

LEAFLET

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The purpose of this issue of the Leaflet is to act organized and to make money, or, more precisely, to make money by being organized. I notice that the really successful nurseries are in the specialty liner business; that the medium successful nurseries are in the commodity plant production business; and that the barely successful nurseries are in the commodity growing business at low prices. And, therefore, we can do lots of liners under three conditions: we get some vague hints as to what the demand will be next June, that we can dig the field clumps from the field before the ground freezes, and that the customer does not expect a really good quality vernalized plug such as Stonehouse Nursery produces—our production cycle is different than that. We think that professional grass liner growers such as Hoffman and Emerald Coast have figured out how to produce grasses all year around and even during the heat of summer. We have not figured that out and are even less motivated than most to do the figuring out as we are busy in the heat of summer sticking 4.2 million *Pachysandra* ‘Green Carpet’ cuttings so that we can be a medium successful nursery. With regards to our proposed winter liner production we do not require advance firm orders but we need to know what to make because if we find out in the middle of January about the demand we will merely sit down and cry because our old potato diggers do not do well (and neither do I do well) working in two feet of snow on top of six inches of frozen ground digging out clumps.

Our production schedule is to dig in the fall and divide in January and February, pot into plug trays, start heating in early March, and have a well-rooted plug to sell in early June and a better-rooted plug to sell in late June. As mentioned before, this is not the vernalized plug that you can buy from Stonehouse and pot up in early March into a gallon and have something to sell by mid-May.

After we list all of the liners that we can do if we get some glimmer of encouragement, there will follow a big list of liners that we have on hand right now. You should keep in mind that the prices are 2018 prices and that I read the Wall Street Journal carefully and so note that there will be some inflation this coming year. I am reminded of a recent manager’s meeting that we all survived here at Twixwood. The subject that I brought up was proposed pricing for the year 2019. I suggested that we really needed to make some money so that we could afford some gravel for the potholes scattered around the nursery. I then proposed two possibilities to the managers with the first one being that they all work harder. The second proposal was for me to raise prices. There ensued a short, spirited, and unanimous discussion as to which proposal the managers preferred. Therefore, the pricing listed in this newsletter will be for plants delivered or paid for in the 2018 calendar year.

Our big scheduled winter production item will be 300,000 *Carex pensylvanica* and this time we are digging it from our field where we have observed it for two years and it is the right one and not that *Carex rosea* that has inflicted us all this year, although *C. rosea* looks like a *Carex* if one is not fussy. We can do a few more of the *C. pen.* if there is some hint of a demand.

As for other Carexes, we have a dozen in production to build up our stock to put in the field. These are the new popular ones and I have no idea why they are popular—but for money we will grow about anything. And then there are the older Carexes that we had too many of and so we planted them in the field and now we have even more than too many. We will dig these if anyone thinks they are pretty. Carexes in big supply in field

Carexes

- C. molesta
- C. Beatlemania
- C. Velvebit Humilus
- C. Silver Sceptre
- C. Ice Dance
- C. Bromoides
- C. Evergold
- C. Blue Zinger
- C. emoryi
- C. stricta
- C. sprengeii
- C. vulpinoidea
- C. brevior
- C. bicknellii
- C. Blue Zinger

Actually (and we should never use the word actually as that is poor grammar and bad practice, but actually so much fun) we do not care if the customer thinks these things are pretty, as they all look a lot like a nondescript clump of grass to me, we only care if the customer has money. When they have money the customer is always right. In years to come we will be able to do lots of Carex elata 'Aurea' Bowles Golden as well as the other dozen or so varieties that we will be building up stock on this winter.

As mentioned, our system is to divide these in the winter when it is cool and they are dormant. We have had predictable success that way and so we are sticking with it. We have not done so well in the heat of May and so we are not going to do it that way any more.

