

# LEAFLET

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

WINTER 2021 1

Looking back at the Leaflets that I have written in the white heat of optimism making claims about how many plants we will have for sale that year the more I think that Yogi Berra was right: “It is tough to make predictions, especially about the future.” In the past five years of writing these things I have been wrong numerous times, but, being more stubborn than smart, I am going to do it again. One of the side benefits of my past predictions is that I am getting more and more better at making excuses to our sales manager and he is getting less and less gullible, a win-win situation all around. To our faithful customers all I can say is that we have an incentive to make lots of plants—we have finally figured out that is how we make money in the nursery business—and then we want to get the reputation for being a reliable supplier of plant material, all of which involves making lots of plants.

The purpose of this, the first Leaflet of 2022, is to comment upon and explain the messages included in our new price list/catalog. You are supposed to conclude, from a close study of this expensive publication: that we are still in business, that we are working hard and thinking all the time, that we are optimistic about being in business far into the future, and that there is still some fire in the belly. I am assisting you in which conclusions to draw in case you cannot figure it out on your own. You will see that we have dropped plants that did not sell well enough for us to bother with all the administrative expenses of growing them, that we keep adding liners as we think they are a higher value product than our standbys, the groundcovers, which are all by now commodified. We are still going to attempt to flood the market with them as long as they are easy to sell and because they are our reputation.

Production is going full bore all winter long with however many workers we can keep on and by April 1 all one million square feet of poly house space will be full. Besides that, you may have noticed a price increase. This goes back to making predictions—we are trying to do economic forecasting about future inflation rates which, if we were good at, we would be working on Wall Street and not earning an honest living getting our hands dirty. Anyhow, we are going to do whatever it takes to keep our stable and skilled work force of 167 personages intact in spite of competition for good workers from every small factory, big farm, construction business, or landscaper in the area, all the while planning on not raising prices during the calendar year. There is the usual internal debate going on here at the nursery—the sales people want the customers to love them while the owners would like to make a little money to enjoy life before it is too late. Now that you mention it, I am assuming that you are not all that interested in our personal lives.

Speaking of winter work, we have found from long experience which comes from making many mistakes that winter is the best time for production of carexes, ornamental grasses, hardy geraniums, and vinca minor. Some of this work is counterintuitive which is why one needs to make lots of mistakes along the way. We have comfortable and heated indoor space set up for this work. We also starting up heating our double poly

## 2 2021 WINTER

houses the third week in February that have plants we need for cuttings, or to get more growth on for May sales. In our area by that time we are getting some sunshine for heat load during the day and the days are getting longer, so more sunshine. It is not ethical to plant these heated—the technical term is ‘forced’ plants—outside before the last frost-free date, which is May 10 in our area. We mull over ethical dilemmas and usually conclude that it is the landscapers who are sinning and not us. We are just selling to sentient, and theoretically professional, beings. Following are some commentaries about the price list listings.

We are stubbornly propagating *Arctostaphylos* every winter. Last year it all rooted a bunch and then every last one of them died from some root rot thing that we think we have enough fungicide drenches on hand to correct even though we kept them under cover all summer to avoid the rains. We got 2,000 cuttings from our stock plants of *uva-ursi* ‘Morton’, PPAF, Illini Beauty™ that the Morton Arboretum people found growing on some limestone outcropping up by Waukegan. Theoretically this should thrive in normal—which means not acidic—soil types. When we get this wired you will be the first to know as it will be the ideal groundcover—evergreen, nice pink blooms, low growing spreading, disease free. You will have to wait a couple of years while we build up stock, assuming that we figure out how to keep them alive long enough to have some stock.

*Asarum canadense* is the fuzzy gray-green version of *Asarum* european that we cannot keep alive because of some black leaf disease in mid to late summer. We can do all kinds of Canadian Ginger but need to know by early June, which is the time of year it is produced. Nice heart-shaped leaves that overlap and make a nice texture in the shade. It is an herbaceous perennial and so the foliage goes away in the winter.

