

LEAFLET

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LATE FALL 2015

While we still have your attention we are going to start with this listing of plants: Allium ‘Summer Beauty’, Stachys ‘Hummelo’, Carex ‘Ice Dance’, Carex pensylvanica, Hemerocallis ‘Stella D’Oro’, Agastache ‘Blue Fortune’, and Schizachyrium scoparium ‘Blue Heaven’TM pp 17310. What has happened here at Twixwood is that Dianne and I have taken over a nursery that was effectively owned by another person for the last 8 years and effectively managed by that person for the last 12 years. I enjoyed the vacation and wish that it had lasted.

Needless to say it is needless to say that there were all kinds of surprises when I started to look at the nursery closely after my vacation and that is why I have listed above some of the more pleasant surprises. We have 60 or 70 acres—the estimate varies depending on which banker we are talking to—of field grown perennials, or, more precisely, field space that has scattered perennials in it. In those fields we have several hundred thousand splits of the above named six plants; maybe even several hundred thousand splits for each of those plants. With very little encouragement we will dig them all and this winter pot them up into any size plug or pot that the customer wants all the way from a 72 cell pack on up to a 2 gallon. The only proviso being that we will need to dig these out of the field before winter comes, at which time we will need a jack hammer to break them loose. I am too old for that.

We have found that digging clumps this time of the year, storing them in a cold frame well mulched in to hold the moisture and then dividing them to pot up in January and February is the best most efficient system to make a lot of little plants from a few big plants. Starting March 1—because of longer day length and more sun over here on this side of Lake Michigan—we will heat and get these plants growing thus gaining two months on the normal growing season.

In the last newsletter I attempted to explain why we were short of some plant material this last spring; plants for the which there was a great demand. We had received a few complaints with the sub-text being the rhetorical question as to why smart people such as ourselves would be out of such easy plants to produce. Here is another stab at the explaining. The more overt question was whether or not the customer is to expect such shortages in the future (the answer is no). The subtle question is whether or not we are smart enough to figure out how the nursery business works. Any answer to that would be self-serving.

The basic issue is that the business climate has changed so fast (and thankfully for the better) that our nursery was not able to catch up in 2015. Presently the landscape business here in the Midwest is booming. It had not been booming during the Recession and so the nursery business model had been based on a different customer base, a more retail one. At least we had a customer base and at least we survived the Recession. Secondly, I had no input into what was produced

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in the summer of 2014, therefore having only the plants to sell that I had inherited from the previous business model.

The thought had fleetingly passed through my mind to complain about landscapers. The thought was fleeting because now I want to exude only happy and cheerful around our customers. Before that resolution I was going to say that if the landscapers had been regularly purchasing plants all during the Recession then we would have been all geared up for this last spring; not a nice thing to say so I won't say it. As we all learned in Econ 101, there are elastic commodities and inelastic commodities with the inelastic example being salt; a person will not use any more of it if it were free. Or, conversely, any less if it were expensive. The example of an elastic commodity is chocolate. If it were free we would eat it day and night and all be roly-poly. If expensive we would have a nibble once a year at Christmas.

Plants for landscaping are inelastic commodities. The landscaper has no use for them if there is no ultimate market, so we cannot even give them away during slow times, so, I guess it would be counter-productive for me to complain about our customers not buying plants when they did not need them and could not use them. These days we want to act all happy and cheerful any time a customer calls and orders something. We will let bygones be bygones.

I have spent a great deal of my life analyzing the nursery business. The real problem we have here is psychological. Any time we are short of product the customer will think that this is the nature of our business and that is how it will always be in the future. Whereas, back here on the ranch, any time we are short of product I first of all cry a lot and then go out and greatly over-produce that plant for the next cycle, which is usually an annual cycle, and that is why we now have more coloratus than we can ever sell with much more in the works for sticking in the middle of winter.

We also have for Spring great amounts of *Calamagrostis* 'Karl Foerster', huge amounts:

20,000 1 gallons, 75,000 3 1/2" pots, 11,000 of some 2 quart square pot size we had a lot of lying around, and here is the long story about why we did not sell much of it last summer. I did not realize what was happening when it was happening but it is all clear now. There was a strange system in place here at Twixwood that was mostly computer driven whereby some people low on the totem pole made decisions about trimming plants with something that had a chain saw engine at one end and a sickle bar mower at the other making it far too easy to wreak huge amounts of damage in short amounts of time. Somewhere along the line someone must have told them, the lower echelon peoples, to keep all plants below one foot tall. Therefore any time the grasses in containers got tall enough to think about flowering they were whacked off. This disaster was compounded by our computer program that immediately and automatically put all newly trimmed plants into an unsaleable category for a month and a half following each trimming. The result of this comedy of errors was that we never had, at least according to the computer, anything to sell all summer and then, this fall when there was some possibility, a faint glimmer of hope that we would sell some plants, the grasses could not bloom—make a decorative plume—and our customers would not purchase them. The good news is that we will have really lots of grasses for sale next spring. We are putting lots of these into minimally heated houses so they will green up earlier in the spring and not be shipped out dormant like last year.

