

LEALETTE

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SPRING 2018 1

I may have been too subtle in the past and so I will remind people that the purpose of this publication is to make money for the nursery. Sometimes we have to admit to the occasional error in judgment, something difficult to do when you are as sensitive as I am I must say, but for money we will do about anything. A few years ago, upon taking over the nursery, I went out into the fields and dug up about everything and divided it on the theory that someone smart must have planted it because it was important. It is now clear that whatever was in the field was there because there was no market for it and someone else (smart) had not, heretofore, dug it up to divide. Anyhow, we have lots of *Geranium x magnificum*, common names Purple Cranesbill or Showy Cranesbill, with blooms that are “rich violet-blue, heavily veined, saucer shaped flowers”. This is a hybrid of *G. Ibericum* and *G. Platypetalum* and because it is a hybrid it is now out of fad. It is also a zone 5 plant.

The fad now is for native plants which is why we are busily purchasing seeds of *Geranium maculatum*, common name “wild geranium” and desperately trying to get them to germinate because everyone wants this plant and not the plant we have the most of. As soon as we get an over-supply of *G. maculatum* we will begin touting its virtues in spite of the fact that it has a pale bloom and so-so foliage compared to the hybrid. It is a zone 3 plant growing all the way up into Quebec.

We have been spending the winter attending every symposium, seminar, talk, or whatever in order to get up to speed on the future. Our customers have not told us what to grow for the next year, and so we are doing the research ourselves. It is all about pollinators and butterflies and natives and not about nativars or hybrids. I was prescient about butterflies which is why we have 6,500 gallons of *Asclepias tuberosa* an “iconic bright orange beauty”, common name butterfly weed. As soon as I figure out what ‘iconic’ means I will use it all over the place and hope that the iconoclasts do not show up. And we have 900 flats of the ten count quarts (9,000 plants). I thought these were going to walk out the door when I put them into production. They are desperately in need of a nudge to help get them going.

And just because I get confused sometimes we have 750 gallons of *Asclepias incarnata* which is Swamp Milkweed, and 600 gallons of *Asclepias incarnata* ‘Cinderella’, and 600 gallons of ‘Soulmate’. We are telling people that the named varieties are better without having any idea at all what we are talking about. It has pink to mauve flowers, is taller than the iconic orange thing, and is best known for its seed pods which are called follicles by people who know what they are doing and that split open in the fall with silky stuff attached to the seeds so they get blown far away in the wind. The foliage of the *incarnata* one is a little coarse and the plant is tall so it is not a beauty, however, with the emphasis being on butterflies these days everyone needs a bunch of these planted out in the front yard to show one’s good intentions and the unattractiveness of the plant lends lots of street cred to the gardener.

Besides going to every talk that Roy Diblik and Jeff Epping gave this winter desperately trying to figure out what the next hot carex is going to be so we can, finally, be ahead of the game and not way behind it, we are going to every job fair and junior college recruiting event we can find. I wrote up a job description. It got a little wordy after I got to thinking about what the business was like—we need everyone from computer wranglers to data entry people to plumbers and electricians, not to mention telephone sales people and truck drivers. We are putting a new team together after the recent change-over in management. And so, in the course of this, I said that we used to look for workers with specific skills but after a few recent experiences we are now looking for people who are easy to get along with. It would be a convenience to have someone with intelligence and an agricultural background so they understand that there are four seasons in the year, but if they are pleasant to work with we can teach them stuff. I hope that was not asking too much of the potential recruit.

In our on-going pursuit of good plants to grow that will sell themselves, we have cultivated Brent Horvath at Intrinsic Gardens, which is somewhere north of Chicago without getting into Wisconsin. Brent is a breeder and hybridizer. We have his Veronica ‘Pure Silver’ which has a faded blue bloom but is a very nice groundcover with ornamental interest long after it is done blooming. We have lots of his dark Andropogons—‘Indian Warrior’ PP#24,999 and ‘Red October’ PP# 26,283. We really like his blue fescue ‘Cool As Ice’ PPAF. You will notice that I am carefully not mentioning the three varieties of Brent’s plants that are in intense demand and that we are desperately building up stock in.