Speaking of easy and fun things to produce during the winter, there are the Alliums. Here, again, we have a dozen new and improved varieties in the rapid fast track system. In the meantime we have far too many of the following in the field:

- Allium Summer Beauty
- Allium Millenium
- Allium Summer Peek-a-Boo™

And there will be some of the following scheduled to be produced this winter:

- Allium s. 'Forescate'
- Allium s. 'Rising Star'
- Allium s. 'Snowcap'
- Allium canadense
- Allium cernuum
- Allium senscens 'Blue Eddy'
- Allium senescens glaucum
- Allium sphaerocephalon
- Allium thunbergii 'Ozawa'
- Allium 'Windy City' PP #28,100

With regards to 'Summer Peek-a-Boo'™ we have finally figured out that this is a registered trademark kind of a name, so we sent in our money to Midwest Groundcovers for the license and we got two polite letters back from them. They graciously accepted our check. It must have been good as we have not received any more letters recently.

There are too many ornamental grasses out there for us to list them all. We have them all in the field if you want some. I really like the Little Blue-stems and the ones that we have plenty of stock in the field are these:

- Schizachyrium 'Jazz'
- S. 'The Blues'
- S. 'Blue Heaven'™ PP# 17,310

We are working on but do not have available as liners the good new patented varieties: Carousel PP #20,948 and Standing Ovation PP #25,202. For those with less discriminating taste we are doing the seed ones 'Prairie Blues' and the regular wild 'scoparium'.

We have most of the newer patented varieties in our fast-track production cycle and so will have them shortly. I see many more coming in over the horizon so pretty soon we will not be trying to compete on how many of the newer more exotic ones out there. I find it amusing that we have had Jazz for years (an Intrinsic introduction but not patented) and also lots of 'The Blues' without there being much of a market and all of a sudden these are in demand.

'The Blues' was considered to be old-fashioned and tacky because it lodged a lot (fell over when it rained or was fertilized or both at the same time) and now this flopping over is the latest natural prairie look and everyone likes it and so we like it.

And now I am really liking the newer Big Bluestems, the patented ones from Intrinsic. We can do lots of these with some advance information:

Andropogon g. 'Indian Warrior' PP #24,999

Andropogon g. 'Red October' PP #26,283

These are about the right height and are the right color—a darker reddish brown—so they look good for several months at the end of the season. We are rapidly building up stock and will have liners in the future for 'Blackhawks' PP #27,949. We also have lots of the seed grown wild *Andropogon gerardii*.

We can do large numbers of the more common hardy geraniums and some of them will be in bloom and ready to transplant in early May. The price is \$0.82 for a 38 plug, or \$31.16 a flat and these are:

Geranium m. 'Bevan's Variety'

Geranium s. 'Max Frei'

Geranium s. *striatum* (Lancastriense)

Geranium x c. 'Biokovo'

Geranium x c. 'Karmina'

Our capability to greatly over-produce 'Max Frei' is both stunning and frightening. I get psychic gratification by putting roots on plants, as happens to those of us who are long-time members of the International Plant Propagator's Society, and cannot stop making them. The fellow here who runs the computer and whose job it is to predict with perfect accuracy what the market will be does not suffer from such psychic problems. We have some interesting discussions.

With regards to the *Rudbeckias*—Black-Eyed Susans—we vegetatively propagate 'Summerblaze' and Viette's Little Suzy, again with an ability to make too many of them. These are improvements over the old standard seed propagated variety, 'Goldsturm' which we make money on and so the truth about it will not escape my lips. Pricing will be the same as for the hardy geraniums.

While on the subject of flowery and flowering perennials, we have lots of capability for *Echinacea*

*Pixie Meadowbrite*TM PP# 18,546, which we have the license for, and it is \$1.00 for a 38 plug or \$38.00 a flat. One of its parents is the original *Echinacea tennesseensis* of which we have a large seed orchard any time the demand picks up. It is a great plant for sandy or gravelly really poor soil and blooms for three months or so.

