

LEAFLET

Twixwood Nursery · Fax (800)854-1754 · Phone (269)471-7408
Website: www.twixwood.com · P. O. Box 247, Berrien Springs, MI 49103

WINTER 2018 1

If it makes anyone feel better there were, this spring and summer and fall, three attempts at writing a Twixwood newsletter and it is true that time appears to pass faster when one gets older. Besides such diversions as planting six acres of perennials and shrubs in the field and attending weekly manager's meetings there were the natural procrastinations of life. My formal excuse is that the sales staff were not getting me up-to-date plant availability lists to put into the Leaflet so that we could advertise and sell everything. The sales staff's excuse is that they were too busy selling everything for me and so they could not do the computer search. Anyhow, much as I wanted to print what I had written back in April of 2017, here is a whole new one.

Here is the latest news. We are still in business. As we all recall, four years ago in the spring of 2014 Mike notified us that he was exercising one of the options in the buy-sell agreement we had with him, and that was to back out of the agreement. Per the agreement he gave us the one year notice and continued to manage the nursery for that year per the employment contract and afterwards we paid Mike for a percentage of his equity interest in the nursery per the formula in the agreement. There were smiles all around once it appeared that the check we were handing him was real. The miracle is that this transition went reasonably smoothly and reasonably affably. Dianne, who is both the nursery general manager and my wife, reminds me quite often that she was responsible for the successful negotiations. She must think that the memory is fading with age.

Some changing of things took place after the transfer and these are just about completed. As one might imagine, many of the personnel were comfortable with one type of managerial style and not with mine, and so we have had quite the changeover. We are busily recruiting and training. The gentle reader of this missive may let their friends know—particularly those working for other nurseries—that a few positions are still open. And then the customer base was changed. Once the recession was over and the economy was improving we had the option of picking and choosing and so I immediately dropped the one big box store we were servicing and returned to our roots of growing for the landscape trade here in the Midwest. We have cleared the decks of the types of early blooming perennials that sell to the garden center trade—aquilegias, dianthus, campanulas, armerias, and similar lower-growing early-blooming gaudy-flowering plants. We are busily researching now the latest fads in landscape design.

In preparation for writing this newsletter I asked the sales personages for their messages. In this modern day and age we cannot refer to these sales peoples by any reference to gender or age, so they are personages even though you would probably be more comfortable if you knew their sex and age because they all told me to tell the customers that they loved them all. Also, the sales peoples wanted everyone to know that they had nothing at all to do whatsoever with the new pricing structure that will become apparent upon opening the new 2018 price list.

The upper echelon management team here would now like to make a comment or two about the pricing structure. We understand that the customers have many possible suppliers of good plant material and so we appreciate the loyalty and business shown to us over the years. We understand that it is our responsibility to produce a good quality plant at a good price. In order to do that we need to set up an efficient production facility which is why we are carefully balancing our production numbers with our facility knowing that we cannot expand the physical plant until we make some money. In the meantime we cannot function properly if we are all jammed up. If that did not make a lot of sense it is because I am being deliberately obtuse. We are hoping that this year will be a great success for everybody.

Speaking of sales personages, these are all highly skilled computer operators as our inventory is on the computer and needs to be accessed when taking orders and making promises. We go out every so often to our fields and display gardens to look at real plants in real life. When at all possible I take some of them to botanical gardens and we hike until we drop. What the sales peoples are not are landscape architects. They have never worked for a landscaper or taken a course in landscape design. Sometimes we get a customer who wants our people to assist in designing for a specific job that is carefully described to them. In one memorable instance from last summer, one of our sales people claimed that they were not qualified to offer an opinion and the customer said that because they worked at a nursery they should help with the design. There is a reason why the sales peoples do not let me get anywhere near a phone where I could talk to a customer. The reason is because I would point out pointedly that we were not the people who put our name in the Yellow Pages under landscapers thus implying that we were professionals and qualified to do the job, that we spent our winters attending conferences and educational seminars, reading books, studying magazines, talking to other landscapers. We make no such claims. Our job is to get the correct names on the plants. I have mentioned many times that we do not suffer from good taste. That is on the conscience of the landscape installer. And I always use as an example the fact that we grow all kinds of *Rhus aromatic* 'Gro-Low' which we want to sell so

bad that we lowered the price on it this year. We have even started to trim it so that it is nice and rounded and branched which makes it look kind of attractive until it gets planted out in the middle of some large parking lot where it can grow wildly like it is meant to do. The only landscape advice you are going to receive from our office is to purchase twice as many plants so that you can plant them thicker and so we can make twice as much money.

