

# LEAFLET

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By way of warning to our esteemed customers, we are saving a great deal of our advertising budget because of cancelled trade shows this year. We are continuously analyzing the beneficial purposes of trade shows, given their expense, and here are my conclusions. Firstly, we attend because we want everyone to know that we are still in business, that we are a dynamic business and that we have plans to continue into the future, and that furthermore the owner/manager team (Dianne & Tom) is busily staving off senility and keeping married although we sometimes wonder if one helps the other or not.

Such reassurances are important because we estimate that our business is 95% repeat with established customers who are comfortable with our way of doing business. It took years of good service to get them in the right frame of mind and we want to keep them as long as possible. Secondly, we are always out fishing for new customers to replace that last 5% because the usual fluidity in the market requires us to do that each year. New potential customers care about one thing—how to get our plants delivered to them, and so we have posters at the shows that show our location which is equidistant between Milwaukee, Indianapolis, and Detroit, and even more posters with photos of our loading dock and delivery trucks. We then have aerial photos of our several farms that show a million square feet of poly house space with the implication being that we will always have a good supply of plant material and also the implication is that we are a real business. We want to be a dependable supplier for our landscaper customers.

Anyhow, that is our theory of the purpose for showing the flag at trade shows and our claiming at the trade shows that we will always have a good supply, which reminds me that we have years of practice telling our banker how smart we are, how loyal our customers are, how the business is recession-proof, and how we are always preparing for good production of new hot plants. Sometimes our conscience bothers us—which is only one of the several burdens of owning a business where 160 employees are dependent on our continuing civility and continuing continuity.

By now you should have gotten our new and quite expensive 2021 lime-green price-list sales-catalog. I am going around the nursery trying to find out who made that graphic arts decision. All that I have gotten so far are blanket denials and rolled eyeballs. Because this leaflet goes to a far wider mailing list than does our expensive catalog this is also an invitation for anyone to request that one of these lime-green things be mailed out to you. Contact anyone in the office and things will happen. I am reminded of visiting several of our large landscapers and seeing twenty or so small offices filled with reference books and each staffed with a designer who had never seen our plant offering palette because the receptionist has doubtlessly intercepted the one routinely sent per customer and has it carefully hidden it away in some secure place in the office because she knows how important and valuable these things are. Therefore, the decision makers at your place of business are invited to contact anyone at

our office any way you can that is more advanced than smoke signals and request a box of catalogs sufficient for each of the lesser decision makers. We will then and optimistically so box them up and mail them off with great hopes that they will be suitably distributed.

A careful reading of the catalog will reveal that we have dropped vines. The reasons for doing so being both numerous and rational. In olden times the mass merchants took lots of clematis and we had Maggie, who was an excellent clematis grower who was trained by Szczepan Marczyński who has visited us half a dozen times. We dropped the mass merchants as I got older and slower, or maybe that was wiser I got, and Maggie has gotten smarter and found an easier job up in Kalamazoo. If anyone wants good clematis liners and good service you can contact Poland Container Nursery, [clematis1@clematis.com.pl](mailto:clematis1@clematis.com.pl) and talk to Stephan (which he suggests we call him). I have visited Warsaw twice and spent quality time with Stephan. He takes his work seriously. He is ethical to deal with. I could not recommend him and his product more highly.

We were good at growing vines but that putting little plastic trellises on them and training them and trimming them and getting them to bloom at the right time was too labor intensive when we had other things to do with our resources. Besides that, landscapers, who are our target market, do not install very many vines; it is more of a garden center market. We have even dropped *Parthenocissus quinquefolia* 'Engelmannii, also known as Virginia Creeper or Woodbine or Five Leafed Ivy, which we used to grow by the thousands of gallons until our surrounding states became so financially mismanaged that they can no longer afford to landscape their freeways and tollways where this vine was used to cover the sound walls. This was a great plant to grow as it over-wintered outside, did not need to be trimmed until just before shipping, and could be propagated from both hardwood and softwood cuttings. I am almost getting teary-eyed here.