Therefore, the customer needs to rearrange their suppositions about us. As a rule, if we are short of something one year we will be long on it the next year. We are thinking day and night over here in rural SW Michigan.

I used to discuss ethics in these newsletters in years past. One of the ethical considerations was to ship out plants that had been forced under heat early in the spring when they were certain to be nipped by frost. I am still concerned about ethics, however, at this stage in my life when I am trying to make a little money so as to have some golden years,

I will not write about the subject offering opinions and advice but let the readers struggle, on their own and without my help, with their own consciences.

In conclusion, the reader should rest assured that whatever we were short of last year we will have too much of next year. We are smart enough to learn from history but not smart enough to control ourselves. Speaking of ethics, we have heard rumors that *Carex* 'Ice Dance' is of questionable hardiness in the Chicago area during really hard winters. We have no way of knowing anything about hardiness because we are on the other side of the lake in something close to a Zone 6 ½. Think of it this way, you can keep on planting 'Ice Dance' because we will have an unlimited supply for replacements every spring.

Speaking of grasses, we now have a very large stock bed of *Ammophila breviligulata*. This is dune grass and it is just terrible what with sharp edges so you cannot walk through it bare foot and not being very pretty besides. On second thought, it is all planted along Lake Michigan on property that is too expensive for us locals to own and so we never have to or get to walk along the beach anyhow so why am I saying that it is terrible. It sells for money which is my new goal in life. In olden times we did not grow this and because someone told me that it would not grow in organic soil but only in pure sand. We found out completely by accident which is how most of our research happens that it grows fine in the same peat/bark mix we stick *pachysandra* into. We offer this in the 2 ½" SVD 32 pots per tray size. I see that it is over-priced because it should be sold for about the same price as *pachysandra*, causing me to lose even more of my ethical considerations. Maybe we will adjust the pricing this winter.

We have lots of it in the field and can make lots more with only a little encouragement. The quality of the plant material is dependent on its length of time in the pot which is why a little advance notice will help us all.

Here are a few suggestions for analog plants to dune grass although I cannot say from personal

experience how well they grow in a sand dune along the lake situation because of the aforementioned problem of rich people from Chicago owning the entire lake front here in Michigan, not that I am bitter or anything. *Leymus arenarius* 'Blue Dune' is described in the Emerald Coast catalog as tolerating sand, sun, and drought. That sounds like a sand dune situation to me. It is also described as a 'strong spreader'. I will need to learn to use this euphemism more often in the future. Once, years ago, I described a plant—I think it was *aegopodium* or maybe *houlttuynia*—as being invasive and a fellow nursery personage who had a horticultural background instead of a modern European history background informed me that the word 'invasive' had legal implications in that it was against the law in some states to have these things so I should not use it. My conscience bothers me to be so restricted in my plant descriptions. Therefore, the readers are advised to interpret correctly the term 'strong spreader' correctly in the future.

I see that we do not list 'Blue Dune' in our recent catalog. I am assuming that is because of poor sales and not a sudden fit of conscience. We have some, about half an acre, in the field, so can ramp up production quickly. When referring to this plant the word 'some' has an whole new meaning—it means 'far too much'. Another plant that I think should or could replace dune grass is Little Bluestem 'The Blues' which is a great and near-perfect plant except when planted in rich good soil with some fertility and moisture; in which case it lodges a lot. The word 'lodges' means that in late summer it falls over. One year we had a late summer drought and out in our sandy growing field 'The Blues' looked good all of the time; a lesson to be learned by all.

Speaking of a non-lodging Little Bluestem we have a whole lot of *Schizachyrium scoparium* 'Blue Heaven PP #17,310. This University of Minnesota selection does not ever lodge. It comes with a single annual patent fee that allows for unlimited production, and so that is what we want to do. We have enough field stock to do a couple hundred

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thousand plugs if anyone is interested.

A few customers have expressed wonderment—maybe that should say have wondered—what the nursery is going to be like in the future, worrying about a reliable supplier. I am changing the business model somewhat. In the recent past and in order to survive the Recession we catered to the garden center trade by offering lots of early gaudy blooming plants such as *Armeria maritima* and *Aquilegia x. caerulea* and *Violas* and *Digitalis*. We are now too old to stay up all night loading trucks and too grumpy to handle complaints from garden centers about how too tall the flowers are. We will leave this business opportunity for younger people still full of the idealism of youth and the optimism of those who have not gone through the baptism of fire of a few Recessions.