We have good cutting stock of *Leucanthemum* 'Becky' and 'Snowcap' and *Chelone lyonii* 'Hot Lips' which is an improved Turtlehead. At least I am assuming that anything with a name tacked on to it is improved in some way or the other. These are \$1.25 for a 2 1/2" SVD 32 per tray or \$40.00 a flat. The *Leucanthemums* and *Chelone* we do in March from what is known in the trade as a 'Dutch Cutting'. Therefore we do not need a commitment or a promise until then. These are in good shape by the middle of June as they start out with half a root already.

Next, we have lots of the smaller grasses. We went through the *Miscanthus* and the *Panicum* phases and now we are hoping that the smaller grasses will come through for us. These are:

Molinia 'Moorflamme'

Molinia 'Moorhex'

Deschampsia 'Goldehange'

Deschampsia 'Goldtau'

Sesleria 'Greenlee Hybrid'

Sesleria 'Autumnalis'

Imperata cylindrical 'Red Baron'

Festuca 'Cool as Ice' PP

Pennisetum 'Piglet' PP# 19,074

Bouteloua 'Blonde Ambition' PP #22,048

Pricing is a 50 count deep cell for \$0.80 or \$40.00 per flat and also they are in a 3 1/2" 18 count tray for \$1.50 or also \$31.00 a tray. The patented grasses are higher at a 50 count tray at \$0.95 or \$47.50 per tray or in the 18 count 3 1/2" \$2.25 and \$40.50 a tray.

There is also a small variegated *Molinia* that comes already covered in rust, so we are not nuts on it like the other ones. The *Imperata* is outlawed in about half of the states, so check before ordering it. We can make lots of it for those states that are not so alert. Actually, it is the green form, which is not in existence here, that is invasive. The state plants people look at the Latin names and draw rather broad

conclusions. ‘Piglet’ is one of my favorite plants as it is about half the size of *Pennisetum* ‘Hameln’.

And then there are the vaguely grass-like plants such as Dune Grass (American Beach Grass) *Ammophila breviligulata*, a truly vicious and ugly plant. We have lots of it. This propagates only in the winter. We got desperate and tried it once in the heat of summer and learned our lesson. If you want it we can do it. This is done in the 2 ½” SVD 32 per tray for \$1.25 per pot and \$40.00 per tray. Now that I see what we are charging for it the inner beauty is coming out more and more. It is one of the few plants that grows in pure quartz beach sand. You just do not want to have to walk through it. Research of the trade indicates that we are one of the very few nurseries who grow dune grass in a small pot or cell. Everyone else sells it as a dormant bare root plant in March and April. Our product can be planted any time of the year that a jack hammer can make a hole in the sand dune.

Another plant, one that I like a whole lot, is Japanese Golden Sweet Flag, *Acorus gramineus* ‘Ogon’. This grows in mud or water. We grow it outside in the sun and just make sure to water it every other day. It does fine and we have lots of stock. We are testing the market for this gaudy wet lands plant although we grow it in the field in full sun and merely have to irrigate it every other day. It goes for \$1.00 per plug in the 38 plug tray, or \$38.00 per tray.

I used to think that it was cheating to grow anything from seed and then I started to make money on some of the seed grown ones such as *Chasmanthium latifolium* and *Calamagrostis brachytricha*. Now we have the seed for way too many *Chasmanthium* and *C. brachytricha*. We have our own seed orchard of these plants and so have many too many seeds. I do not want to waste a thing and so we are busily running out of room on the ground for our plants that sell. These are \$1.75 for a 3 ½” 18 per tray pot, or \$31.50 per flat.

Speaking of *Sporobolus heterolepis* there is the dwarfer one that is more upright with a significantly more distinct seed head, ‘Tara’, a Roy Diblick selection. Someone made the mistake of telling me that this was difficult to propagate and so to show off I went out and made far too much of it. The problem is that it grows lots of roots and so does not do well

in a small pot or plug and then there is only a very narrow window of time when it can be propagated and so we have it ready in mid-June and at other times of the year when people want it we either do not have it or it is busily choking itself out.