A close reading of the catalog will reveal that we have dropped some of the marginally ethical plants—*Lamium*, *Aegopodium*, *Houttuynia*, *Potentilla tabernaemontani* (that was years ago), and *Brunnera macrophylla* (marginally hardy in Chicago). The wag may say that this sudden attack of ethics

was made all the more easier because of a big drop in demand—I am trying to make a living here.

And to make our life simpler because the nursery business can never be made easier we have dropped most of the perennial varieties that were selling at fewer than 500 gallon pots per year.

This is a good time to discuss vertical integration, custom growing opportunities, and our fields of cutting beds. First of all, we encourage custom growing opportunities, preferably the ones that give us enough lead time to do it right. We maintain cutting beds of whatever it is we have grown in the past and we will buy in liners from professional liner growers when that is possible. It would be nice if landscapers would let us know a couple of years in advance what their demand will be, but never, in the history of the world, has a landscaper been able to do this. Now that I think about it, if they were that prescient they would be playing the stock market and not working for a living. Anyhow, we will do whatever we can. One advantage we have is several hundred thousand square feet of natural gas heated double poly house space. Perennials need a six week dormancy period and can be forced after that, as long as someone does not mind planting tender perennials in April when the frost-free date here in Southern Michigan is May 10. We grow everything else on speculation, so some certainty, as provided by custom growing, is always appreciated. Vertical integration is when we, for our own internal use, grow perennials in the field for either division in the winter or for cuttings in the spring. From them we make our liner plugs that we pot into containers and then sell doing our own marketing and distribution.

Horizontal integration is something that Midwest Groundcovers does, and quite well if I may say so. They were our largest customer for our first ten years in the business and so we have had the opportunity to study their business model as well as to become pleasantly acquainted with Peter and Irma. Midwest makes their own potting mix, barging in pine bark from Arkansas and composting it with the other mix precursors. They buy in to, wholesale and distribute, plastic trays and containers. They bend their own polyhouse bows and sell them to other, aspirant, nursery people. And at one time they fabricated their own can carriers from old vans.

Twixwood does vertical integration because the parents started out with an 80 acre fruit and berry farm where they got used to growing plants in the field as well as working hard. *Vinca minor* was similar to strawberries because of the similar stolons that rooted into the ground at the nodes. Therefore, we field grow and then make liners for ourselves and now we are trying to break into the perennial liner market because we note that people smarter than us are doing that. They have been doing that for a while and now they also appear to be more richer than us. When I see that they can stick one perennial cutting into a pot, where we stick three *pachysandra* cuttings, and then turn around and sell it for twice as much. I am starting to wonder what I was thinking all this time and then I decide to not wallow in the past.

These days we are producing over 400,000 *Carex* liners annually, as well as untold numbers of grass liners, all done in the winter. In early spring we seed *Sporobolus heterolepis*, *Chasmanthium latifolium*, and *Calamagrostis brachytricha* from seed collected from our own grass orchards. We usually do more than we can sell. As mentioned heretofore we cut and stick upwards of ten to fifteen million groundcovers per year and thus have the trained staff already in place to take cuttings, stick cuttings, and root cuttings under intermittent mist. We are used to having a lot of employees doing this kind of hand labor. Hence, doing a few million perennial liners is not a problem, either psychologically or practically; they are made with the same cheerful enthusiasm with which we do the groundcovers.

This year we have included grass, grass-like, and perennial liners in the catalog—the two sizes, or cell types, are: the 38 count plug tray and the deep 50 plug tray. There are several deep 50 trays out there and when we can figure out the codes we try to order the square ones and not the octagonal ones because there is more volume in the square. To go along with this liner listing our high-priced highly skilled computer wrangler and sales manager person has done some research and determined what the market price is for these liners. You can only imagine my joy and finding this out.