We want Brent to keep working but mostly we want him to get out there and do some marketing for us. For example, his Penstemon ‘Pocahontas’ PP# 24,804 is really good, much better than ‘Husker Red’, not as distinctive as ‘Dark Towers’ PP# 20,013, but almost as good, and with a much lower royalty fee. I really like the flowers. One of our customers from last summer will be puzzled by my joyful description of the flowers because I noticed while doing a walking inspection of our sorting, tagging, and shipping area up on the dock that the girls

were carefully snipping off the tips of the scapes. It appears that the flower buds were just starting to form and the scape was contorted because it was still young and thin and so it appeared diseased or deformed to them and they were told to make everything pretty before it went out the door, so they were doing their job. I have felt bad about shipping that out all year, but not quite enough to call the customer, bring the error to their attention, and apologize.

Speaking of shipping and apologizing, we really do try to get our inventory people to accurately list which plants are mature and saleable and which are still in the growing stage. Actually, all of our plants are in the growing stage, it is just that some of them are well rooted such that the roots hold the dirt ball that is in the pot together so the plant can be planted without root disturbance along with concomitant shock to the system that slows down growth. And so I am reminded of a fresh disaster that happened early last summer when we shipped out a bunch of *Sporobolus* ‘Tara’ without near enough root development. We really do have a system in place, starting with inventory people who walk the farm and mark the plants saleable once they have grown enough. Then we have a pickup supervisor who looks at any marginal plant to decide if it should be shipped. Then we have the girls who prepare the plants for shipping; cleaning up, trimming, tagging and labelling. We have the office next to the loading dock so that the sales people can walk out and take a glance at what is shipping too whom. And finally, our shipping manager is tired of picking up plants and bringing them back because they were not described accurately to the customer, and so he does a final walk-by and look. It must have been a busy day when the ‘Tara’ went out.

We have figured out that about 95% of our business is repeat business to a stable list of long-term customers. This really limits our ability to pull a fast one on our customers. We are done worrying about how a smart person like me got into a business with these practical constrictions on our ethics and we are now concentrating on giving good customer service; accepting the reality of it all. Therefore, if you, the customer, get anything that you cannot use, send it back and keep on ordering from us. Try to keep it watered in the interim, please, as sometimes it takes us a while to schedule a pick-up.

Here is our hosta availability. You will notice large numbers of strange varieties, about half of the names listed, in fact, and these we are going to drop as soon as we sell out. As we all know by now, there is a reason for everything. Sometimes the reason is difficult to explain, and sometimes it is not even a good reason, but there is always a reason. When I took over the management of the nursery some three years ago I noticed a tissue culture hosta supplier's list of plugs on sale. I did not recognize most of the names and so immediately assumed that these were the new, improved, hot, and in high demand hostas,

little suspecting that these were not the premium varieties and so were not in hot demand in the plug size because they were not in hot demand in the gallon size. When we sell out, these will be dropped and we will continue growing the ones that are easy to sell. We are field growing the ones that multiply rapidly, such as 'Francee'. Thus we will have plenty of them and many in a liner size if there is a demand for them. The sieboldiana types will probably be grown from tissue culture, although the late Bill Brinka taught me how to profitably propagate the sieboldiana types. We can almost compete with tissue culture there.

