'
Cerastium tomentosum	Sedum k. 'Variegatum'
Cymbalaria muralis	Sedum lydium
Dianthus g. 'Petite'	Sedum pachyclados
Dianthus g. 'Tiny Rubies'	Sedum requieni
Euonymus f. 'Kewensis'	Sedum s. 'John Creech'
Gypsophila cerastioides	Silene acaulis
Gypsophila r. 'Rosea'	Stachys d. 'Alba'
Herniaria glabra	Thymus c. 'Archer's Gold'
Hutchinsia alpina (Pritzelago alpina)	Thymus d. 'Doone Valley'
Hydrocotyle sibthorpioides	Thymus p. 'Albiflorus'
Isotoma fluviatilis	Thymus p. 'Bressingham'
Leptinella squalida	Thymus p. 'Coccineum'
Lotus c. 'Plenus'	Thymus p. 'Pseudolanuginosus' (Woolly)
Lysimachia n. 'Aurea'	Thymus s. 'Elfin'
Lysimachia nummularia	Thymus s. 'Pink Chintz'
Mazus r. 'Alba'	Trifolium r. 'Atropurpurea'
Mazus r. purple	Veronica p. 'Blue'
Mazus radicans	Veronica r. 'Sunshine'
Muehlenbeckia axillaris 'Nana'	Veronica 'Waterperry Blue'

we inherited the inventory we had in the spring of 2015. We hear rumors that some of the other nursery producers suffer from good taste and are going to cut back on their production of this plant. While we here at Twixwood may suffer from many things, good taste has never been one of them. Therefore we are busily sticking coloratus and guessing at what the market will bear this next year. We also plan on changing the business model for producing coloratus; we plan to hand trim it from time to time to get it to branch more and better and to have a more mature root stock situation. We will grow it in any size that it has a prayer of a chance of selling in, from a rooted cutting on up.

Years ago my excuse for growing aegopodium was three kids in college. Now all three kids have college degrees, two with multiple degrees, thank you for asking how that all went, and so a different excuse is now required. For now it will be having my golden years interrupted by needing to run the nursery. We have lots of stock plants of aegopodium, and my, is it an ugly plant.

One of the big changes in the nursery business that took place while I was enjoying my retirement is patented plants. We are behind the times pursuing patent rights, but busily catching up. We have the license from the University of Minnesota for Scyz. 'Blue Heaven' and enough stock in the field to produce 100,000 liners this winter. This is the Little Bluestem that does not fall over and lodge. We are signed up with Chicagoland Grows so can make whatever they have patented. Just let us know. We have the patent agreement for growing Boutelia "Blonde Ambition". It is a nice little plant. There will be enough to sell once we build up stock. We also have plenty of seed grown Bouteloua gracilis 'Bad River', an ecotype selection out of the University of North Dakota many years ago. This is the native prairie grass that is much shorter than 'Blonde Ambition'.

More recently we have signed up with Brent Horvath of Intrinsic Nursery up north of Chicago who has decided that breeding plants is easier than running a nursery. I wish I was that smart. I think that we are starting to grow all of his good plants. We welcome customer input about which of his plants you wish us to grow and then we ask for a

little patience as we build up the field stock.

The tour of Intrinsic was educational. I was most amused by his Golden Cup Plant, *Silphium perfoliatum*. "Foliage emerges chartreuse and brightens in summer". Brent says it gets six feet tall; good luck. It gives new meaning to the term 'accent plant'. Anyhow, I am reminded of the large planting that I have of the straight seed grown *Silphium perfoliatum* green cup plant and mostly, the fact that Wolfgang Oehme told me that I would get rich if I grew enough of it. Fortunately I have a lot of patience. Unfortunately I may still be gullible.

We have a plan for growing the newer patented varieties. Our office is three miles down the road from Stonehouse Nursery, a premier plug grower of new good introductions. We plan on developing a good working relationship with Patty and Jay so that we will have good product, meaning new perennials, in the future. The term "good working relationship" means, when translated into English "the payment was on time, the check was good, and the whining was at a minimum".

We are now in the holiday decoration business, if one can call it being in the business without having any idea of how it works. At the least we have several acres of red twig, yellow twig, and some in between color more coral or orangish, dogwood. I think the latter started out as 'Cardinal'. These are known as *Cornus sericea* or *stolonifera* depending on the reference. I was told that it would be easy and fun to grow these plants; the easy being the growing and the fun being the selling. We have a couple of acres of several year old plants and no one has yet told me what is considered to be quality in the product.

Therefore, we have been clear cutting the rows and sending the product into Chicago by the rack full, with a large sturdy employee packing the twigs into the rack before bungee cording them in place. We got some feedback last fall. The customer said that they sorted them and kept what they could use. We know that they were sorted but are still clueless about the difference between good quality and poor quality—short, tall, straight whips, or branched—they all look alike to me. The aesthetics of someone sticking a bunch of sticks into a pot to look at all winter is beyond my artistic sensi-

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bilities. Anyhow, we have some for sale. We will send a rack of samples any time someone desires.

And now for a few comments about last spring when we were short of many of the common landscaper plants: coloratus, lirioppe, Thorndale ivy, and Calamagrostis 'Karl Foerster'. I am busily changing the business model of Twixwood from what it had been in order to survive the recession to now reflect the good economy, booming times, and increased sales to landscapers. Some of our customers have reminded us many times about our shortages. I thank you for being concerned about the well-being of the nursery; however, I do not need to be reminded every time we lose a sale. It is painfully apparent to me when that happens.

I have a couple of responses. If the landscapers who are complaining now had only purchased a lot of plants from us during the recent recession, then we would have enough money to be all geared up for production during the good times. I should have been writing these newsletters a few years ago making that very suggestion.

Secondly, I am pretty sure that there are other very fine suppliers of nursery stock to the trade which means that our customers are buying from Twixwood either because of my charming personality or because we are lower priced. I have spent much time reflecting on this subject. The winter will be spent changing numbers in the catalog.

There are a few more things to sell, to wit, 7,000 gallons of Rhus aromatic 'Gro-Low' at \$5.75. These have been trimmed and are flushing nicely. 15,000 are potted up for next year. Hope the demand in Chicago holds for a few more years.

Next are 1,000 flats of quarts of Hedera helix 'Thorndale'. These have been trimmed a couple of times and are flushing nicely, all compact and multi-branched.

And finally, the obligatory, for a ground-cover nursery, 8,000 flats of Pachysandra 'Green Carpet' 2 1/2" SVD plastic pots.

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