

LEAFTER

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We get, at the office, many periodicals and one of them is *Country Folks Grower* out of Palatine Bridge, NY. It has pictures, so I regularly leaf through it, ever optimistic. Recently they ran a feel-good article entitled “Learning how to turn off your stress switches” which is a review of a wellness program named “Stress Free You” founded by Matt Rush and Rich Taylor. And to quote: “According to the duo, people were born and designed to live a life of love, joy, peace and a sound mind. Stress should be an occasional experience based on a response to a dangerous or overwhelming situation”. Apparently, these people have not studied how life was back in Neanderthal times when there was the stress of going hungry every day and then of being trampled by a mastodon while working on the hunger problem, but I like their attitude. They publish books, of course, and one of them lists 108 stress switches that can be turned off. The best most useful advice gleaned from this article is the recommendation to not watch sports. Watching sports triggers a sympathetic stress reaction. They recommend that people spend the majority of their time in a parasympathetic state. I was busy trying to relax so did not look up the definition of that last term.

We are in the wholesale nursery business and this has been an above average good spring shipping season. I sense that our sales personages are in a bit of a stress position, but they are holding up well and when they start to lag I remind them that I paid them all winter to sit around looking out the window at the snow falling and laughing and carrying on. I will let you know how this has helped their stress level here in the busy season.

Our job is to have the plant material ready when our customers want it and then to deliver it. Our job is to relieve stress. It is my opinion that the landscaper person has enough stress working in a different location every few days, dealing with the public in all their glory, and then when it is all done, trying to collect. There is a reason I am not a landscaper. My final thoughts are that it is better to have a good year than a bad year. And this brings up the delicate subject of us running low on plant material from time to time when our entire goal in life is to be a reliable supplier; actually, our entire goal is to never miss a sale. Our loyal customers may wonder why smart people, such as ourselves, got caught up short. First of all, we have never had three good years in a row, with a fourth one looming up for next year. Second of all, if we were prepared for maximum production during the best of times we would have long since gone broke during the poorer of times because producing our kinds of plants—groundcovers and perennials—involves a large capital investment in everything from gravel roadways to a skilled experienced cadre of middle level management. The reason that we are here today is because we have scraped through times of recession, inflation, wars, floods, droughts, and changing trucking laws. We are lucky to be here at all.

The purpose of this newsletter is to bring to you, the customer, good useful information now that we have survived the spring busy season and the summer busy season is upon us. The good news is that if

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you are reading this, then you are a survivor of the spring. Mainly we want to give you reassurances that we are working hard with the goal of being a reliable supplier. As an example, we started sticking pachysandra March 1, 2021 and will continue until early November; this after maximum production all of 2020. In the middle of June we will begin trimming the tall new growth from 12,000 flats that we rooted last year and forced under heat this winter and spring unless we have sold these to our good customers already. Our customers used to complain about the plants being too tall, although they were growing exactly like they were created to grow, and now, instead of complaining about the complaining, we are trimming at every opportunity to get a lower more branched product. More recently the customers have not mentioned tall pachysandra, being happy to be able to get any at all. In conclusion, we think this production scheme will provide us with a reliable steady supply of good well rooted plants all season long.

We started out in the groundcover business and probably because my parents did not care much about growing things that involved flowers and beauty—they wanted to make some money after a lifetime of being farmers, which is not a good way to make money, and had very little to do with beauty. Our major product, to this day, is Pachysandra ‘Green Carpet’ which we offer in gallons, of all the strange things, and quarts which used to be a 4 ½” thing and are now a 3 ¾” square thing, plus three kinds of 32 to a 10-20 tray pot things. In the price list you will see 32 ct, which means the plastic 2 ½” SVD pot (which, of course, is marketed by the plastics supplier as a 3” pot), and a 32 ct Peat, which is a 2 ½” peat pot from Jiffy Peat, and a 32 ct plug, which used to be a Root Tutor™ in olden times and has now changed. That information was tedious but important because last summer due to petroleum costs plastic resin was in short supply and we did not get in our SVD’s in time and so we made lots more plug and peat pot trays than expected while patiently awaiting, as we had to keep the cutting and sticking crews going at full speed during the peak propagation season.

The plug tray has a fraction of the dirt volume of the other pots but is a real convenience to handle as two can be carried in each hand and after planting someone does not have to chase plastic pots after the

wind has blown them all over the lawn. This pak is becoming more popular for those reasons. Peat pots are an whole another story and one fraught with much emotion. We have a few customers who cannot live without them and many customers who cannot live with them, and both border on the irrational although any customer who buys pachysandra from us must be a basically rational sentient being. These days the peat pot is coming with something called “A Jiffy Poly Pak” which is some really thin cellophane-type of plastic liner that fits in the tray and has peat pots pre-fitted into it. What this means is that the peat pot acts like a plastic pot in that the rhizomes (which are those white things that look like roots but are not) are constrained and do not run all over like the mycelium does in tempeh when the *Rhizopus* species fungus makes filaments that, and I quote: “bind the beans together in a mouldy mass.” On second thought, that may not be helpful information unless you are a vegetarian who has to eat moldy soy beans in order to get enough protein.

