

*When You're In a Hurry...*

Photo by E. Shaunn Alderman

*Piedmont cargo crew transfers freight on to conveyor.*

## Foliage As Air Freight

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**F**lorida lobsters are shipped by air to Boston. Florida crabs are shipped by air to Maryland. And Florida foliage is shipped everywhere by air.

Shipping air freight out of Florida is big business. Air cargo representatives commonly agree that foliage is one of Florida's largest commodities shipped. Seafood, tropical fish, strawberries, gift fruit, and electronic parts and equipment are the other large volume commodities shipped by air. Why do Florida growers use the air freight services?

The general first reason that growers ship by air is that their customers want the material in a hurry. The old saying of "when do you want it? Oh, you wanted it yesterday!" is heard around

the world. Growers using the airlines can't get the plants there "yesterday" but they can count on the airlines to deliver the plants usually within hours or the same day. Shipping by air is less expensive today than it was 10 years ago. If your order consists of only two boxes, it might cost you less to ship by air than by truck. Many growers like to take advantage of the opportunity of being able to sell directly to retail florists who are not always able to purchase large-cube orders. When foliage is shipped as air freight, plant handling is minimal, especially with the use of LD3 and LD2 containers. The plants are loaded into these containers when they arrive at the cargo warehouse and the entire container is placed into the airplane.

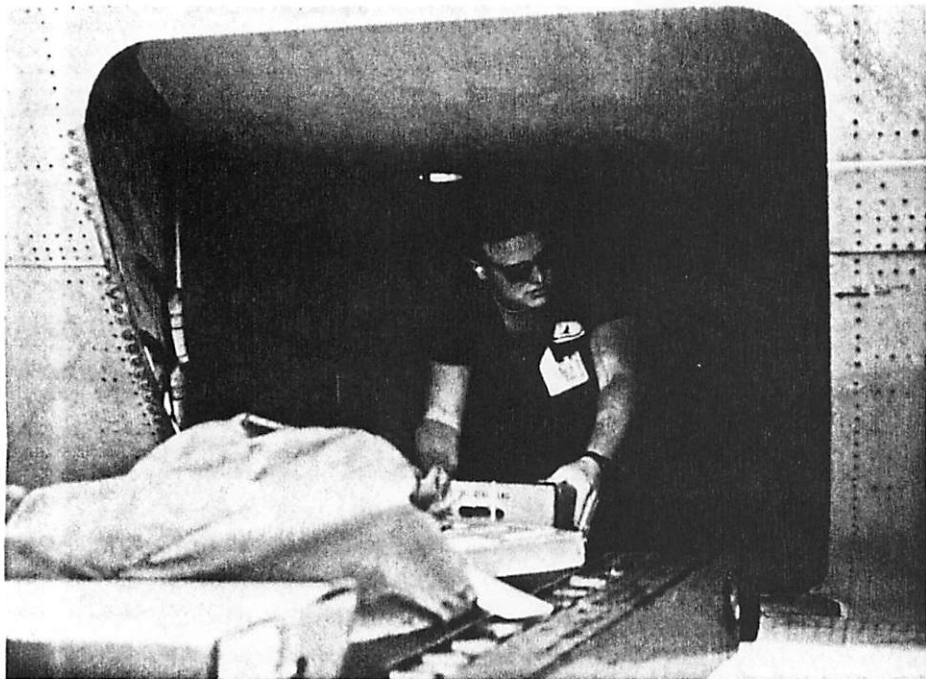
When placing an order with a Florida Grower, the customer in Charlotte will tell the grower how they want the material shipped. If they want the plants delivered by truck they usually indicate a specific trucking line. If they want the material in a hurry, the customer will request that the plants be shipped as air freight. The grower may deliver the plants to the airline's cargo area or arrange for a delivery service to pick up the plants from the nursery and take them to the airport. When the plants arrive in Charlotte, the customer will pick them up or arrange for a redelivery service.

When growers ship by air they think in terms of dimensional weight rather than cubes as they do when shipping by truck. Dimensional weight, the figure of how many pounds per cubic foot of space the box is occupying, is calculated by multiplying the length of the box by the width and by the height and dividing the figure by 194 ( $L \times W \times H / 194$ .) There are 8.91 pounds per cubic foot. Your order may only weigh three pounds but you will pay for the full 8.91 pounds of a cubic foot. You are paying the air cargo service for the volume, which is the amount of space your order requires.