Another thing about our sales personages; they act happy and cheerful when talking to the customer. This is a talent. We, the upper echelon management team, appreciate this ability because we do not have it. Our sales personages accurately describe the plants, often sending photos right away, and they are sometimes the bearer of bad news. Maybe the customers understand that any time a supplier has lots of good looking plants and enough room on the truck for prompt delivery, it is a miracle.

And now back to talking about plants; I have developed an attraction, bordering on a fetish, for the whole *Carex* family. We are now able to over-produce the following: *C. pensylvanica*, *C. bromoides*, *C. flacca* 'Blue Zinger', *C. elata* 'Aurea' Bowles Golden, *C. morrowii* 'Ice Dance', *C. caryophyllea* 'Beatlemania', and *C. oshimensis* 'Evergold'. We have too much of these out in our fields. It is essential to get some advance notice because these are cool weather growers and we would have to dig and divide them during March for this to be a great success. We have practiced doing it wrong enough times that we are starting to see a trend.

This winter we have in the production schedule several hundred thousand *Carex pensylvanica*, a lot of 'Ice Dance', and way too much 'Blue Zinger'. We are assuming and hoping that this 'Blue Zinger' selection can be used any time the jobs call for *Carex flacca*. We will accept advice from a horticulturist ethicist on this subject. Of course the jobs are calling for a whole raft of new and strangely pronounced *Carex*s. We have most of these in our production where they are being desperately babied and divided this winter to be planted out in the field for future over-production. Over-producing plants that we are excited about got us where we are today; so I see no reason to change the behavioral pattern. Our customers could assist by dropping the occasional hint as to what new *Carex* varieties will be coming up on the big jobs so we can get them into the production cycle.

Clematis

Our reputation is somewhat shaky when it comes to good looking spring delivered clematis because these were mostly going to the aforementioned mass merchants. Those days are over and so here are some 15,000 good bud and bloom clematis for spring sales to normal people. The one gallon pots are all \$8.50, trellised, trimmed, tied, and labelled. The #2 pots are \$18.00.