Anyhow, the peat pot pachysandra we have now is thick, healthy, well-rooted, and easy to pop out of the tray and its little plastic cup without disturbing the root ball. This is a good deal if you are able to over-come the psychological problem, for which, I think, there is therapy available. As for the SVD plastic pot, we now have a lot of it and more coming on every day.

Another trend in the groundcover/perennial growing business is grasses, and by this we mean native prairie grasses, European and Asian grasses, carexes, and *Liriope spicata*. These are all green and have blades and are not necessarily related to each other at all. This is now a major part of our business. It reminds me of the big push in olden times for all kinds of *hemerocallis* and *hosta* when they were in fad. I have even overcome my aversion to seed grown plants (therapy again) and we are growing the native prairie grasses from seed: *Sporobolus*, *Chasmanthium*, *Bouteloua*, and *Little Bluestem*. We also grow lots of *Calamagrostis brachytricha* from seed. The latter we cannot foist off as a native because the common name is Korean Feather Reed Grass. It is very showy.

Right now we have a pretty good supply of liners, just coming on from winter propagation, of

Sporobolus h. 'Tara' which is the improved seed variety of the native prairie grass, Northern Dropseed. 'Tara' has an upright habit more so than the more flowing habit of the seed variety. It also has a more prominent seed head—again of an upright nature. It is not seed propagated. It looks different. We have some liners of that controversial native selection *Bouteloua gracilis* 'Blonde Ambition' PP# 22,048 for which we are licensed. This plant is controversial because it often dies in the winter. We have many internal debates here at Twixwood about the ethics of offering this plant to the trade. I say that it is our job to put the correct name on all of our plants and, after that, to write about what we know and do not know about the plant's hardiness. We cannot know about its hardiness because we are near Lake Michigan and about a zone and a half warmer than the rest of the Midwest. We think that soil drainage is critical to this plant in that it lives in sand and dies in clay. Other than that minor difficulty it is a spectacularly showy plant with strikingly blond seed heads toping out at about three feet.

We used to grow grasses in three sizes of containers—1, 2, and 3 gallon sizes. Then we noticed that the market for 3 gallons material was going up so we have limited our offerings in the 2 gallon size. We may seem like country rubes, isolated as we are out here in rural Michigan, but we try to keep up with people who know what they are doing and thus we see that our colleague, Midwest Groundcovers, is switching over from a #3 to a #2 pot on most of their grass offerings. We do not know if this marketing change is because of much deep research or if they are doing what we do all of the time—make a wild guess and then hope. And so you now have choices as to which size of containers your grasses come in.

The grass business is really strange—a few years ago the fad was to find as many different panicums in red or blue-gray as possible. And then everyone and their dog went looking for the ideal Little Bluestem, good color, no lodging, whatever, and then the unpatented selection 'The Blues' came back into popularity because, while it had that unnatural nice blue color, it had the very naturalistic habit of lodging (flopping over any time it got fertilized or watered or both at the same time) and people now like things looking like nature. All of this is tough

on us growers because sometimes we use logic and common sense in deciding which plants to grow for the market. At other times we go with our own (completely unsophisticated) sense of aesthetics. So far, begging, pleading even, to our customers has not gotten us any better information as to market trends.

Speaking of kind-of grass-like plants, there are the carexes. I have lost track of how many varieties we have in production—it is twenty or thirty something—and we are looking for more because this is the next big thing. We have the system figured out for successfully propagating carex. We also have our production people and facilities set up to match those nuances. Therefore, either tell us what to grow or ask us what we have in stock because, to me, they all look alike. We are almost up to speed on *Carex pensylvanica* again after the fiasco of several years ago receiving mis-labelled *Carex* pen. which was really *Carex rosea*. The offending nursery that we suspect the most for selling us mis-labelled plants is located many states away, so all local midwestern people are innocent.

Because I am worried about being too successful I have been looking in the local wood lots on my farms for more things to grow and have found *Podophyllum peltatum* and *Allium tricoccum*. We now know how to grow these two fine spring ephemerals and can make many more as soon as we get some hint that there is a market out there. May Apple we grow mostly in gallons and Ramp we grow mostly in an SVD pot. We prefer to sell these spring ephemerals in August and September when they look like a pot of dirt after the foliage has dried up and blown away. These really good ideas of mine do not make me happy because my second thought is why I did not think of this scam sooner.