1 Gallon Hostas

Quantity	Description	Price	Quantity	Description	Price
200	Hosta 'Abiqua Drinking Gourd'	5.50	4,900	Hosta 'Guacamole'	6.50
100	Hosta 'Abiqua Moonbeam'	5.50	800	Hosta 'Hadspen Blue'	6.50
600	Hosta 'Albo Marginata'	5.75	5,500	Hosta 'Halcyon'	5.75
600	Hosta 'Allan P. McConnell'	5.50	400	Hosta 'Janet'	5.50
160	Hosta 'Ann Kulpa'	5.50	1,500	Hosta 'June'	6.50
2,000	Hosta 'Blue Angel'	5.75	1,400	Hosta 'Krossa Regal'	5.75
400	Hosta 'Blue Cadet'	5.75	1,700	Hosta 'Liberty' PP	8.50
900	Hosta 'Blue Mouse Ears'	8.50	900	Hosta 'Love Pat'	5.50
500	Hosta 'Christmas Tree'	5.50	1,200	Hosta 'Minuteman'	5.75
160	Hosta clausa	5.50	200	Hosta 'Night Before Christmas'	5.50
120	Hosta 'Curly Fries'	7.50	5,500	Hosta 'Patriot'	5.75
400	Hosta 'Diamond Tiara'	5.50	700	Hosta 'Praying Hands'	5.50
160	Hosta 'Dream Queen'	5.50	300	Hosta 'Queen Josephine'	5.50
1,000	Hosta 'Earth Angel'	5.50	350	Hosta 'Regal Splendor'	5.50
300	Hosta 'Fire And Ice'	7.50	4,600	Hosta 'Royal Standard'	5.75
100	Hosta 'Fire Island'	7.50	400	Hosta 'Sagae'	5.50
600	Hosta 'First Frost'	7.50	160	Hosta 'September Sun'	5.50
1,000	Hosta fortunei 'Aureomarginata'	5.75	4,400	Hosta sieboldiana 'Elegans'	5.75
100	Hosta 'Fragrant Blue'	5.50	6,000	Hosta sieboldiana 'Frances Williams'	5.75
250	Hosta 'Fragrant Bouquet'	5.50	300	Hosta 'So Sweet'	5.50
1,700	Hosta 'Francee'	5.75	5,000	Hosta 'Sum and Substance'	7.50
1,100	Hosta 'Gold Standard'	7.50	300	Hosta 'Summer Fragrance'	5.50
100	Hosta 'Golden Tiara'	5.75	500	Hosta tokudama 'Flavocircinalis'	5.50
300	Hosta 'Grand Tiara'	5.50	100	Hosta 'Twilight' PP	5.50
150	Hosta 'Great Arrival'	5.50	100	Hosta 'Victory'	5.50
700	Hosta 'Great Expectations'	6.50	1,300	Hosta 'Whirlwind'	5.50
			900	Hosta 'Wide Brim'	5.50

Every so often we will get a customer who sends stuff back that we think is of good quality. If this happens too much or too often for us to live with then we suggest that we are not the people for them to do business with and give them a list of our colleagues in the groundcover and perennial business for their convenience. If any of our colleagues do not want us to foist off upon them our more difficult customers, then a small bribe, paid directly to me, will keep them off the list.

We have been in the Green Roof business since 2008. It is called Eco-Roofs and I did not name it. We own a mold up in Muskegon so we have made our own thick and strong tray that is one foot by two feet 3.3" high and with hand holds and drainage and all. We have several thousand on hand full of sedum that was planted (the sedum was planted and the trays were planted) up a couple of years ago in a fit of optimism. They are ready to go. What is interesting these days is that there are some custom grows with all kinds of plants, not only sedums, in them. These usually are the smaller native grasses such as the Boutelouas—Gramma Grass to normal people—and Little Bluestem and Buffalo grass, also some alliums, a few flowers and on a really good day we will get a request for Prickly Pear, optunia. We have a nice row of that in the field awaiting the next big job. The crew keeps asking me when we are going to plow it under and I say never because I do not want to puncture my tractor tires. It was someone else's idea to plant this in the first place. For one job we planted up Pachysandra 'Green Carpet' into roof trays. If you are puzzled as to where we can find a roof top in the shade, join the crowd. We got paid and everyone was happy. We always have a few hundreds of over-grown pachysandra trays left over at the end of the year and we keep these around, way out back, for such emergencies.