Lily-of-the-Valley is something that bothers our conscience as by the end of summer the leaves are yellow streaked and then turn brown and appear to have died, very ugly. The rest of the year when it is green it is a vigorous grower invading everything around it, mostly old ladies’ flower gardens. We will have it for another year and then will have used up our stock bed. As you can see our conscience pricks us only when the stock bed is empty.

*Euonymus fortunei* ‘Coloratus’ used to be

our number one seller and then, of all the bad luck, someone out there started to suffer from good taste. Besides that the combination of crown gall and *euonymus* scale slowed it down and made it uglier. It is outlawed in Indiana and for the really dumb reason that the legislature there has confused this groundcover with the winged burning bush, an entirely different plant, a woody shrub that is invasive because it self-seeds a lot and readily and is a terrible understory plant in the woods. We grow purple leaf wintercreeper out of sentimentality for the olden days, back when we made money in this business.

We have asked around and then tried to find every possible substitute, analogue, whatever for *coloratus* that we can think of. Our thanks for this public service was to lose money on everything that we tried. Someone told us that *Symphoricarpos x chenaulti* ‘Hancock’ was a good substitute. They lied. It was thick and enthusiastic, but about two feet tall and deciduous, so ugly for half the year—at least ugly because it was bare of leaves. The rest of the year it was just plain ugly while it had leaves.

And then there was *Deutzia gracilis* ‘Nikko’ which was a round shrub that looked like a ground cover if planted close enough together. There were white flowers in the spring and good fall color, but too tall and too deciduous to be a good analogue.

Then there were the zone 6 plants—*Lonicera pileata* and *Cotoneaster salicifolius* ‘Scarlet Leader’ which were wonderful plants but we could find no one in Chicago dumb enough to buy them. And we even told the truth and they still did not buy them.

Just to show that we tried everything, we grew and listed *Hypericum calycinum* with the common name Aaron’s Beard and tried to grow for years *Paxistima canbyi* with the greatest name ever—Rat Stripper, but could not reliably propagate it. My parents grew and sold *Cotoneaster dammeri* skogholm and now Midwest has introduced *Cotoneaster dammeri* ‘Nordic Carpet® which we are all signed up to grow and is a fine plant. I have no idea of the hardness, but Midwest has a reputation for being ethical and thorough in their research. We have a nice cutting bed whenever we can drum up some business. This is a very nice looking analogue here in Michigan—low growing, evergreen, good texture from the small leaves, it is something we like the looks of.

And so we are not doing very well finding a good substitute. Maybe *Stephanandra incisa crispa* is the best one, and particularly the dwarf version that I saw many years ago in front of the office at one of Roy Klehm's businesses. Roy was watching closely, as he always did when I was around, and so I did not get any cuttings. That may have been the 'Crispa Nana' version that you can find on the Denver Botanic Gardens website. It is deciduous, but about the right height and running around habit.

*Lonicera henryi* was just recommended by the Chicago Botanical Garden people. They sent their Director of Plant Collections, one Phillip Douglas, to something called InVigorateU in Bloomington, Illinois to talk on "Expanding the Palette: Alternative Selections to Overused Plants". It will get 30' high, and I assume only when there is a 31' tree nearby, and Douglas says that it is stone cold hardy and these people would not lie to you. In looking it up on the internet I found that someone wrote that it was a "delightful evergreen honeysuckle". There is a reason that I cannot write for things like that—I would choke if I was saying that about something related to Hall's Honeysuckle. Anyhow, let us know and we will grow it for you. We used to have pride but that was so long ago that I have forgotten how it went.

*Galium odoratum* 'Bed Straw' is just the thing for making spring wine and sweetening up your bed if you do not bathe all winter. Maybe this was a big selling point back in Medieval times and not so much now. It is a cool weather plant and barely makes it through August heat. Try to control yourself and do not do what one of my conscientious employees did, which is to trim the ugly foliage all back in August, thus killing it dead. Wait until September and all is well again. It is deciduous but comes up really nice and early in the spring.