We have patent licensing agreements with High Country Gardens, Chicagoland Grows®, Intrinsic Perennial Gardens, Hebron, Illinois, and with the

University of Minnesota for ‘MinnBlueA’ Blue Heaven™ Little Bluestem, and a few others. While on that subject we thank Roy Diblik of Northwind Perennial Gardens for deliberately and stubbornly not patenting *Panicum* ‘Northwind’, *Sporobolus* het. ‘Tara’, and *Allium* ‘Summer Beauty’. And while on the subject of *Sporobolus* we learned something this last year and at great personal cost. We learned that *Sporobolus* grows really fast and immediately gets root bound in whatever plug tray we make it in, both the seed variety and the ‘Tara’ division made plant. Last summer we lost sales for some ten thousand gallons of our own *sporobolus* while fielding complaints from customers. I finally myself went out to the grass container area and banged a few gallons out to see why there was not much rooting going on. Things were really clear. In the future we will recommend that the transplanter supervisor person furnish the crew with utility knives to slice the root ball some. This is good advice for both the customer and our own crews. It is moments like this that make me wake up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat staring at the ceiling.

Going back to the grass selections, you will note that we described ‘Blue Heaven’™ in the catalog without listing it and that was a little oversight because it was dropped for diminishing sales. It is a really nice Little Bluestem, good summer color, good fall color, and no lodging. One of the more stranger things that we have noticed is the influence of the native/nativar business is having. It appears that lodging (falling over whenever there is good rainfall and rich soil involved) is the latest attractive thing to have in the landscape because it harkens back to the original *Schizachyrium scoparium* seed grown native. And for those who so desire that attractive quality we offer ‘The Blues’ which has good color and falls over.

Going back to perennial liners, we make these at whatever times of the year do not interfere with our primary goal of sticking five million *pachysandra* cuttings and *pachysandra* wants to be stuck between July 1 and September 15 although we have several creative ways of extending the season both ways. Mostly we force perennial stock plants in February and March, take the cuttings in the spring and sell whenever they are well rooted—sometime in June and on. Being naturally stubborn, several years ago, I attempted to build up stock of the *Rudbeckias* ‘American Gold

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Rush PP#28,498 and 'Glitters Like Gold' PP#30,933 by sticking flower stalks, which is all we had by the time I got the itch to over-produce these plants. As we say at moments like this—it was a learning experience—so in the future we would like you to get your orders in early, maybe in March sometime, so that I will not have to learn things all over again.

While studying our price list you may notice that prices have inched up a little which is not nearly what I had in mind. Our sales manager wants everyone to love him and so he did not heed my instructions—maybe he does not need my love, anyhow, we hope that will be enough so that we will be able to compete for labor with the local factories, landscapers, and farmers in our area. So far we are fortunate to have a stable experienced labor force.

The market continually surprises. If it was something rational and predictable, then it would not have been a surprise and I am talking about *Pachysandra terminalis* 'Green Carpet' #1 containers. This market is hot, on the north side of 20,000 gallons per year. And, needless to say, our historic production system has proven inadequate. We used to always have some left over, and soon to be over-grown, trays of *pachysandra*. We would take a handful of these with rhizomes going all over the place and pot them into the #1 pot and then trim them and wait and then trim them some more until the tops were really thick and well branched. The problem is that we have yet to figure out how to get the roots from a transplanted *pachysandra* to go to the bottom of a pot, which would not be a problem except that we have trained our entire crew, from inventory people to pickup people to sales people, that we do not sell plants until the roots fill the container at least enough to hold all of the dirt. Finally, this last summer I suggested to the sales personages that if they ever wanted to take an order for 'Green Carpet' gallons they would have to get the customer psychologically prepared for the roots to miss the last two inches of dirt in the bottom of the pot. We looked at perched water table and all, to no avail. The customers took them as that is what we had, we had fits of conscience qualms, and now we are producing only by direct sticking 8-9 cuttings per #1 container. For reasons that cannot even be guessed at, when a sticking roots in the container the roots go straight down easily and cheerfully right to

the bottom with nice white roots with fuzzy root hairs and everything. It will take us a little while to chew through the three-year old partially rooted ones and then we will be back to normal, which means a good night's sleep with minimal conscience qualms.