We have a couple of really heavy-duty welded up racks so that cranes can hoist our racks of roof trays up to the top of sky scrapers. What we do not have are lots of high-powered high-priced sales people out there beating the bushes. This roof tray business is very strange as the customers are roofing contractors and the people who spec the jobs are the architects and so one needs to get to them three years before the job goes so that our trays are specified. As you might imagine, whatever goes on the

roof is the last thing done to a building so there is a long wait between the time the sale is made and the money is collected.

And so, we will sell you an empty tray so it is do-it-yourself if you want. And we can sell you thousands of trays of little plugs of sedums—usually a 72 cell pack tray—if you want to plant your own. It is a lot easier to ship 72 cell packs across the country than to ship these trays all completed and full of rocks. They are really heavy. In our fields we have over 80 varieties of whatever kinds of sedums that are used on green roofs so we have the cutting stock to make up however many trays anyone would ever want. This reminds me to say a few words about our business. We have 160 people in the summer and half a million square feet of mist space and we cut and stick anywhere from ten to fifteen million cuttings a year. So we have a trained crew and the facilities in place to make a lot of plants in a hurry and about any time. The crew is used to doing cutting and sticking. In the winter the same crew divides Carex and Hakonechloa into very small divisions for potting into 98's and 72's and 50's. The crew is well-behaved and excellent at doing repetitive meticulous work.

I almost forgot, in the excitement of writing on an empty sheet of paper—it is such a temptation—that the purpose of these Leaflets is to sell some plants and so I want to mention that we have lots of groundcover gallons. We have some 50,000 Pachysandra 'Green Carpet' gallons sitting around at any one time waiting for the roots to get to the bottom of the pot. The tops are thick. And then, due to a cancelled order, we have nearly 20,000 heavy and cut back many times Hedera helix 'Thorndale' gallons overwintered inside and ready to go.

We are still learning how to grow grasses in containers, or, more precisely, we are still working on getting our inventory people to look at how thick the pots are before listing them as saleable and trying to foist them off on an ever more sophisticated customer base. We have learned much quicker how long it takes to get over a bad reputation. Anyhow, I was not running the nursery when most of these errors were made. We have a lot of pots of some exotic red and fuzzy grass: Muhlenbergia reverchonii UNDAUNTED®. We have overwintered lots of #1's of Pennisetum 'Hameln' which reminds me that my new

favorite plant is Brent Horvath's Pennisetum 'Piglet' PP# 21,917. It is about half the height of 'Hameln' and really fast growing and cute. We have 3,000 gallons of Molinia 'Moorhexe' and nearly 7,000 3 1/2" liners if you want to make these yourself. For reasons that are unfathomable we have 4,000 #2's of Miscanthus gracillimus. And finally, we have some fat #3's of Panicum 'Heavy Metal'.

We are now in the Allium business. I inherited about an acre of 'Summer Beauty' and it is only getting bigger and thicker. We are not too proud to sell liners in any size plug and we might be talked into selling field clumps to the right customer. We are busily building up stock this winter of many of the smaller chive-like alliums. I have no idea why anyone would want them, but then I try to not think like that about most of the plants that make us money. I really like Alliums. They are easy to divide and appear to be dividable all year around. We try to do them in the middle of winter, but this involves some planning ahead and foretelling the future. So we can do some of them in the early spring, as soon as Serbando comes up from Texas to run the digger machine. That used to be fun, but I have had as much fun for a lifetime as I can handle.

A few years ago I was told that an easy way to make money was to grow red twig and yellow twig dogwoods which are *Cornus sericea* or 'Red Osier Dogwood'. The fun thing is that these were cut and sold in the late fall for winter decoration in the big city. I was disheartened to find out that these things did not sell themselves and I finally figured out why not. Most of these decorative branches for the Midwest come in from Minnesota and not from our much milder climate over here the other side of the lake in Southern Michigan, thus, up north, they get a few killing frosts by late October so the leaves fall off and the stems color up. The sales opportunities generally dry up when I inform the customer that I am not going to be the one pulling the green leaves off one at a time. Besides that, we do not have any history of figuring out how to sort these into either branches or whips. And so, we will cut them 4-7' tall and pack as many as we can into one of our racks and bungee cord them in and sell them by the rack full for whatever we can get. The customer gets to sort them out and trim them to whatever length they want and

so they can be part of the team. This usually happens by late November or early December.