*Hedera helix* 'Thorndale' is something that we have completely lost our touch with. A few years ago we moved it from one location to another, as at that time we had six different farms, having gotten land-locked five different times. The tradition of how to care for ivy did not come with the plant and we are now sour on it. I used to like it a lot because about every five years there was a hard winter in Chicago and it all winter killed. Back then the people in Chicago were slow learners and so they would re-

plant. We have some, but not much, and if anyone wants a big hit on it, we can custom grow.

*Liriope spicata* is a new favorite as we have that production wired. We grow our own and do not buy it from the southern growers, although we have to get our Big Blue from them. We are the only people who offer *liriope* in a 32, either plug or SVD pot. We are high priced compared to the southern bare root suppliers but our plugs really take off fast when either potted up into a gallon or planted out.

All that I can say about *pachysandra* is that we are growing only the French introduction 'Green Carpet' which is glossier, sweeter smelling blooms, and a very even height, making for a nice texture. We used to propagate it eight weeks out of the year—July and August. These days we propagate it eight months out of the year—March through October—and we try to trim the new growth in June to keep it lower and more branched. We are not running out of it very much anymore. We have a strange, small, and intense market for gallons of this plant and do not understand why. In either case, we have discovered that if we direct stick it instead of potting up our overgrown stock it will root all the way to the bottom of the pot. So, that is what we are doing. Good supply and good roots.

When discussing *Vinca minor* 'Bowles' you will want to review the first paragraph of this missive, which is the one about making predictions. At least these days we have figured out which chemical to apply and do not have the black stem rot problem, which is known as phoma, any more. Phoma is caused by the fungus *Phoma macdonaldii* Boerema whereas Phomopsis is caused by a mycotoxin produced by the saprophytic fungus *Diaporthe toxica* and is not our problem. In theory we will be able to produce enough for the market this year. We have everyone we can hire working on it right now. I cannot help but use a binary sexist term here and state that we are manfully working on it. A couple of years ago I thought we had it wired and could really flood the market. We will keep trying.

We asked our computer to kick out sales last year by genus and number 1 is *Pachysandra* 'Green Carpet' followed closely by *Vinca minor* in its three varieties: 'Bowles', 'Dart's Blue', and 'Ralph Shugert'. By genus the next four big sellers are: *Carex*,

## 4 2021 WINTER

Liriope, Sporobolus, and Calamagrostis. These are all grass-like plants. I cannot over-emphasize the importance of educating anyone operating a spray gun at your place to not spray broad leaf weed killers, such as Confront®. If you look it up, and it is a Dow product, you can see what it kills and also get a few suggestions on what not to spray it on. We have found that very new seedlings of Sporobolus react poorly to being sprayed with this herbicide. Established plants do fine. And to repeat: carex and liriope may look like a grass, may be listed in the catalog along with grasses, and may be used as a grass substitute that does not need to be mowed, but they should not be treated as a grass when applying broad leaf herbicides.

As for other grass-like plants we offer *Acorus gramineus* 'Ogon' which is a taller, ten inches or so water loving gaudy yellow Japanese sweet flag. So far we have an intense but very narrow market for it as a garden center plant for color in early fall sales. We note that Midwest offers the dwarf *Acorus* as a short groundcover, so it must be halfway hardy in Chicago. Ask about it for sure. It is easy and fun to grow which proves the point that easy to grow and easy to sell are diametrically the opposite. Just my luck.

Speaking of grasses I really liked the other Brent Horvath Big Bluestems—'Indian Warrior' and 'Red October' but no one bought them so we are only offering the really dark colored 'Black Hawks' PP# 27,949. This has good ornamental value.

