

LEAFFLE

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

I always begin my Christmas letters by loudly announcing that “we are still married”, so that the readers will not have to wade through all 80 pages in order to find that out, something that is, doubtless, uppermost in their minds. It does not seem appropriate to comment on our personal life in this informative nursery newsletter and so I will merely say that “we are still in business”. I would not be so sensitive about that subject, but when we had our little management shake-up some 5 or 6 years ago I thought that I sensed rumors about the continuity of our business. What has happened is that we have recruited and trained a new management team, changed the business model by dropping the big box stores so that we can concentrate on servicing the landscape business, and I have retired again, leaving the management in the capable hands of my wife, Dianne L. Dicken. At least, I am reminded several times a day that these are capable hands. And then sometimes I pretend that I am suffering from little memory lapses just so no one will get any ideas of making me go back to work. It was enough for me to have to learn all of those new plant names when I took over this last time and, besides, I am busily writing my *Real Steam Power Series* which will run to fifty volumes if I can eat enough tofu and thus live long enough.

We had a good year and will end up the year ahead of 2019 sales as long as it does not snow too early, all the more which is amazing considering all of the issues going on—Michigan landscaping and garden centers being shut down for most of the spring, spacing out of workers, the strange shutting down of the border thus limiting landscape and agricultural worker availability, and the distraction of weird political campaigns going on, whirling about around us. We do not discuss politics at the nursery or with our customers, which, I think, helps a lot.

The secondary purpose of this newsletter is to inform the customers how we are analyzing the business with the primary purpose being to sell more plants. It has dawned on me this year that I am maturing. This is quite a surprise. The results are that we are being a lot more cold-blooded in our decision making; not being influenced by our personal preferences in what we grow and not being sentimental about keeping plants that are going out of style. To begin with, my analysis of the nursery business is that our main cost is pretty much the same for all plants in all sizes on a square foot basis. It has to do with what it costs us to produce a plant and then to grow it and maintain it—trim it and weed it, tag it and sort it, pick it up for shipping and load it on a rack—no matter which plant or which size of container it is. Therefore, we are attempting to get our pricing to reflect this new attempt at rationality.

This reminds me of what I used to do in olden times. Back then we made the decisions as to which plant varieties to grow and in which sizes based on exactly one criteria—what we have to grow and ship to our customer base such that they will buy more *E. coloratus* from us. There are still higher profit and lower profit items out there, but by and large our costs are based on each square foot that we have under cultivation and under poly.

In doing this analysis I was surprised to discover that the smart people were growing liners. Liners sell for from five to ten dollars a square foot more than our commodity-priced items—*Pachyandra* ‘Green Carpet’ and *Nepeta* ‘Walker’s Low’ and *Rudbeckia* ‘Goldsturm’—although we plan on continuing to produce the above named items, to the point of saturating the market. Breaking into a new type of business is a slow process. It takes a while to develop the reputation for a new product line. It also helps to have the complete product line, which is really hard to do all at once. Speaking of liners we are doing mostly grasses and carexes although I like a lot the *Geraniums* ‘Max Frei’ and ‘Bevan’s Variety’. We can produce liners of any plant that we grow.

And this brings up the delicate subject of what happened to our *Carex pensylvanica* production which we used to be really good at. As the alert reader will remember the previous management team had purchased carex liners from several reputable suppliers except that one of them was not quite reputable enough and they slipped us some *Carex rosea* which I used for stock to produce several hundred thousand plugs about 4 or 5 years ago. I learned several lessons from that experience. For one, these newsletters are totally ineffective in unloading some dog of a plant on the unsuspecting public, which makes me wonder why I keep writing them. Secondly, we learned to grow our own plants in our own fields for several years to get them rogued out and identified properly and professionally. Thirdly it takes a while to get production geared up when there is not enough stock in the field. This winter we are projecting production of from 400,000 to 500,000 liners of this fine plant. And we will get enough stock in the field to increase our numbers in years to come. There is no reason to run out of something that is in demand and something that we are good at growing. Those *Carex rosea* grew really good, just to rub a little salt in the wounds.