#1 Pots	\$8.50
<hr/> 549 'Ai-Nor' 1992 'Andromeda' 486 'Arabella' 406 'Ashva' 2458 'Baltyk' 93 'Beauty of Worcester' 3028 'Blue Angel' ('Blekityn Aniol') 1013 'Blue Explosion' PBR 191 'Broughton Star' montana ('Broughton Beauty') 29 'Cardinal Wyszynski' 99 'Cloudburst' PBR 2314 'Dr. Ruppel' 153 'Duchess of Edinburgh' 254 'Etoile Rose' 2590 'Etoile Violette' 88 'Fay' 80 'General Sikorski' 16 'Girenas' 1816 'Guernsey Cream' 126 'Gypsy Queen' 446 'H.F. Young' 998 'Hagley Hybrid' 505 'Haku Ookan' 1008 'Halina Noll' 1391 'Hania' 1005 'Isago' 205 'Ivan Olsson' 1913 'Jackmanii' 1774 'John Paul II' 504 'Julka' 999 'Kaiser' (PBR Blushing Bridesmaid) 114 'Kathleen Dunford' 70 'Lincoln Star' 967 Clematis 'Little Mermaid' 91 Clematis 'Mazury' (Crater Lake) 137 Clematis montana 'Freda' 120 Clematis montana 'Tetrarose' 418 Clematis montana var. wilsonii 2100 Clematis 'Mrs. Cholmondeley' 122 Clematis 'Multi Blue' 4066 Clematis 'Nelly Moser'	81 Clematis 'Niobe' 499 Clematis Patricia Ann Fretwell ('Pafar') 114 Clematis 'Piilu' 584 Clematis 'Pink Champagne' 648 Clematis 'Polish Spirit' 1987 Clematis 'Praecox' (x jouiniana 'P.) 501 Clematis 'Proteus' 511 Clematis 'Rooran' 1483 Clematis 'Rosamunde' 1947 Clematis 'Rouge Cardinal' 513 Clematis 'Serafina' 103 Clematis 'Skyfall' PBR 975 Clematis 'Snow Queen' 2094 Clematis 'Solidarnosc' 2034 Clematis 'Sunset' 916 Clematis 'Tae' 1018 Clematis terniflora (maximowicziana, Sweet Autumn) 1499 Clematis 'The President' 3689 Clematis 'The Vagabond' 491 Clematis 'Toki' 724 Clematis 'Veronica's Choice' 483 Clematis 'Ville De Lyon' 477 Clematis 'Violet Elizabeth' 1803 Clematis 'Vyvyan Pennell' 4478 Clematis 'Warszawska Nike' 256 Clematis 'Westerplatte' 2388 Clematis 'Wildfire'
	#2 Pot 18.00
	<hr/> 13 'Broughton Star' montana ('Broughton Beauty') 26 'Cardinal Wyszynski' 143 'Dr. Ruppel' 30 Clematis montana 'Freda' 28 Clematis montana 'Tetrarose' 27 Clematis montana var. wilsonii 112 Clematis 'Pink Champagne' 113 Clematis 'Praecox' (x jouiniana 'P.) 32 Clematis 'Sunset' 30 Clematis 'The Vagabond' 230 Clematis 'Veronica's Choice' 22 Clematis 'Will Barron'

What we are producing this winter will be heated in March and should be shippable by the end of May. They will, of course, not be vernalized, but they should be well-rooted in the pot. The cell sizes for new production will be a 72, a deep 50, or a 2 ½" plastic pot (SVD). Most of the *c. pensylvanica* and *c. 'Ice Dance'* that we sell are in really thick one gallon pots. We are not too proud to custom grow in a 3 ½" or a quart pot. There are many varieties of quart pots out there. Let us know which one.

Now that we are on the subject of over-production, we will be able to do this with the seedling grass *Sporobolus heterolepis*, Prairie Dropseed or Northern Dropseed. Many years ago Galen Gates showed me this plant at the Chicago Botanical Gardens and told me it would be the next hot thing. I should have believed him. Anyhow, we have either fifty or a hundred pounds of seed that we collected from our seed orchard last fall and we have a production scheduling person who is not a big risk taker. Therefore I am going to have to seed this all out by myself this spring because the workers have to stick to the schedule. Let us know what size you would like. We start with a 98 cell pak and go on up with the occasional transplant along the way.

There is a division-produced *sporobolus* named and selected by Roy Diblik called *S. 'Tara'*. We think a girl had something to do with the plant name but are too polite to ask. Its habit is dramatically different and more dramatic looking than the seed variety. It is also tricky and slower to produce; therefore we will be producing only 200,000 or 250,000 plugs this winter.

The year 2017 was pretty good. Our shipping department was able to keep up with demand. I think that our regular and prompt delivery is one of the main attractions of Twixwood. I also think that being a regional grower is going to be a big advantage in the future because of the many and onerous trucking restrictions that are just now going into effect. We plan on designing our trucking fleet such that we can provide even more regular and prompt delivery here in the Midwest. We already cover Milwaukee, Indianapolis, and Detroit and all points in between such as Chicago and Fort Wayne. With our new trucks we will give consistent service to southern Illinois, northern Michigan, southern Wisconsin and all of Iowa.