The new business model is to instead grow large amounts of plants for the landscape trade. The one advantage is to not have to heat and force in late winter early spring. The other advantage is to spread the shipping season out over the entire snow-free time. Thus we are going to grow great amounts of *Agastache* 'Blue Fortune' and *Allium* 'Summer Beauty' and *Calamintha nepeta* and *Nepeta* 'Walker's Low', all plants that I could not even pronounce last year.

The more basic question from concerned customers has to do with how serious we are going to be about the nursery business. Let me just say that after 40 years of being around or in the business we have all of our life savings tied up in land, poly houses, and plants. And, as anyone who has ever been married and for however short a period of time knows, domestic harmony depends much upon financial stability. I am therefore highly motivated to make the nursery go; thank you for your concerns; they are nothing compared to my concerns.

We are busy preparing planting fields with organic matter and then fumigating. Field plantings of perennials are a three year cycle, giving some hint as to our plans for the future and our seriousness about the nursery business.

The alert student of price lists will note that in the last year or so we have offered a tray described as: "24 ct (3" Chicago Style), an 18" x 13" tray with 4-6 packs in it and we used to think that Chicago Style referred to hot dogs, pizza, and dead people voting during elections. Some years ago I coined the saying that a person does not have to be smart, they just need to find someone smart and copy them. On second thought, maybe a person has to be smart enough to find the other smart person. A theme running through these newsletters is that at this stage in my life I have lost most of my pride. A smarter person than myself designed this tray years ago and then went around to all landscape designers to get it specified for their landscape jobs and, best of all, called it a 3" pot.

We, here at Twixwood, started out copying Zelenka's using a 2 ¼" peat pot that fit 35 in an Alma Flat. When the Keyes peat pot people out of Louisiana went broke we switched to a 2 ½" Jiffy Pot out of Canada that fit 32 to a 10-20 flat; more information I am sure than anyone wanted to know. Then, when SVD came out with a plastic pot that fit 32 to a tray we added that. And, more recently, the Root Tutor™ which is a plug tray of 32 units, same price, same size tray, less dirt. The 24 count Chicago tray has containers glued together into 6 paks. There are four of them. Each little pot thing is 2 ½" wide and 2 7/8" long and 2 ½" deep. If you measure it like a TV it is 3 ¾" diagonal. The volume of one of the little pots is 228.33 ml. whereas the volume for one of our 2 ½" SVD pots is 280.95 ml. This is the best of all possible worlds; the smart nursery person got to say they have a 3" pot and only paid for 83% of the dirt that I pay for in a 2 ½" pot. If everyone else calls it a 3" then we will be right there in line saying 3" and loving it. We just want to sell groundcover.

Anyhow, we are busily expanding the plant line offered in this new-to-us 24 count tray to include most of the rest of the groundcovers. For next spring we will have *aegopodium*, *liriope spicata*, *waldsteinia*, and, of all things, *Lamiastrum galeobdelon* var. The latter plant was dropped from our

catalog some years ago. I forget if it was because of poor sales, too high maintenance costs in keeping it trimmed, or because of good taste on our part. My new theory of the nursery business is that if someone somewhere offers this plant to the market then so should we. On that general subject many years ago one of our customers out in Massachusetts gave me some starts for a dwarf Yellow Archangel. It is the near-ideal groundcover being small low hardy evergreen and having a good texture. The name predicates against it and so it never sold. The large cutting bed is still here if anyone is interested.

We can offer *Hypericum calycinum* and *Plumbago (ceratostigma plumbaginoides)* and *Waldsteinia ternata* if given enough lead time. Our cutting beds of those plants are unlimited. Speaking of *Waldsteinia*, we are going to offer the *fragarioides* version of this plant. A big customer had us custom grow some gallons for him (them) and so we have plenty of cutting stock. My theory is that if one person wanted it then there may be some more, similar minded, customers out there. This looks just exactly like the *waldsteinia* that we have been growing for years, the *ternata* version; however the *fragarioides* version is listed as a native plant, so it must be better. I see that North Creek out in Pennsylvania refers to this plant as *Geum fragarioides* with the common name of Appalachian barren strawberry. The fact that we are going to start offering this plant to the buying public should tell volumes about the new attitude and intent of Twixwood.

Speaking of natives; I used to avoid growing plants with names that I could not pronounce. Those days are gone. I also used to avoid growing plants that came from seed, thinking that was cheating. Those days are also gone. We have a good seeding capability here at the nursery, owning a greatly over-priced needle seeder and having a germination chamber and some good bottom flood benches purchased from Midwest Trading. The problem that we see has to do with lead time. By the time the bids are finalized for the big jobs there is not enough time to get the seeds started. We will take the risk and start these early at such time as we

A Lot of Stuff in Inventory.