We are big fans of Roy Diblik from Northwind Nursery up in Wisconsin, having known him from Natural Gardens just outside of St. Charles, Illinois back when we both used to work for a living. Roy now goes around giving slide shows and speeches and planting fancy gardens, or at least they are ones that he tells the customers are fancy. I am busily growing all of the plants that are in his palette on the theory that he is going to be influential and that is why we are starting to grow *Aruncus* 'Horatio'. Our plants are now very small as they are coming from tissue culture. 'Horatio' is an Earnst Pagals' introduction. He is some famous German plants person who has introduced many plants. He crossed *Aruncus aesthusifolius* with *Aruncus dioicus* and this was the tallest of his four selections from those seedlings. It gets nearly 4 feet tall. There is a fine example of this plant right by the back door of the Boerner Botanical Gardens. Aesthetics must not be a consideration in choosing this plant is all I can say. We will be getting another thousand from tissue culture this spring so should have a good supply if I can live long enough to enjoy the fruits of this endeavor. I hear that it takes a while to bulk up. No less a famous plants personage than Roy Klehm sells this plant through his Song Sparrow nursery, so we have two good people to copy and do not listen to whatever I have to say about it.

Monarda bradburiana is a plant being touted widely and enthusiastically in all of the seminars and slide talks that I attend. I might believe it more if the people giving the presentations did not show photos of the plant. The good news is that it is a pure native and thus supports bees and butterflies. It is also a clump former that does not spread widely and wildly as do other monardas. It is the first to bloom. We are busily building up our stock and I would get a lot more support from the rest of the crew for over-production if we had sold more than 50 gallons last year. We have orders for much more already for 2018, so it is on its way. I looked it up on North Creek's website to get the spelling right and found this quote which I am going to quote right down to the exclamation mark which I have way too much pride to use myself.

"*Monarda bradburiana* remains attractive with fascinating dried seed heads long after the flow-

ers fade....superb!" If you are good at reading between the lines you may come to some conclusions when the dried flowers are considered the most attractive part of the plant. Here, again, street cred will be obtained with the native plant people, and that is what we all want, crave even.

Right up there with growing red twig dogwood that we do not have a reputation for growing are a bunch of Buxus (boxwood to normal people) 2 1/2" SVD pot liners these were potted up last summer and are well rooted and quite full for a little pot but not root bound yet. Green Velvet: 80,000, Green Mountain: 30,000, and Green Gem: 25,000. If no one buys these I will have to plant them out tying up acres of good field space from growing perennials that we can sell. I have a psychological problem with throwing things away and it is too late in life to invest in therapy.

We have some things that we can easily make money on if we can sell enough of them. One is Iris s. 'Caesar's Brother', which is the tall dark blue/purple Siberian iris that blooms and is gaudy for exactly ten days out of the year. Due to errors in judgement by my predecessors we have much of it in the field.

Last year we found out that we can dig and divide and pot up at any time of the year. I used to do it only in the winter. We can custom grow this in any size plug, pak, or pot size.

With some lead time we can produce large quantities of Echinacea tennesseensis. This is a true native. It used to be endangered. I got my seeds from Johnny's Select Seeds and it is a little different. It naturally grows in poor sandy or gravelly soil where it does not have competition from other plants. It looks spindly in a pot, so does not sell to the retail people worth a hoot. And, strangest of all, in the field all of the flowers are oriented toward the rising sun, every one of them. I accidentally planted a long row to the west side of a drive and it makes a big splash of pink color almost all summer long for those driving by. We now collect our own seeds.

The memory is fading and so I think that in every Leaflet I mention the wonders of Liriope spicata. It divides in the summer, we can grow it in any size plug, and we have lots in the field for digging.

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