Special Commodity Rates (SCR) have been established for foliage shipped as air freight. With some airlines, rates may vary depending on the distance of the shipment's destination. The Special Commodity Rates are a real break from the rates of shipping general cargo (hard freight). As an example, a 100-pound air freight order of general cargo may cost approximately \$27.50 to be shipped to Charlotte. In

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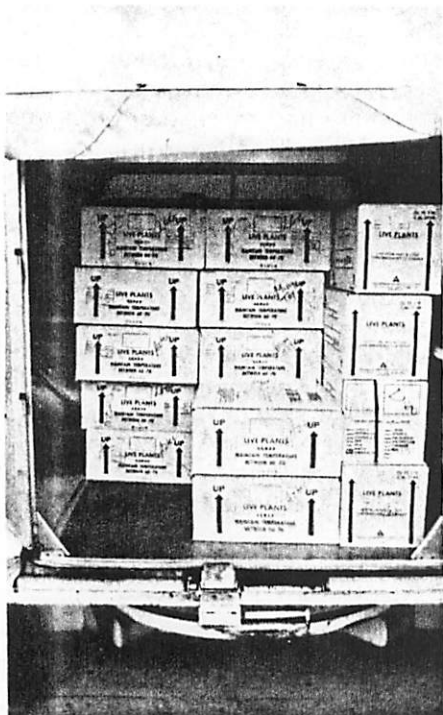




*Piedmont Airlines crew member loads cargo into the aircraft's belly.*

Photo by E. Shaunn Alderman

comparison, a 100-pound order of foliage shipped to the same city may only have an approximate cost of \$18.50 to \$20.00.



*Plants in Delta LD3 container before being placed on the aircraft.*

In the past few years more airlines have adapted to the needs of the foliage industry, which means more flights to more cities. Less handling occurs because there are not so many transfer deliveries due to the fact that more cities are being serviced. Because there is less handling, many airlines have seen a continued decrease in the amount of claims reported. Although growers still have a few horror stories about plants not arriving at their customer's location, growers generally agree that shipping by air is much more efficient and feasible than in years past.

One factor that will affect the delivery of your shipment that you and the airline have no control over is the weather. The airlines will not accept your shipment to Chicago if the temperature in Chicago is too cold. Growers who frequently ship foliage as air freight believe in insulating the plant boxes in a "winter-time" fashion. Although they say they try to ship plants as if they were live animals, the airlines unfortunately have not rid themselves of the reputation of letting boxes of plants sit on the loading dock in 98 degree weather. Most airlines will al-

low the weather to rule their shipping schedules. If the weather is too cold at the point of delivery they will not accept the plants for shipment. If hot weather will cause severe damage they will not accept the load.

The responsibility of the load planner is to efficiently plan the use of the cargo space. Full aircraft bellies mean the airlines can pass the savings on to their passengers. The cargo load must be organized in conjunction with passenger load and also the amount of mail being shipped. Around Christmas, the holiday mail takes priority and takes a lot of space. Computers play a major role in organizing the space utilization. Load planners also watch weather reports. They pay close attention to bad weather areas that might be on their routes. Planning the loads with cost-efficiency and safety in mind is the number one priority of a cargo planning specialist.

When asked about their use of air freight services, Carole Clelland of Hermann Engelmann Greenhouses, Inc. said "They (the airlines) have really come a long way to help the foliage industry." That thought seems to be commonly shared by many who ship foliage by air. Earl J. New said his nursery has been using the airlines for over 20 years. In the beginning he said "there was a problem with the shipments arriving frozen, but now, the airlines know a lot more about handling plants." Mardy Blankenship explained how Hogshead Nursery & Greenhouses uses the airlines. "We ship mostly three-inch and bareroot material. Our customers use air as often as they can which is when they are able to make the required 100 pound minimum." Marilee Lubin of Hermann Engelmann's said that at least 40 cases a week are shipped by air. She praised the air cargo services and said that she is glad more attention has been placed on the foliage industry.

Shipping by air is not for every nursery, but it is an option that is opening wider to better serve the foliage industry. The air freight business out of Florida is growing and becoming more professional. Foliage as air freight might be your new shipping method!