Hemerocallis 'Happy Returns'	#1	26,672
Hemerocallis 'Stella de Oro'	#1	25,950
Vinca m. 'Bowles'	#1	25,176
Rhus a. 'Gro-Low'	#1	20,173
Pennisetum a. 'Hameln'	#1	18,289
Hedera h. 'Thorndale'	#1	15,868
Calamagrostis a. 'Karl Foerster'	#1	14,323
Pachysandra t. 'Green Carpet'	32ct	13,102
Hemerocallis 'Pardon Me'	#1	11,341
Sporobolus heterolepis	#1	10,422
Schizachyrium scoparium	#1	9,802
Carex h. 'Evergold'	#1	8,633
Rhus a. 'Gro-Low'	#3	8,110
Pachysandra t. 'Green Carpet'	10ct	7,989
Sesleria autumnalis	#1	7,467
Hemerocallis 'Purple De Oro'	#1	7,260
Hemerocallis 'Little Wine Cup'	#1	6,504
Hemerocallis 'Strutters Ball'	#1	6,099
Hemerocallis 'Chicago Apache'	#1	5,928
Echinacea p. 'Magnus'	#1	5,891
Hosta 'June'	#1	5,810
Vinca m. 'Dart's Blue'	#1	5,776
Hemerocallis 'Hyperion'	#1	5,715
Carex pensylvanica	#1	5,700
Hosta 'Guacamole'	#1	5,449
Euonymus f. 'Coloratus'	#1	5,176
Panicum v. 'Shenandoah'	#1	5,118
Buxus m.k. 'Green Velvet'	#1	5,045
Hemerocallis 'Little Grapette'	#1	5,004
Pachysandra t. 'Green Carpet'	24ct	4,712
Euonymus f. 'Coloratus'	10ct	4,670
Schizachyrium s. 'The Blues'	#1	4,658
Hemerocallis 'Ice Carnival'	#1	4,587
Parthenocissus q. 'Engelmannii'	#1	4,580
Liriope spicata	#1	4,414
Buxus m.k. 'Green Mountain'	#1	4,276
Pachysandra t. 'Green Carpet'	#1	4,198
Hemerocallis 'Mardi Gras Parade'	#1	3,989
Liriope m. 'Big Blue'	#1	3,926
Euonymus f. 'Coloratus'	32ct	3,825
Lavandula a. 'Hidcote'	#1	3,822
Liriope m. 'Silvery Sunproof'	#1	3,792
Sporobolus heterolepis	32ct	3,761
Panicum v. 'Rotstrahlbusch'	#1	3,728
Euonymus f. 'Coloratus'	24ct	3,589
Heuchera m. 'Palace Purple'	#1	3,548
Panicum v. 'Heavy Metal'	#1	3,539
Calamagrostis a. 'Karl Foerster'	#3	3,537

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get the information just in case we get the job.

Another surprise from walking the fields is a large supply of Miscanthus 'Dixieland', a very strange name. Maybe miscanthuses are like hemerocallises, there are so many that they are running out of names. This is a dwarf variegated Maiden Grass, which means it is shorter and more compact than the regular one. It gets 4' to 5' tall. It looks good out in the field. We would produce it if we could sell it.

As the reader can see from grinding through this letter, we are in the selling phase of our lives. Earlier in my nursery career I was dedicated to raising the level of consciousness of the nursery public; those days are long gone along with my hair and spryness of step. There may even be a relationship there if one thinks about it. The urgency is on because they say we have only a few years here between recessions to earn a little.

The fervent hope is that these newsletters are informative. The last one mentioning 40,000 too many one gallon pots of vinca minor 'Bowles'

was ineffective. Of the several possible lessons one could learn from that experience, the one I brought away is that I was being too subtle. Do not expect that in the future. Speaking of gallons of groundcovers, that is one of the stranger changes in the market. Our job is not to comment on what makes sense but to grow for the market. Besides vinca we are growing tens of thousands of gallons of Green Carpet Pachysandra. The only problem with pachysandra is that it does not handle transplanting well; the roots grow slowly toward the bottom of the pot. The rule for determining maturity and salability of a plant is that the roots fill up the container such as to hold the dirt together when the plant is pulled from the container. This is a problem with pachysandra; the top of the pot is solidly filled in with many stems and stolons or whatever the white things are called that make new shoots. We cannot convince the plant to grow roots down to the bottom of the pot. Here is hoping that everyone is understanding.

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