While speaking of carexes, we have accumulated thirty varieties that are going into and out of production. Some of the big commercial jobs were spec’ing them and I thought this was a good way to do research, to let the market tell us what we should

be growing and then I figured out that it was some designer landscape architect out of New York City who was looking at some encyclopedia of plants while trying to justify his or her existence who was coming up with these varieties. And that is why we are going to offer *C. jamesii* one more year before going on to better things. If anyone wants a carex variety over-produced, get us some stock plants and wait a year or two. Another problem with carex production is the ongoing struggle between ethical considerations and making money considerations. For a few brief moments the ethical considerations are going to win out which is why I want to warn everyone about *C. emoryi*—common name ‘Riverbank Sedge’. This is one of the most rampant growers of any plant that I have seen. I am sure there is a place for it somewhere, which, in my opinion should be about two states away. And, by the way, we have plenty of it.

Business is so good and continuing far into the Fall that we are starting to worry about next Spring, about how the demand is going to be then and this reminds me of a new phenomenon that our sales personages have noticed—hoarding. This virus thing has gotten people to thinking strangely; they are no longer hoarding toilet paper, but hoarding plants. They are buying in, for delivery this Fall, a few thousand gallons of perennials to assure themselves of having them in the Spring. I cannot imagine a more wonderful idea. Anything that we do not have to take up room overwintering is a good thing. And please let me know what strange quirk of fate has caused this irrational activity so that I can encourage it some more.

Moments like this remind me of all of my past attempts to raise the level of consciousness of the landscaping community. As one example, we produce 15,000 gallons per year of *Rudbeckia* ‘Goldsturm’, a cheap plant to grow because it comes from seed and one continually in demand in spite of having some septoria leaf problems. We have offered R. ‘Summerblaze’ and R. ‘Viette’s Little Suzy’ as being more compact and more leaf spot resistant without a lot of consciousness raising going on. And now we have plenty of Intrinsic’s new *Rudbeckias*—‘American Gold Rush’ PP28498 and ‘Glitter’s Like Gold’ PPAF, both blooming from July through October and being septoria leaf spot resistant. The fluff on these says

that they have a more intense bloom, greater bloom volume, while having more disease resistance. They need vernalization for maximum blooming.

We will be able, come March 2021, to over-produce these fine plants, mostly the 'Glitters Like Gold' which is the taller of the two and quite the plant. The only problem is that one of our previously mentioned management team members is rational. He thinks that we should be in this business to make money and so he is conservative about scheduling production of a new plant. I refer to him as being cold-blooded. We will be able to produce somewhere north of 20,000 plugs of each of these fine plants, but we will all get along much better, here at the ranch, if there is some indication of demand from our customer base before I start making these 20,000 plugs on a whim. These plugs will not be vernalized, which means that they will bloom but not nearly as good as they will the next year. Given our production schedule we cannot produce them and vernalize them. The reason is because they need to go through a dormancy cycle in order to maximize the production of new shoots for cuttings, which is why we start taking the cuttings in March. They have to be taken early and often because once the bloom stalks (scapes) form it is all over for the cutting business. I tried rooting bloom stalks once and it was a humbling experience, particularly when there were too many witnesses.

The fact that we are still in business implies that we have had a great many successes this year. We have also had the few failures, for which I will make some explanations, mumble some excuses, and promise to do better in the future because of learning from the experience. One is *Asarum canadensis*, Canadian Ginger, a native plant growing in the woods in deep shade with fuzzy over-lapping heart shaped leaves. It makes a good groundcover except that it is not evergreen, it is herbaceous. We can grow an unlimited quantity of this fine plant and we pot it up in May and June for sale one year from that time. The plant grows from shallow rhizomes sending up petioles and leaves every so often. We lost a lot of sales this year because it looked poorly with the leaves being distorted. That was because we had a late frost and our normally reliable and dependable irrigation person missed the *Asarum* which was over

in a corner of the nursery under shade. The frost hurt the leaves. This plant only puts out one set of leaves per year so it does not work to trim them off hoping for re-growth. Any trimming off during the summer will kill the plant. At moments like this I am always hoping for slick-talking customers who can convince the home owner that these will only come up nicer and better the following year and that there is seldom a frost like we had. This winter we have most of our *Asarum* under poly so it should flush early and be frost protected.