Returning to the grown together over-grown *pachysandra* peat pot problem we now have a solution which is to remember to order the #70000488 from Jiffy that is a 2.5 x 3 inch Peat Strip Pot in a thin 32 cell Polypak holder. This thing stops root interaction with its neighbors. Thus we end up with a peat pot that will last a few months longer than it takes for the peat to completely disintegrate. The new product makes for a really good product for landscape installation. All we need now is some consistency at this end. You will be informed.

You will notice, on the opposing page, and assuming that the computer people got it right, a current liner list as of right now. These were made last winter or summer and are ready to ship now in the middle of winter. Note the number of trays and the type of tray and overlook the abbreviations except to note that Rud. means *Rudbeckia*. Prices would not fit so you will need to look them up in the aforementioned lime-green catalog. Because of space issues varieties with fewer than 20 flats were left off.

The very first plant is dune grass so technically this is not a liner but a finished product ready to plant out. Therefore, for symmetry and consistency, we should mention the *Liriope spicata* we have in both the 2 ½" SVD pot and the 32 plug tray 5,000 + flats. These are our grass-like plants, just remember to not spray them with Confront®, a broad leaf weed killer that is safe around grasses, but not *liriope*s or *carex*es even though they look like grasses.

Come June we will send out another liner availability list that shows what we produced this winter (2020-2021). The list will include 400,000 *carex* plugs of twenty or thirty varieties and 500,000 grasses plugs and a whole bunch of perennials. Yet this spring we can do great quantities of: *Chelone lyonii* 'Hot Lips' and *Penstemon digitalis* 'Pocahontas' PP#24,804 which is far superior to 'Husker Red' and probably a few other things. Also fairly good quantities of *Vernonia*, *Veronica*, and *Veronicastrum*, assuming that we can keep the names straight. Hope this assists in your production plans.

**Grass Liners**

683	<i>Ammophila breviligulata</i>	32ct
90	<i>Bouteloua curtipendula</i>	18ct
188	<i>Bouteloua gracilis</i> (Bad River)	18ct
385	<i>Calamagrostis</i> a. 'Karl Foerster'	18ct
44	<i>Calamagrostis brachytricha</i>	50ct
159	<i>Calamagrostis brachytricha</i>	18ct
60	<i>Carex appalachica</i>	50ct
74	<i>Carex appalachica</i>	18ct
35	<i>Carex bicknellii</i>	50ct
36	<i>Carex bicknellii</i>	18ct
95	<i>Carex emoryi</i>	18ct
104	<i>Carex emoryi</i>	50ct
404	<i>Carex flacca</i> (aka <i>Carex glauca</i> )	18ct
43	<i>Carex</i> 'Ice Dance'	50ct
174	<i>Carex</i> 'Ice Dance'	18ct
164	<i>Carex jamesii</i>	18ct
172	<i>Carex jamesii</i>	50ct
39	<i>Carex lacustris</i>	50ct
41	<i>Carex lacustris</i>	18ct
94	<i>Carex pennsylvanica</i> 'Straw Hat' PP29432	18ct
25	<i>Carex sprengelii</i>	50ct
115	<i>Carex sprengelii</i>	18ct
119	<i>Carex stricta</i>	18ct
78	<i>Carex vulpinoidea</i>	18ct
51	<i>Chasmanthium latifolium</i>	18ct
56	<i>Deschampsia cespitosa</i>	50ct
28	<i>Deschampsia</i> c. 'Goldtau'	50ct
45	<i>Deschampsia</i> c. 'Goldtau'	18ct
36	<i>Deschampsia</i> c. 'Pixie Fountain'	50ct
85	<i>Deschampsia</i> c. 'Pixie Fountain'	18ct
37	<i>Eragrostis spectabilis</i>	50ct
163	<i>Eragrostis spectabilis</i>	18ct
109	<i>Miscanthus</i> s. 'Little Kitten'	18ct
68	<i>Molinia</i> 'Moorflamme'	18ct
45	<i>Panicum virgatum</i>	50ct
71	<i>Panicum virgatum</i>	18ct
54	<i>Panicum</i> v. 'Heavy Metal'	18ct
250	<i>Panicum</i> v. Ruby Ribbons ( PP17944)	18ct
525	<i>Panicum</i> v. 'Shenandoah'	18ct
162	<i>Pennisetum</i> a. 'Hameln'	50ct
223	<i>Pennisetum</i> a. 'Hameln'	18ct
27	<i>Pennisetum</i> a. 'Little Bunny'	18ct
60	<i>Pennisetum</i> a. 'Little Bunny'	50ct
60	<i>Pennisetum</i> a. 'Piglet' PP19074	50ct
203	<i>Pennisetum</i> a. 'Piglet' PP19074	18ct
60	<i>Pennisetum</i> a. 'Red Rocket' PP28715	18ct
229	<i>Schizachyrium scoparium</i>	32ct
27	<i>Schizachyrium</i> s. 'Carousel' PP20948	50ct
58	<i>Schizachyrium</i> s. 'Carousel' PP20948	18ct
125	<i>Sporobolus</i> h. 'Tara'	50ct
493	<i>Sporobolus</i> h. 'Tara'	32ct
1,027	<i>Sporobolus</i> h. 'Tara'	18ct
106	<i>Sporobolus heterolepis</i>	50ct
261	<i>Sporobolus heterolepis</i>	50ct
456	<i>Sporobolus heterolepis</i>	18ct
695	<i>Sporobolus heterolepis</i>	32ct

