

Marketing Committee Products — They're For Growers Too!



Duane Thompson
The Greenery
Omaha, NE

Good morning, fellow BPI'ers. What a great time of year this is for us. Up at 2:30 checking the houses to make sure everything is all right. Going over notes on production and space and expenses to make sure we've not forgotten a thing.

The crops are underway and the calendar tells us it is only a few weeks before we can expect a change in the direction of our cash flow. I think we're looking at a banner year for sales.

We will do all right on the growing end — we always do because we are professional growers. But, what about changing that product to CASH — selling it? Here we need to invest lots of thought, effort, and sincere determination. Use every selling aid you can.

Someone said BPI growers are not prime candidates for our Marketing Committee products. They are growers, not retailers. Let the merchandiser worry about selling to the public.

Right, but it is your product, and the more the retailers sell, the more you sell. Give them every assistance you can. Supply them with excellent point-of-purchase materials developed by the BPI Marketing Committee, as requested by the membership. If your pricing strategy won't permit you to supply materials gratis, cooperate with them and you will both benefit from a shared cost effort.

I have never seen a "springtime-only" bedding plant retailer (grocery store, hardware store, mass market outlet, etc.) who could not use some help in selling our product.

And, help we have. The list includes an employees training program, weather-proof color-coded spring cards, bedding plant information charts, informational brochures, and 12 different planting tip sheets. We use these products and they work for us. I urge you to use them also to increase the revenue you work so hard for. Your BPI office staff has a sample packet of marketing aids you may request. Please hurry, you need them now.

Wishing you a season whose end will find your benches empty and your pockets full.

Production

Container Production of Herbaceous Perennials

This is the sixth in a series of articles on the container production of herbaceous perennials. As part of his M.S. degree program, James Locklear carried out a thorough search of literature on this subject. A report on his findings began in the December, 1981 BPI News and will continue in this and subsequent issues.

James H. Locklear
Univ. of Nebraska
Lincoln, NE

Gerald D. Coorts
Southern Illinois Univ.
Carbondale, IL

TISSUE CULTURE

The use of tissue culture as a means of propagation shows a great deal of promise for the commercial production of perennials. Tissue culture, also referred to as *in vitro* or micro-propagation, involves the development of new plants in an artificial medium under aseptic conditions, from very small pieces of plants. These small pieces are termed explants. Shoot tips, flower scapes, flower buds, leaves, roots, and vegetative buds have served as explant material in the tissue culture of herbaceous perennials.

There are a number of advantages and benefits derived from this method of propagation. Of primary importance is the recovery of disease-free plants. Disease problems can sometimes develop in an asexually-propagated cultivar which may only be perpetuated by conventional propagation methods. Tissue culture offers a means of "cleaning up" stock by using relatively disease-free explant material and culturing this under controlled, aseptic conditions. This can help restore vigor and productivity to propagating stock.

Another important benefit is the speed with which plants can be increased by tissue culture. Through proper manipulation in culture, small numbers of plants can yield large numbers of new plants very quickly. This is particularly helpful with plants which are slow or difficult to propagate, or for which conventional methods have proven inefficient. Such plants as Hostas can be increased several thousand times faster by tissue culture than by the conventional method of division.

Related to this is the benefit of more rapid introduction of new cultivars to the commercial trade. Newly developed cultivars of plants such as Daylilies and Iris are increased slowly by the conventional method of division. With Iris, for example, there may be a delay of nearly ten years before enough stock of a new cultivar has been built up for release. With tissue culture techniques, the potential exists to reduce the time necessary to introduce new cultivars by several years.

Still another advantage for commercial produc-

tion is that this type of propagation is not seasonally limited. Propagation by cuttings or division usually must be done at a particular time of the year, regardless of the availability of time, space, or labor. Tissue culture, since it is done under laboratory conditions, can be carried on at any season, as long as a source of explant material is available.

Plants propagated by tissue culture are generally true to type and exhibit good growth characteristics. Occasionally tissue culture derived plants may vary from parent plant characteristics, but this is primarily a function of the type of explant material and relative levels of growth regulators used. Such variation might be advantageous, however, if the result is a sport that can be developed as a new cultivar. When the *Hosta sieboldiana* cultivar "Frances Williams" (with green and gold variegated foliage) was cultured from flower buds, the resulting plants were of three types. Variegated plants like the parent plants were produced, along with solid green plants and a new gold-colored sport.

A discussion of the methods involved in tissue culture is not within the scope of this article. Techniques and procedures can be picked up from propagation textbooks, articles on tissue culture, and courses in tissue culture methods. More relevant here is a consideration of the role that tissue culture can play in the commercial production of perennials.

At present there are not many perennial growing operations that employ tissue culture. Those that do are mostly large wholesale operations that produce plants in very large numbers. The primary reason for this is the high cost of setting up a tissue culture lab, which would only be justified for large scale production. Perhaps someday improved technology will lower the cost of materials and equipment, making tissue culture a viable alternative for smaller operations. It is still possible today, however, for a smaller operation to get started in tissue culture, if alternative (and less expensive) materials and equipment are used. In an article in the 1979 Proceedings of the International Plant Propagation Society, Leonard P. Stoltz explained how a pilot tissue culture lab could be set up for less than \$1,000.

Even without a lab, perennial growers can still derive benefits from tissue culture. First of all, tissue-cultured plants could be brought in to replace propagating stock that is diseased or has lost its vigor. It may also be possible to send propagating stock in to labs which will "clean it up" through tissue culture. Finally, operations that purchase numerous perennials from the larger wholesale growers may find greater availability of species and cultivars that are sometimes in short supply due to

problems associated with conventional propagation methods.

Tissue culture provides definite advantages to the large perennial grower and also benefits the smaller grower. At present, tissue culture finds greatest application with plants that are primarily propagated by asexual means. Not all plants respond to this method, and it may not always be the most economical means of propagation. Whether or not tissue culture will play an increasing role in the propagation of perennials in the future remains to be seen.

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