Another failure, one that nearly brings tears to my eyes, was with one of my favorite plants: *Sporobolus h. 'Tara'*. The sales personages told me, late in the season, that they could have sold a lot more gallons of this fine plant and so I went and looked at it. Our sales in 2020 were 10,000 fewer or less or whatever than what we had in 2019 and these numbers start to hurt. The problem was that the liner plants, which were in a 2 1/2" SVD plastic pot, were root bound, which is a common situation with *Sporobolus* because it is a native prairie plant and thus survives because of its large root system. The root binding happens because of the plant's production cycle. It is tricky to grow from division and it does not come true from seed, so that is our only choice. We have perfected its production, however in order to do this properly the timing has to be precise. Thus, we do not have a choice as to when we make the plants and when we grow them for sale in the winter and potting up in the February to May time frame, they are long-since root bound.

This is an easy problem to fix if the person who is the grower either has a heads up on the situation or gets out of the office and checks in regularly with the potting crew. The fix is to lightly score the four sides of the root ball with a utility knife. This gives the roots an opportunity to break away from the circling mass and fill the gallon pot. I am busy trying to figure out how to tell the production and growing supervisors that their inattention to business cost me \$50,000 this year, and to do it diplomatically. So far I have not figured out how to do that. If we can get that done we will not have that problem again and we will still have our production and growing supervisors still working for us. Life is a tightrope.

Available Liners for Fall 2020 Delivery

Here is what we have, produced by cuttings in the summer or from divisions in the winter. The regular sporobolus is from seed, made in the spring. This is 2020 price list catalogue pricing, so get them while they are hot. In the future we can do every which a variety as long as we have some glimmer of hope of selling them.