One of the many things about the wholesale nursery business that is changing is our shipping methods. Preferably we ship on our own racks in our own trucks. That only works well within a six hour radius. We have recently discovered light-duty one-way wooden racks which, for the cost of an extra \$90 a rack, we can ship FedEx Freight, which we are doing these days all over the country. Shipping our product in this manner makes the most sense when it is liners that we are shipping because they are short and light. This reminds me of the early days when

my parents sent me to the local KFC franchisor to get pick up truck loads of wire-bound lettuce crates. We would drop a tray of groundcover in one of those crates and haul them to the local Greyhound bus station where they were loaded into the suitcase bins. I am trying to not get sentimental about olden times, and even more so trying to not give away my age; I am only telling this to show that we are now up with the ever changing times.

Speaking of shipping, a few years ago I changed our business model and we now have 100 CC racks to sell. The CC rack was invented years ago by Container Centralen over in Europe and what we have is a cheap Chinese knock-off which reminds me that some of my staff suggested that I not say the words: "cheap Chinese knockoff" when trying to unload something and I replied that few believed me anyhow so it did not matter much what I said, and besides, the memory is slowing down so I am telling the truth more often these days. These are lightly used. These things have wheels and adjustable shelves and are narrow, call Wadia for pricing.

Speaking of selling things we do not need we have 15,000 one foot by two foot 3.3" deep roof top trays now for sale. I have been changing the nursery business model, as mentioned, and besides the roof top sedum business has changed and it never did quite fit with our established customer base as it involved tall buildings and architects and union roofing contractors. Also, these days the green roofs are installed over a rubber membrane with the sedum grown like sod and rolled over the gravel base which is cheaper than using these trays. The trays are pressure molded from HDPE high density polyethylene plastic and the wall thickness is 150 mil thick. They are very tough as they are designed to last for years. They appear nearly indestructible to me. I have been using some for vinca minor propagation trays, as they were just sitting around. And then someone told me that we might be able to sell them for \$10 each and so they are all for sale. We will even supply you with 72 plugs of sedum to put in them and you too can be in the green roof business yourself and if you are really prospering at it we can sell you the \$30,000+ mold that we own.

The original intent of this Leaflet, which was for it to arrive in the mail about June 1 and to sell all

of the perennial plug liners that we have been making all winter and spring. Perennial liners are selling as fast as we can make them without my extolling of their virtues. Our computer jockey/sales manager is earning his keep by adjusting the production schedule almost daily to meet demand. It helps a great deal that our fellow perennial liner producers have been lowering the level of expectations and so now a vernalized perennial plug is not expected. This makes our life much easier because we do not have to carry everything over winter. It also makes our lives easier now that we can sleep at night without worrying about ethical dilemmas. We have kept field stock of most of whatever varieties we have ever been growing, even though we have not sold enough and dropped them from the catalog. Thus, we can produce liners of many varieties at will. Availability is changing weekly.

Here is some other information; 'Ralph Shugert' Vinca minor which is a variegated sport of 'Bowles', or 'La Grave' if you are British, and which does not revert as do all other variegated plants. We have lots of little 105 plugs that survived the winter outside and are ready to transplant up into 2 1/2" pots or whatever. In fact, I made more than was scheduled and these are extras and no one is complimenting me on my prescience so this is an opportunity for you to help reinstate my reputation for predicting the future accurately. Let us know which package you prefer.

This reminds me that after pachysandra the next major plant we grow is Vinca minor, both the 'Bowles' and the 'Dart's Blue' strains, of which we are experiencing a brief shortage. In anticipation of 2021 sales we made 1.6 million little plugs of vinca, which are all nicely rooted now and growing and being plugged into 2 1/2" pots or cells or whatever as fast as we can spring some workers away from shipping work. Once the plug is rooted and established such that the roots are not disturbed when pulled, they make up a saleable plant is as little as six weeks. Ten thousand flats have been potted up with another ten thousand probably being done by the time you read this and the rest will be plugged in all summer long. We may have run short here for a few weeks, but at the least we have figured out a good, workable, reliable production system for this fine plant.

If you read the price list/plant catalogue care-

fully you will note a rigid schedule of when an order has to be placed before it can be delivered on schedule. Mr. Freud and I can explain a few things about the toilet training of those who put this in the price list, but some might be sensitive about that plus it would take up valuable space. Our entire shipping system, up and down the line, is set up to provide good customer service. Sometimes the trucks are chockablock full and things are impossible and sometimes the plants are at a remote growing area and it is impossible, but we do not want to miss a sale if there are any way to be had. We still encourage you to get this information to us in a timely manner so that we can then provide good service to those other benighted souls who are not so organized and considerate. These things are called “add-ons” and they are the bane of the sales personage’s existence—I consider them to be the highest profit item that we can sell, which does not help the sales personage’s lives any. The truck is going to the customer’s address, the sale will be lost if the delivery is missed, it is a terrible dilemma to be in. Maybe I should not have chosen to be in the nursery business, but it is too late now.