Another plant that used to have a difficult-to-propagate reputation is *Arctostaphylos uva-ursi* ‘Massachusetts’ and so I took that as a challenge and after many years we are, once again, able to make lots of it. All of what I made last year is still here in a 2 ½” pot and more will be done this winter to be ready next June. This is a mere \$0.84 per 2 ½” SVD and for a tray of 32 that means \$26.88 a flat. It is slowly dawning on me that if we pot it all up into gallons we will not have any room for our *pachysandra* and that makes us money.

We can do *Panicum* ‘Northwind’ and *Calamagrostis* ‘Karl Foerster’ but these are easy and so hardly worth mentioning unless we want to make some money this year.

And so this is what we can do this winter. We need some immediate feed-back so that we can gear up to dig and divide them. As mentioned, we do not need firm orders, just hints and encouragement. We will sell to anyone—our fellow perennial growers most of all. As Peter Orum once told me: “We are colleagues, not competitors”. Our sales people have not quite gotten that message, but Dianne and I believe it. We try to get it across. It is not easy to change a business model and it is not easy to develop a market for which one does not have an established reputation. At the least we have practiced and we are confident that we can produce these plants reliably.

Now that we have everyone thinking about the future, we want to shift gears back to the here and now. For immediate sales and at 2018 prices we have the following listing of plants left over from my enthusiastic optimistic phantasmagorical production during the last winter’s production cycle. These are starting to think about getting root bound.

Sporobolus Tara

375	50ct Deep	\$0.80 (\$40.00/flat)
750	32ct	\$1.25 (\$40.00/flat)
1,000	18ct	\$1.75 (\$31.50/flat)
8,000	#1s	\$5.75
2,000	#2s	\$12.00
850	#3s	\$16.50

Sporobolus heterolepis

800	98ct	\$0.39 (\$38.22/flat)
500	50ct Deep	\$0.80 (\$40.00/flat)
2,500	32ct	\$1.25 (\$40.00/flat)
1,200	18ct	\$1.75 (\$31.50/flat)
20,000	#1s	\$5.75
500	#3s	\$16.50

Bouteloua Blonde Ambition

375	50ct Deep	\$0.95 (\$47.50/flat)
275	18ct	\$2.25 (\$40.50/flat)
2750	#1s	\$6.50

Carex rosea (heavily discounted prices)

1000	98ct	\$0.15 (\$14.70/flat)
600	72ct	\$0.25 (\$18.00/flat)
500	50ct Deep	\$0.40 (\$20.00/flat)
1600	32ct	\$0.75 (\$24.00/flat)

Imperata Red Baron

20	72ct	\$0.66 (\$47.52/flat) +100 planned
250	32ct	\$1.50 (\$48.00/flat)+200 planned
75	18ct	\$2.25 (\$40.50/flat)+300 planned
5000	#1s	\$6.50 +3500 planned

Buxus

450 flats	Buxus 'Green Gem'	\$1.50 for a 2 ½"
600 flats	Buxus 'Green Mountain'	\$1.50 for a 2 ½"
1350 flats	Buxus 'Green Velvet'	\$1.50 for a 2 ½"

The Buxus is an whole another story. We are starting to soften on the price, so call Homer when you want a truckload for "special" pricing. Our original stock was obtained over 30 years ago from some stock plants direct from Sheridan Nursery up in Canada. These have not been near or contaminated or anything by any other boxwoods and are thus free of any communicable diseases. I was going to get rich growing fields of them and then I discovered that I did not own enough acreage and a quick glance at the actuarial tables further cooled my ardor for the plant, hence this fine block of liners.

And so we have mixed into this list plants that we plan on making this coming winter with plants that we made last winter. Hope that you did not get confused by this.