**Perennial Liners**

27	<i>Achillea</i> 'Oertel's Rose'	38ct
109	<i>Alchemilla</i> m. 'Thriller'	18ct
216	<i>Allium cernuum</i>	10ct
34	<i>Allium senescens</i> 'Blue Eddy'	72ct
127	<i>Allium senescens</i> 'Blue Eddy'	10ct
70	<i>Allium senescens</i> ssp. <i>glaucum</i>	50ct
156	<i>Allium</i> 'Summer Beauty'	50ct
415	<i>Allium</i> 'Summer Beauty'	10ct
377	<i>Allium</i> Summer Peek-a-Boo®	10ct
24	<i>Allium thunbergii</i> 'Ozawa'	10ct
435	<i>Allium</i> 'Windy City' PP28100	10ct
57	<i>Amsonia ciliata</i> 'Halfway to Arkansas'	38ct
43	<i>Amsonia</i> 'Midway to Montana'	38ct
747	<i>Asclepias tuberosa</i>	10ct
112	<i>Astilbe</i> 'Vision in Red'	18ct
40	<i>Baptisia</i> 'Lavender Rose' PP25876	38ct
32	<i>Baptisia</i> 'Lunar Eclipse' PP25875	38ct
28	<i>Baptisia</i> 'Midnight' PP20432	38ct
27	<i>Baptisia</i> 'Mojito' PP25987	38ct
24	<i>Baptisia</i> 'Solar Flare' PP20408	38ct
109	<i>Calamintha nepeta</i> ssp. <i>nepeta</i>	38ct
60	<i>Dianthus</i> 'Fuchsia Fire' PPAF	38ct
53	<i>Echinacea purpurea</i> PowWow® White	18ct
156	<i>Echinacea purpurea</i> 'White Swan'	18ct
30	<i>Eupatorium</i> 'Summer Snow' PP31128	38ct
33	<i>Eurybia divaricata</i> (aka <i>Aster divaricatus</i> )	38ct
62	<i>Geranium macrorrhizum</i> 'Bevan's Variety'	38ct
130	<i>Hemerocallis</i> 'Hyperion'	38ct
50	<i>Heuchera</i> 'Autumn Bride' (villosa)	18ct
25	<i>Heuchera</i> 'Palace Purple'	50ct
30	<i>Monarda</i> 'Marshall's Delight'	38ct
40	<i>Nepeta</i> 'Blue Wonder'	38ct
31	<i>Nepeta</i> 'Kit Cat'	38ct
359	<i>Nepeta</i> 'Walker's Low'	38ct
28	<i>Perovskia</i> a. 'Little Spire'	38ct
43	<i>Perovskia atriplicifolia</i>	38ct
40	<i>Phlox divaricata</i> 'Blue Moon'	38ct
88	<i>Phlox</i> p. 'Jeana'	38ct
28	<i>Platycodon</i> g. 'Astra Blue'	18ct
62	<i>Rud. Viette's Little Suzy</i> (fulgida 'Blovi')	38ct
13	<i>Rud. x</i> 'American Gold Rush' PP28498	38ct
89	<i>Rud. x</i> 'Glitter's Like Gold' PP30933	38ct
58	<i>Salvia</i> n. 'Sixteen Candles' PPAF	38ct
78	<i>Sedum spectabile</i> 'Autumn Fire'	38ct
73	<i>Stachys officinalis</i> 'Hummelo'	38ct
36	<i>Stachys</i> x 'Summer Crush' PP29899	38ct
53	<i>Stachys</i> x 'Summer Romance' PP30243	38ct
29	<i>Vernonia</i> 'Summer's Surrender' PP28475	38ct
39	<i>Vernonia</i> 'Summer's Swan Song' PP28556	38ct
23	<i>Veronica</i> 'Blue Yonder' PP27284	72ct
35	<i>Veronica</i> 'Blue Yonder' PP27284	10ct
54	<i>Veronica</i> 'Blue Yonder' PP27284	32ct
61	<i>Veronica</i> 'Blue Yonder' PP27284	38ct
69	<i>Veronica</i> 'Kiss the Sky' PP31665	38ct
24	<i>Veronica</i> 'Spike' PP27814	38ct