| Perennials | | | | Grasses | | | |
|------------|---------------------------------------|-----------|---------|---------|-------------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Qty | Name | Size | Price | Qty | Name | Size | Price |
| 155 | Alchemilla m. 'Thriller' | 18ct Flat | \$36.00 | 895 | Ammophila breviligulata | 32ct Flat | \$40.96 |
| 30 | Allium sen. 'Blue Eddy' | 72ct Plug | \$39.60 | 65 | Bouteloua curtipendula | 18ct Flat | \$36.00 |
| 70 | Allium sen. glaucum | 50ct Plug | \$32.50 | 145 | Bouteloua g. (Bad River genotype) | 18ct Flat | \$36.00 |
| 35 | Allium 'Summer Beauty' | 50ct Plug | \$32.50 | 440 | Calamagrostis a. 'Karl Foerster' | 18ct Flat | \$36.00 |
| 15 | Allium t.hunbergii 'Ozawa' | 72ct Plug | \$46.80 | 160 | Calamagrostis brachytricha | 18ct Flat | \$36.00 |
| 60 | Amsonia c. 'Halfway to Arkansas' | 38ct Plug | \$39.90 | 50 | Calamagrostis brachytricha | 50ct Plug | \$42.50 |
| 40 | Amsonia 'Midway to Montana' | 38ct Plug | \$43.70 | 130 | Deschampsia c. 'Goldtau' | 18ct Flat | \$36.00 |
| 45 | Calamintha 'Montrose White' | 38ct Plug | \$36.10 | 65 | Deschampsia c. 'Pixie Fountain' | 18ct Flat | \$36.00 |
| 130 | Calamintha nep. nepeta | 38ct Plug | \$36.10 | 35 | Deschampsia c. 'Pixie Fountain' | 50ct Plug | \$37.50 |
| 95 | Coreopsis v. 'Zagreb' | 38ct Plug | \$32.30 | 100 | Deschampsia cespitosa | 50ct Plug | \$37.50 |
| 50 | Echinacea p. PowWow® White | 18ct Flat | \$36.00 | 190 | Eragrostis spectabilis | 18ct Flat | \$36.00 |
| 155 | Echinacea purpurea 'White Swan' | 18ct Flat | \$36.00 | 35 | Eragrostis spectabilis | 50ct Plug | \$37.50 |
| 15 | Echinacea purpurea 'White Swan' | 50ct Plug | \$27.50 | 175 | Liriope m. 'Big Blue' | 32ct Flat | \$40.96 |
| 50 | Heuchera 'Autumn Bride' (villosa) | 18ct Flat | \$45.00 | 10 | Liriope m. 'Big Blue' | 32ct Plug | \$40.96 |
| 30 | Heuchera 'Palace Purple' | 50ct Plug | \$27.50 | 3430 | Liriope spicata | 32ct Flat | \$27.20 |
| 40 | Heuchera 'Steel City' | 38ct Plug | \$60.80 | 155 | Liriope spicata | 32ct Plug | \$27.20 |
| 20 | Monarda 'Jacob Cline' | 38ct Plug | \$39.90 | 70 | Miscanthus s. 'Gracillimus' | 18ct Flat | \$36.00 |
| 35 | Monarda 'Marshall's Delight' | 38ct Plug | \$39.90 | 15 | Miscanthus s. 'Gracillimus' | 50ct Plug | \$42.50 |
| 40 | Nepeta 'Blue Wonder' | 38ct Plug | \$36.10 | 115 | Miscanthus s. 'Little Kitten' | 18ct Flat | \$45.00 |
| 35 | Nepeta 'Early Bird' | 38ct Plug | \$36.10 | 95 | Molinia 'Moorflamme' | 18ct Flat | \$36.00 |
| 45 | Nepeta 'Kit Cat' | 38ct Plug | \$36.10 | 75 | Panicum v. 'Heavy Metal' | 18ct Flat | \$36.00 |
| 155 | Nepeta 'Walker's Low' | 38ct Plug | \$32.30 | 25 | Panicum v. 'Northwind' | 18ct Flat | \$36.00 |
| 75 | Perovskia a. 'Little Spire' | 38ct Plug | \$36.10 | 260 | Panicum v. Ruby Ribbons | 18ct Flat | \$45.00 |
| 40 | Perovskia atriplicifolia | 38ct Plug | \$36.10 | 525 | Panicum v. 'Shenandoah' | 18ct Flat | \$36.00 |
| 85 | Rudbeckia 'Viette's Little Suzy' | 38ct Plug | \$32.30 | 70 | Panicum v. 'Shenandoah' | 50ct Plug | \$42.50 |
| 95 | Rud. x 'Glitter's Like Gold' PPAF | 38ct Plug | \$43.70 | 70 | Panicum virgatum | 18ct Flat | \$36.00 |
| 35 | Salvia n. 'Caradonna' | 38ct Plug | \$32.30 | 45 | Panicum virgatum | 50ct Plug | \$37.50 |
| 25 | Salvia n. 'East Friesland' | 38ct Plug | \$32.30 | 285 | Pennisetum a. 'Hameln' | 18ct Flat | \$36.00 |
| 60 | Salvia n. 'Sixteen Candles' PPAF | 38ct Plug | \$43.70 | 215 | Pennisetum a. 'Hameln' | 50ct Plug | \$42.50 |
| 30 | Salvia n. 'Wesuwe' | 38ct Plug | \$32.30 | 120 | Pennisetum a. 'Little Bunny' | 18ct Flat | \$36.00 |
| 100 | Stachys officinalis 'Hummelo' | 38ct Plug | \$36.10 | 65 | Pennisetum a. 'Little Bunny' | 50ct Plug | \$42.50 |
| 45 | Stachys x 'Summer Crush' PP29899 | 38ct Plug | \$39.90 | 215 | Pennisetum a. 'Piglet' PP19074 | 18ct Flat | \$45.00 |
| 65 | Stachys x 'Summer Romance' PP30243 | 38ct Plug | \$39.90 | 65 | Pennisetum a. 'Piglet' PP19074 | 50ct Plug | \$47.50 |
| 15 | Stachys x 'Summer Romance' PP30243 | 72ct Plug | \$43.50 | 60 | Pennisetum a. 'Red Rocket' PP28715 | 18ct Flat | \$45.00 |
| 35 | Vernonia let. 'Iron Butterfly' | 38ct Plug | \$39.90 | 15 | Schizachyrium s. 'Carousel' PP20948 | 18ct Flat | \$45.00 |
| 10 | Vernonia 'Southern Cross' | 38ct Plug | \$39.90 | 145 | Schizachyrium s. 'Carousel' PP20948 | 50ct Plug | \$47.50 |
| 35 | Vernonia 'Summer's Surrender' PP28475 | 38ct Plug | \$43.70 | 260 | Schizachyrium scoparium | 32ct Flat | \$40.96 |
| 65 | Vernonia 'Summer's Swan Song' PP28556 | 38ct Plug | \$43.70 | 1080 | Sporobolus h. 'Tara' | 18ct Flat | \$36.00 |
| 50 | Veronica 'Blue Yonder' PP27284 | 32ct Flat | \$40.96 | 585 | Sporobolus h. 'Tara' | 32ct Flat | \$40.96 |
| 60 | Veronica 'Blue Yonder' PP27284 | 38ct Plug | \$39.90 | 210 | Sporobolus h. 'Tara' | 50ct Plug | \$42.50 |
| 10 | Veronica 'Blue Yonder' PP27284 | 72ct Plug | \$43.50 | 665 | Sporobolus heterolepis | 18ct Flat | \$36.00 |
| 65 | Veronica 'Kiss the Sky' PP31665 | 38ct Plug | \$43.70 | 920 | Sporobolus heterolepis | 32ct Flat | \$40.96 |
| 25 | Veronica 'Spike' PP27814 | 38ct Plug | \$43.70 | 200 | Sporobolus heterolepis | 50ct Plug | \$42.50 |
| | | | | 295 | Sporobolus heterolepis | 50ct Plug | \$37.50 |