Business is so good these days that we are getting new customers from all over and we did not even have to attend winter trade shows and clean up and act happy and cheerful and sometimes even hug people who stop by the booth in order to attract the business. The problem now is me remembering their names. I used to drive the truck and then remember our customer base—those days are long over. I guess that when there is an over-all plant shortage people are able to find us. It must be the internet and our website and the good work of our social media person who works from home so that I do wonder if she is working or just cashing the weekly checks. Maybe I will feel better about her now that I think about it and see all of the new business coming in.

Also, we are selling more and more to garden centers. A few years back we were still learning how to grow container perennials and so our quality for how the plants looked was a little shaky. The plants were true to name and well rooted but unless spaced and trimmed and sometimes forced they did not move well at the garden center where aesthetics and perception and presentation are all that matters.

We have augmented the plant care staff all the while telling them that it matters and now the plants look good most of the time. This trimming and spacing is a whole new concept.

And so, as you can see, we spend most of our energies bustling around trying to make as many plants of whatever sizes that the market desires. Sometimes I have a little extra energy and thus make plants for sentimental (read irrational) reasons and that explains the batch of wildly overgrown spindly, because of being too close together, *Persicaria polymorpha*, a plant that gets 8’ tall when given the chance and a favorite of Piet Oudolf and Wolfgang Oehme. I am not certain if those two people agreeing on anything is an endorsement or should be taken as a warning. This plant has big leaves and some big white flowering spike thing on top with a long bloom time. It is some hybrid out of Finland, so it is hardy. The latest information is that after a dozen years or so it sends out suckers, so it will spread some. I have said that there is a place for everything and this is true of this fine plant and the reason that Wolfgang Oehme said they used it when landscaping Oprah Winfrey’s eighty acre spread in NW Indiana, since sold. From a quarter of a mile away one does not want to be looking at little rock garden plants. If you just have to have it, we got it, and please do not sue us.

Next, we have some *Acorus gramineus* ‘Ogon’ that we would like to foist off upon the unsuspecting public. It is not that bad a plant, except for being a gaudy yellow much like Golden Vicary Privet. I like it because it is easy to grow, propagate, and we have lots of stock plants. It will live on dry land but thrives when it has wet feet. Japanese Sweet Flag. We think it is a Zone 5 plant

Speaking of lots of easy to grow, we have hundreds or thousands of flats of *Liriope spicata* in both the 2 ½” SVD plastic pot and the 32 plug tray. When these have been around long enough to get their rhizomes started they make up a gallon pot in a big hurry, much better and faster than when a bare root is purchased out of the Deep South. We do not part with these cheap and the reason is because any time we have to handle a plant—divide it, sort it out, and pot it up—there is a cost and it does not matter exactly which plant it is. This plant is hardy in Chicago. It spreads rapidly. It will grow in hard packed

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clay and gravel. It looks like green grass and does not require mowing, thus ideal for traffic and parking lot islands.

Now that we have figured out that all money is green, we avoid talking politics, however, I need to vaguely reference politics because wage inflation is upon us. You can pick your favorite bogeyman, all we want to do is to stay in the business and to stay in business we are busily raising wages in order to compete with the local factories, landscapers, construction companies, and the odd farmer. We have a good trained crew, which makes the business much easier to run. We plan on keeping them. We plan on raising prices next year. I suggest that you consider stocking up on all kinds of plants this fall so that you will have them for next year, save some money, and so that we will have money to spend this winter making more plants. Try to figure out how to keep them alive during the winter as not all survive outside. Keep working.

Tom Krinel



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Liriope

Qty	Name	Size
6,707	Liriope m. 'Big Blue'	#1 Pot
629	Liriope m. 'Big Blue'	10ct Flat
244	Liriope m. 'Big Blue'	32ct Flat
86	Liriope m. 'Big Blue'	32ct Plug Flat
2,267	Liriope m. 'Silvery Sunproof'	#1 Pot
223	Liriope m. 'Silvery Sunproof'	10ct Flat
19,836	Liriope spicata	#1 Pot
830	Liriope spicata	10ct Flat
2,916	Liriope spicata	32ct Flat
726	Liriope spicata	32ct Plug Flat

Grasses

Qty	Name	Size
352	Calamagrostis a. 'Karl Foerster'	18ct Flat
258	Carex appalachica	18ct Flat
221	Festuca x 'Cool As Ice' PP27651	50ct Plug
231	Miscanthus s. 'Gracillimus'	18ct Flat
238	Panicum v. 'Shenandoah'	18ct Flat
385	Sesleria autumnalis	32ct Flat
782	Sesleria autumnalis	18ct Flat
786	Sporobolus h. 'Tara'	32ct Flat