Next on the list is *Bouteloua gracilis* 'Blonde Ambition' PP# 22,048 and this is the cause for many interesting discussions about business ethics and morality which reminds me that in one of my earlier newsletters I stated that our responsibility, as a wholesale grower, is to get the name on the plant correct. And if something dies reliably every winter that is the responsibility of the professional landscaper to find out all about. Some people tell us that if this is planted in sandy well-drained soil it will survive the winter. We are too warm here on this side of Lake Michigan to have any idea where the limits are for cold hardiness. We will have unlimited liners available in June and these will make up a saleable gallon by August. The seed head is spectacular. We know how to propagate it and we are licensed. I am not telling my age, but there are not very many more years in here where I have an opportunity to make some money—hence the

intensity of the debates about ethics and morality between me and our sales manager. He is young so he can afford to have morals.

*Carex pensylvanica* is just like *Vinca* 'Bowles'. We think that we have the production of it wired and under control and are making enough to satisfy the market. Refer back to the first paragraph about making predictions. In fact, I am just informed that we have finished our propagation for the season with just under 400,000 splits made and potted into plugs and looking good. As you might imagine this is a cool weather grower. About 30% is reserved for our internal usage with the balance for sale as liners. We can do more next year if the market holds up, let us know. If anyone sees any other carex varieties than what we are listing that they have a burning desire for, let us know what the demand is and then get us some stock plants.

As for *Hakonechloa* Japanese Forest Grass we had a big conference a year ago that resulted in the doubling of our production numbers and we still sold out. We will get ahead of it one of these days.

Speaking of easy to grow and hard to sell, there is *Imperata cylindrica* 'Red Baron', another gaudy (this time red) plant for early fall garden center sales. It is kind of halfway well behaved for us.

Little Bluestem is 2022 Perennial Plant of the Year® and so we have resurrected the University of Minnesota introduction 'Blue Heaven'® PP# 25,202. It does not lodge. One of the stranger trends in plant fads that I have ever seen is the popularity of 'The Blues', which is an unpatented, untrademarked plant with very good blue color that lodges like mad when it rains and it is fertilized. They tell me that people like it because it has the habit of the native *Schizachyrium scoparium*. It is a strange world out there. We are producing every kind of Little Bluestem this year, in containers and in liners, that we can do, just in case there is a market for them.

One of the strangest surprises I got when getting back in the business some six years ago is alliums, which are number 9 on our dollar value list. I am still amazed that something this disease-free, this easy to propagate, and this popular exists and we can do it. If we could ever get enough 'Windy City' PP# 28,100 into field production we would have it made.

Echinaceas and Heucheras just keep on com-

ing. Whoever breeds these things must be strange, fortunately I do not have to socialize with them. We offer patented, trademarked, and Proven Winners® with abandon. Someone around here must have figured out how to space and trim them as they keep on selling. All of that color contrasts nicely with the green of our groundcover.

And now to the good stuff—liners. I like offering them in the 32 SVD pack but our sales manager wants them in the Deep 50 and 38 Plug Flat. The 38 count flat is not photographed and in the catalog, but it is well described. We abide by all the Federal laws in describing dimensions and volume. Someday I will go into details about milliliters, fluid ounces, quarts, and liters. Somewhere in here are inches. When I see that the #1 pot (nominally a one gallon thing) is now 2 ½ quarts I am reminded of what I said years ago—we are not selling televisions. That last statement was in reference to the measuring diagonally across the screen, which is what TV makers do. We can make liners of anything that is in the catalog, or that we used to list, and whatever we are licensed to grow that is patented, or whatever we can buy in tissue culture that comes with the license paid. Liners are our next big push to get into the more profitable area. Over the years I have tried miniature roses, hypertufa (using Martha Stewart's recipe), roof trays of sedum for green roofs, woody liners, Stepables™, and premium clematis all trel-lised up. It is about time that I guessed right.

Right after allium, hostas are coming back into popularity, surprising us, again. We are doing all kinds of them these days, getting the liners in from tissue culture because when field grown they get root knot nematodes and hosta virus x, otherwise known as HVX. The TC people are getting good at it and so we are back in the hosta business. All we need is feedback about the varieties and numbers. There are way too many hosta breeders out there. They should be selling Amway instead.