| Carexes | | | |
|---------|---------------------------------|-----------|---------|
| Qty | Name | Size | Price |
| 85 | Carex appalachica | 18ct Flat | \$36.00 |
| 110 | Carex appalachica | 50ct Plug | \$42.50 |
| 135 | Carex bicknellii | 18ct Flat | \$36.00 |
| 35 | Carex bicknellii | 50ct Plug | \$42.50 |
| 95 | Carex emoryi | 18ct Flat | \$36.00 |
| 105 | Carex emoryi | 50ct Plug | \$42.50 |
| 105 | Carex 'Evergold' | 18ct Flat | \$36.00 |
| 420 | Carex flacca (aka Carex glauca) | 18ct Flat | \$36.00 |
| 10 | Carex flacca (aka Carex glauca) | 50ct Plug | \$42.50 |
| 415 | Carex flacca 'Blue Zinger' | 18ct Flat | \$36.00 |
| 25 | Carex flacca 'Blue Zinger' | 50ct Plug | \$42.50 |
| 160 | Carex jamesii | 18ct Flat | \$58.50 |
| 170 | Carex jamesii | 50ct Plug | \$70.00 |
| 40 | Carex lacustris | 18ct Flat | \$58.50 |
| 35 | Carex lacustris | 50ct Plug | \$70.00 |
| 180 | Carex m. 'Ice Dance' | 18ct Flat | \$36.00 |
| 85 | Carex m. 'Ice Dance' | 50ct Plug | \$42.50 |
| 15 | Carex muskingumensis | 18ct Flat | \$36.00 |
| 90 | Carex pen. 'Straw Hat' PP29432 | 18ct Flat | \$45.00 |
| 310 | Carex rosea | 32ct Flat | \$40.96 |
| 55 | Carex rosea | 50ct Plug | \$42.50 |
| 115 | Carex sprengelii | 18ct Flat | \$36.00 |
| 10 | Carex sprengelii | 50ct Plug | \$42.50 |