In an continuous struggle to keep up with the

latest ruminations of landscape theorists, and these are strange people indeed, I was happily leafing through Noel Kingsbury's fine book "Gardening with Perennials" that has something to do with the Lurie Garden in the middle of Chicao and Piet Oudolf and someone named Jennifer. The blurb under *Calamintha nepeta* subsp. *nepeta*, calamint has this to say on page 102: "Jennifer is enthusiastic about what she says is "an amazing perennial—I love that the flowers are white when they begin blooming in the summer and then become a pale-violet color when the temperatures drop in early fall. I also love this plant because it feeds our bees for up to four months!"

I agree with Jennifer that this is a fine plant. I like it mostly because of how fast it will grow and fill out from a cutting. I am even going to be big about it and overlook Jennifer's use of the exclamation point, something that I am way too proud to do. And this reminds me about my latest scheme to make money. I am pleased that the readers of this Leaflet can be a part of this scheme. It appears that I like planting lots of stock plants out in the field.

Last summer a newer customer in another State put in an order for thousands of plugs of *Nepeta 'Walkers Low'* for a big landscape job going in the middle of summer thus giving us plenty of time to stick and root and then trim a lot. It was a great success, we got paid for them. The pay was more than for a similar tray of groundcovers and the time of production was less. The light is slowly dawning and *Calamintha* reminds me that we can over-produce liners in a hurry. We are not set up for being a complete perennial plug liner supplier like North Creek and Stonehouse and Creek Hill with many varieties and getting them vernalized before shipping which is the ethical thing to do. We are set up to do lots of plugs of any size of most perennials, as long as we have rows of cutting stock in the field and as long as it is early enough in the year for optimum rooting. After all, we are groundcover growers and a few million cuttings here and a few million there is what we usually do. I have had recently several discussions with the production scheduling people here at the nursery. These are the ones who look at sales history and make careful projections and do not take risks. Let us just say that threats and promises were made and so from here on we will want some kind of serious show of interest or an order before taking cuttings. There are some plants that grow very well from side

shoots pulled in the early spring such as *Rudbeckia* 'Summerblaze' and *Rudbeckia* 'Viette's Little Suzy' as well as *Echinacea* 'Pixie Meadowbrite' TM PP 18, 546, and *Leucanthemum* 'Becky' and *Chelone* 'Hot Lips'. Just remember, we cannot do an order for three flats, but only for hundreds or thousands and they will not be vernalized.

Speaking of other great success last summer; we figured out how to trim *pachysandra*. Now, the customers will expect low, branched, healthy looking *pachysandra* for the rest of their lives. The trick on our end is to put several houses of *pachysandra* under minimum heat about the middle of February so that the cuttings are mature enough to root by the end of May. This gives us incentive to trim them, plus we can have a good saleable *pachysandra* for Fall sales of that same season. And so we did this and everyone was happy and now we will have to do it again. I still wonder why the landscapers insist on a short instead of a normal sized *pachysandra*. It is a little late in the day for philosophical ruminations and so we are going to do what makes money from here on out.

Speaking of *pachysandra*, my favorite package is the 4 1/2" quart. It looks good and is easy to sort. The market these days is, very strangely, nuts about one gallon pots of *pachysandra*. Instead of commenting about rationality and irrationality we made 30,000 of these and they are as thick as can be physically possible. We plan on making more all of the time. They are left in the pot for a year or so to develop good rooting as well as lots of new stolons, those little white things that grow horizontally and then make a new stem with leaves and everything.

Speaking of lots of gallons of groundcover, we like to custom grow for large orders which is why a year ago we made 10,000 gallons of Thorndale Ivy for a good customer with a proposed big order. And then the job ran into money problems and each week the order was trimmed until it got down to one thousand and I do not know if it shipped at all. The reader may conclude that we have plenty of well-rooted ivy gallons that have been trimmed many times such that there are lots of new buds. These will really pop when planted in the ground. Hope there is a market for them this year.