Years ago, back when I suffered from the optimism of youth, I hoped that everyone would

remember what I wrote in these newsletters. Now, older and possibly wiser, I am hoping that there are memory lapses here and there and specifically about what I had said a few years ago about the people who complained about pachysandra being too tall. I said something about how pachysandra grows in nature, putting on a six inch spurt every May, and how we had no control over nature and all and that everyone should just live with it. Anyhow, for the past two years we have instigated a new program of forcing some of our plants starting March 1 and then trimming the new shoots starting June 1 so that we will have trimmed and newly flushed pachysandra to sell all summer long. We get on average two new shoots for everyone cut as well as the usual two or three stolons that make it to the surface. Therefore, the trimmed and flushed pachysandra looks short and really thick. By the time July comes around the regular pachysandra, that over-wintered in cold frames just outside under the snow, is ready to trim and so we do this all of July and into August. Of course we stick the cuttings we make this way and some of these are saleable by the middle of September, depending on whether or not we are out of that particular size and the sense of humor of the customer.

And so now that we have a system that is efficient and works out to benefit all of us, I have something else to complain about, and possibly something else to hope that people will forget in the future. The topic now is peat pots. Years ago we only made peat pots. That was because we were following Zelenka's example and using the 2 ¼" Keyes peat pot, made in Louisiana, 35 to an Alma flat. They had not invented all of the little plastic pots and cells and plugs back then. We now have several key customers who insist on peat pots and so we grow our groundcovers in three kinds of 10-20 trays with 32 plants per tray and all for the same price. We grow mostly the 2 ½" SVD plastic pot that is advertised by the plastic maker as being a 3" pot. Then we grow some of the 32 plug trays where the dirt volume is not as great as in the SVD but the tray is easier to carry around and, after planting, one only has to chase one plastic tray and not 32 little plastic pots plus the mother tray after the wind has distributed things around the yard. The problem with the peat pots is that they disintegrate, as advertised, after one season. The plants are still there and bigger and better, but the peat pot is softened and

crumbled, and the pachysandra stolons have grown between the pots doing further disintegration. I do not see the problem but our landscaper customers perceive there being a problem.

Now we have several hundreds of extra older peat pot trays and nowhere to go. I have suggested that for the really particular customer the landscaper could take the tray with both hands and dump it *en masse* onto the ground and call it planted. Some people suspect that I am more watching out for my profitability than I am trying to make the landscaper's job easier. It is lies, all lies. We will appreciate anyone who can figure out how to re-purpose the broken down peat pots of pachysandra.

Other than that, the pachysandra business is trudging steadily along. Of all things that make little sense but that I like a lot, are gallons of pachysandra. We sell twenty to thirty thousand of these a year and have no idea why. Because we can use our overgrown smaller pots to produce the gallons we do not tell the customer what we are thinking, we just ship them and smile.

I am always looking for the ideal plant for us to grow, one that is green and does not bloom thus

not needing trimming. I think that I have found it in *Liriope spicata*, creeping lilyturf. This one is hardy in Chicago and we have lots of it in the field, in fact years of supply, and so we have several systems for producing it in smaller pot sizes. We sell mostly the 2 ½" SVD of it but also the 32 plug tray. Our goal is to never run out. In fact our goal is really to sell more of them.

If there is ever any doubt in anyone's mind about Twixwood's attitude toward plants, the market, and the customer being always right, let that doubt be henceforth smashed because we are now starting to grow *Scutellaria incana* with the common name 'Hoary Skullcap'. Someone told us that native plants were going to be the next latest rage and this plant is definitely a native which you can tell by looking at its attractiveness. It gets up to 4' tall and has a blue bloom at some time in its life. Everything that I know comes from a close reading of the North Creek website. Right now we only have a hundred or so gallons, but quite shortly we will have plenty. It appears to propagate and grow with great enthusiasm.

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