Another semi-failure was gallons of *Pachysandra* 'Green Carpet'. It is a surprise to us that there is an intense demand—we have been selling between fifteen and twenty thousand a year. At first potting up gallons from our several year old over-grown and rhizome intertwined heavily rooted left over trays from a year or so seemed to be the perfect idea. We always have a few left over plants, usually in the peat pot pack, because we never want to run out of this fine plant, and so we aim high with our production. Anyhow, when transplanted the plant grows nicely, sending out rhizomes all over and because we trim the cuttings off it a couple of times there are lots of new branches and buds. It is a really heavy plant. The problem is that, for some reason that is in defiance of common sense or anything, a transplanted gallon never roots all the way to the bottom of the pot. The roots stop a couple of inches shy of the bottom and the inventory people and sales people are trained to only sell completely rooted plants, such that when pulled from the pot all of the dirt (peat/bark soil mix) comes out with the roots. And so about half way through the summer I sensed a problem and solved it by telling the sales personages (we can no longer refer to them by any gender, let alone a common term for people of a certain gender who are younger than our sales personages and I do not want to go to jail for making that mistake, although a mistake that makes me a lot of money is sometimes tempting) to describe in mind-numbing detail exactly how the *pachysandra* gallons look and what to ex-

pect along with the information that they were never going to get any rooted to the bottom, no matter how long they waited. Soon they were flying out the door. One of our early hypotheses was a perched water table in the pot, but after we had allowed for this with a well-drained crushed rock base we deduced that was not the problem. And so now we are direct sticking the gallons with about ten cuttings per pot and it is a great success, as we had found out years before, with the roots going immediately, only a few months after sticking, all the way to the bottom of the pot. Sometimes logic and common sense fail us.

As you will recall, from reading the introduction to this nursery newsletter, the business is continuing and with a continually improving management team and plans are being made for it to continue far into the future in spite of my (finally) getting older and having brief memory lapses—try to not worry about it or, worse yet, send sympathy cards to Dianne. There are some evolutionary changes in Twixwood because of some confluence of us getting older, wiser, lazier, and smarter—or did I say that already, anyhow we are making some changes that are designed to make the business easier to run as well as being more profitable. When we were younger and more ambitious and enthused about all new plants the thought of making the business more profitable and easier to run had not occurred to me yet. It is a real revelation.

Out of sheer stubbornness and loyalty we are continuing producing *Euonymus fortunei* 'Colora-

tus' in spite of it being illegal to sell in Indiana. We are very careful to not sell it in Indiana, now that you ask. What has happened is that the politicians or bureaucrats or whomever it is who make such decisions based on emotions and not science have conflated all kinds of Euonymus together—with the real culprit being Winged Euonymus or Euonymus Alatus. The reason that is bad is because it produces lots of viable seeds and thus becomes an invasive understory plant in northern forests. The groundcover euonymus does not appear to have seeds. By the way, after years of painstaking development there is now a triploid seedless variety of Euonymus alatus 'Compactus'. By the time it gets into commercial production the laws will be complete and irreversible, much like what happened with Lythrum salicaria which has sterile hybrids that are outlawed as if they were the real villain. Well, that is life, and maybe we will have lots of Carex varieties to replace coloratus so it will not matter much.

And so, that is what we are doing, isolated as we are out here in rural Michigan, with this new

idea of making the nursery easier to run and more profitable at the same time being such a novel logical idea that we are wondering why we did not think of it sooner. Life is a mystery that way.

Because of virus issues our usual ways of meeting and interacting with our customers will not happen this year. The Winter trade shows are out. Our Fall visits by our sales manager and sales personages complete with a gift of Michigan apples is not going to happen either. We need the information that we receive during our customer interactions—new products on the horizon, how to do things better, how we should adjust our prices, general market trends. Therefore, we, here at the nursery, will need to develop some virtual means of interacting with our customers. Feel free to call or write and express your innermost thoughts and feelings. That is why I hire sales personages with good people skills. And I want to get my money's worth.

Tom Krinel



P. O. Box 247,
Berrien Springs, MI
49103