Thinking about things we are really good at doing reminds me of *Liriope spicata*, creeping lily turf. I used to be bored with this plant until I figured

out that we made money with it and now I am effervescently enthusiastic, bubbly even. This grows really fast in the heat of the summer and because we have an acre of so of thick rows out in the field we can dig it all summer long, split it with our custom designed and fabricated hydraulic splitter, and pot it up all summer long. We make smaller pots of these with the 2 1/2" SVD being the usual with the ability of custom growing in the Root Tutor™ that has 32 plugs per tray. Most of what we sell is in gallons. We do not want to miss a sale.

Every so often the memory fades and I suffer from a fit of optimism and so this Fall I accompanied our sales staff while they made courtesy calls on the customers delivering bushels of apples and little cards. Sometimes the customers misinterpreted my intent and used the opportunity to inform me how we could do things better at our nursery. I have no idea how they came up with this idea because I was not looking happy and cheerful, on purpose. I found out that over the years we have gotten a really poor reputation for growing quality grasses. This is a puzzlement to me as we always have a few acres too many of them sitting around out there. It appears that we used to ship out a small plant that was barely rooted to the bottom of the pot whereas the competition only shipped out grasses that completely filled the top of the pots, whether they were one, two, or three gallon pots. Therefore, we are, in the future, only going to ship out good full plants. We plan on having long heart-felt talks with the inventory people such that they only put the full pots into the saleable category. Hopefully we can change our reputation.

Speaking of grasses, we consistently put out a good quality, full container, with nice tops of *Sesleria autumnalis* and *Sesleria* 'Greenlee's Hybrid'. The latter is some shorter. In spite of the fact that it was hybridized in California it appears to be hardy in the Midwest. My research shows that the *autumnalis* variety came from Southern Russia and the other cross, *caerulea*, came from Scandinavia. We have a lot in the field and so will be able to over-produce this fine grass given a little lead time. As with all grasses, these divide best in the middle of winter.

Speaking of unattractive grasses, some years ago I was told that wet gardens or swampy muddy places were going to be the next hot thing and so I stocked up on *Glyceria maxima* 'variegata' and *Scir-*

pus fluviatalis and promptly got disappointed. If I could remember who told me about rain gardens I would share that name with you. It is, however, lost in the mists of time. We can custom grow these any time there is a demand. Just remember that I used the word 'unattractive'.

Speaking of grasses, we have several of the Brent Horvath/Intrinsic Perennial Gardens selections. His Festuca 'Cool as Ice' PPAF is spectacular and I would not lie about festucas. We have too many 3 1/2" liners and need to pot them up into gallons. The new operational management team thinks there should be some customer interest before making thousands of any new plant. Brent's Pennisetum 'Piglet' PP#19,074 is very nice looking. And his Pennisetum 'Ginger Love' PPAF is absolutely spectacular. Recently I was re-reading the catalog and hidden in the fine print underneath the description talking about 'thick red inflorescence' and all and I then found this sentence: "Plants should be deadheaded once seeds start to drop." If I was smart I would figure out that there was a story there someplace. (The operational management team does not think they are being paid enough to take risks, thus they are leaving this aspect

of the nursery business to the owners. We will make some Piglets PP as soon as there is an order).

For some reason we have 25,000 Green Gem, 30,000 Green Mountain, 80,000 Green Velvet, boxwood liners in 2 1/2" SVD plastic pots. These were stuck in December 2015, potted up into the pots in August 2016 and overwintered under poly. If we do not sell them we will have to plant them into the field and this reminds me of what my father said about the nursery business and why he was growing plastic trays of groundcovers. He said that a shrub in the field got bigger and heavier every year and he got older every year. With groundcover at least the product stayed the same size. We had these tested and boxwood blight is absent as it should be because we acquired our stock plants over 25 years ago pretty much straight from Sheridan Nurseries which is long before someone invented boxwood blight. I am no longer propagating boxwoods after the flurry of 100,000 Green Velvets we did a year ago. I took a look at the growth rate of boxwoods and then I took a look at the actuarial tables and started to draw conclusions.

Tom Kruegel

P. O. Box 247
Berrien Springs, MI
49103