You will note that we are doing Proven Winners®. The way their business model is set up we do not have a competitive advantage growing them, but then no one else has one either, and so the playing field is really level. As you can see we will do anything that will fill the truck and will get the customer to buy our common groundcovers and perennials and who want

us to be the one-stop shop for their convenience. Refer back a few pages to my mentioning how losing pride has come along with age and hair loss.

Last year there was a blip or bump or something on the road to success and someone asked one of the other farms—the one that does not listen to me—to propagate liners of Geranium 'Max Frei' and they did not plan ahead and then stuck them in the heat of June, with predictable results but, as mentioned, they do not listen to me. This year they have over-compensated, not wanting to hear from me again, and have all kinds of stock plants, under cover, ready to force to cut when it is cool and perfect for geranium propagation, and they promise to do a good job. I am tending to believe them as they have too much pride to fail again.

And so, in conclusion, our business model has been to establish stock beds for cuttings or to field plant perennials on a three year cycle to produce nice clumps to divide. We are always aware of logarithmic progression when deciding how long to leave these in the ground before dividing, something also known as geometric progression, in case anyone wondered about our level of sophistication here in rural Michigan. When we have the room and there are not weed pressures or nematode contamination we like the option of storing stock plants out in the field; we then have much more flexibility. After the basic production is established, we have mostly labor input costs. Non-labor costs are the basic ones for plant production—plastic pots and bought in potting mix—we get ours from Renewed Earth up in the Kalamazoo area. They are local, they know that we are checking on them, and we get fairly good porosity and a PH stable mix. After that it is all labor, something that we are psychologically comfortable with being used to having a lot of it around. Labor is needed for making about 15 million cuttings and then sticking them. We have acres of shade or poly houses set up with intermittent mist and we faithfully attend the IPPS (International Plant Propagators Society) to learn how to do it. Much labor is, likewise, involved in dividing grasses, carexes, and hakonechloas into small splits and then potting them into cells.

Once we have a customer that we are used to doing business with, or, more likely is comfortable with our idiosyncratic business style, we like to en-

courage their business. Therefore, we will do custom grows for large jobs, or custom liner production of whatever we have stock of. We are pretty good at finding strange plants and getting them into production.

The perennial, *Chelone lyonii* 'Hot Lips' with the great common name of 'Turtlehead' is a good groundcover/perennial plant. Like all perennials, it is herbaceous, which is not too bad as it mows easily in the late fall and comes up early in the spring. We have an extra-large cutting bed along the drive to the office and so I get to admire it all year long. My trips to the office, now that you mention my second retirement, are mainly to slit open envelopes with checks in them. After the last couple of years I get to walk about telling everyone to work harder and then complaining about carpal tunnel syndrome, something I am hoping no one learns how to pronounce in Spanish. Anyhow, this chelone is about 8 inches tall, dark glossy green, very thick and even so that weeds are disheartened, and with some shocking pink blooms in late summer. We grow it in full sun. We have not sold very much of it and, upon closer inspection, I suspect that listing it as a plant 2' to 4' in height may

be the problem. We fertilize our bed and have never seen it with that growing too tall problem. Maybe I should spend a little more time proof reading the catalog instead of acting all retired. A brief internet search indicates that most people think that it is 2-3' tall, is hardy to zone 3 and is not bothered by insects, diseases, or deer. Best of all, it is a native, something we forgot to mention. North Creek Nurseries says that they introduced this plant to the trade. No better recommendation than that is possible. We propagate in April to early May, so call us by then if you want a whole bunch of it.

While studying the price list and trying to ignore the price increases you will notice that we went nuts on patented lupines. These bloom early, have about the gaudiest more prominent blooms of anything, and Walters Gardens—an entirely reputable business—says that they are an American native. *Lupinus polyphyllus* can be dead headed for more blooms and they resist deer. One source mentioned that they are short lived, but we are not going to emphasize that feature.

*Tom Kruegel*



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