Recently and because it is snowing and in the middle of winter I was reading my Noel Kingsbury *Gardening with Perennials* book, subtitled; Lessons from Chicago's Lurie Garden. This garden is in the middle of Chicago. It was designed mostly by Piet Oudolf, the Dutch landscape designer who is the latest. The garden has lots of color in it with big swaths of salvias which have by now intermixed and self-seeded and who knows what else happens when we are not watching to the point that I have a salvia seed selection called "Lurie's Hybrids" that, disappointingly, is not a big seller or even a big give away plant. Anyhow, here are some of his quotes:

"I am not a color gardener at all, I choose plants for their good structure, especially if it is long-lasting and a plant is only worth growing if it looks good when it's dead". I think he means dormant instead of dead, a fine point. He avoids plants that are colorful but look a mess after flowering. Not to show off or anything but we have lots of cutting stock of *Stachys monieri* 'Hummelo' and *Salvia nemorosa* 'Wesuwe'. We even have lots of stock of *Scutellaria incana* which Piet's sidekick Colleen says is a "Great, great plant". Purportedly it has good fall color with

red, purple, and bronze tones. I would not know—it looked like a large natural native plant the last time I looked and those words are usually used to describe a weed. Piet is a purist about some things, but his plant palette consists of half American natives and half normal plants but what do we know, we just grow what the market can bear.

On a personal note, every so often someone asks if I plan on selling the nursery. My immediate response is that my personal plans have almost nothing to do with finding someone smart enough to have a lot of money because they also have to be dumb enough to want to buy a job. Short of a miracle I have every intention of continuing in the nursery ownership, but not nursery work, experience. It is fun to show up every few weeks and tell everyone to work harder. It is fun to make plans for earth moving and poly house building. It is fun to tour botanical gardens and the display gardens at other nurseries always looking for the magic next hot plant. And I anticipate that it will be fun to make a little money every now and again.

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