

Market Driven Plant Selection and Production—From Sales Representative or Customer Input

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Part of Bailey's Mission Statement is the commitment to produce a broad selection of plant material. Trying to predict the plants that will be popular 4 to 5 years into the future is a challenge. Even the experts in any field can miss the mark. We don't have a crystal ball or use a fortune teller. Several sources of information are used to select new plants. A major source of input at Bailey Nurseries is sales representatives.

At Bailey's, a scheduled week-long meeting (the Plant Planning Meeting) held in late fall gives some insight on what to grow for future catalogs. New plants, market trends, and production schedules are discussed at that meeting. A cozy group of about 20 from sales, administration, inventory, and production attend. One month prior to the meeting, each sales representative submits a list of five plants for review. I title mine, "The Plant Wish List". Plant descriptions, pictures, and at times samples are sent to the office. When 'Reliance' grape, a new hardier seedless grape from Arkansas State University was being considered, I sent fruit for sampling. Not only was it added to our catalog, but the representatives who can use it in their territories have endorsed it. With 14 sales representatives, the new plant list can be extensive. From all this data, Don Selinger and Jim Stolzenburg in Planning and Administration compile an orderly list by category such as fruits, trees, shrubs, roses, vines, etc., and a meeting agenda. The 1993 Plant Consideration List is ten pages long. It includes new and carryover plants from previous years.

The first part of the meeting is devoted to new plant considerations. Each sales representative presents their plants. Their merits and weaknesses are discussed. Topics discussed are the plant's sales range. The production staff addresses the realistic questions of:

- How to grow—seed, cutting, graft, or bud?
- Should it be container grown, bareroot, or both?
- Where to grow—Minnesota, Oregon, Washington—and which location best suits the plant's cold, heat, and soil requirements?
- Sources of stock are suggested. If it is to be budded, we need bud wood from the original or an accepted source. For softwoods, we purchase stock plants or rooted cuttings.
- Are royalties needed to be paid to the appropriate patent holder and do patent tags need to be secured?
- How many to grow or should it be trialed for further evaluation? If a plant is trialed, a quantity of about 500 liners will be grown.

Input comes from all attendees and the discussion is often lively and always informative. Basically, if a sound argument is presented with logic and facts, the

chances are good that the plant will be added to the production schedule. But if it doesn't, there is always next year to present the plant again. Once a plant is placed on the planting schedule, it is the responsibility of administration and propagation to get it into production.

On the 1992 Plant Consideration List were 236 new plants and carryovers. Out of these, 77 were added to the planting schedule and 61 (25%) were actually placed into production by propagating or purchasing.

Four years ago when I started at Bailey's, the majority of my territory—Missouri, Kansas, Oklahoma, southern Illinois, and Arkansas—was a new area. It was apparent that new plant material needed to be produced for this region—but what plants? Being a native of Missouri, I was familiar with several. To expand my list, I asked a lot of questions of customers and potential customers. They are always willing to suggest their favorites. I talked to staff at local botanical gardens, and researchers such as Dr. John Pair of the Kansas State Horticultural Research Center and Dr. David Hensley formerly of Kansas State University, about what plant material was needed in their area and why. The bulk of information for plant selections and trends is gathered during sales calls to customers. New plants can be spotted during a tour of the sales lot, growing fields, or even while driving. *Rhus typhina* #92-8 is a yellow fall-colored staghorn sumac found by Jim Stolzenburg along a Minnesota highway. It is currently being trialed.

Sometimes a suggestion can be a common plant, but offered in a new way. An example is fernleaf buckthorn, *Rhamnus frangula* 'Asplenifolia' in tree form. This came from a customer who uses it as an alternative to threadleaf Japanese maple, *Acer palmatum* dissectum group, where winter kill is a problem. 'Tina' crabapple, *Malus sargentii* 'Tina', is a popular dwarf crabapple that we grow on a 42-in. standard. However, customers have requested it in its natural habit, so this will soon be available. Trade journals and horticulture books are another source I use.

As sales territories have expanded further south and west, a new set of questions are guiding new plant selections. At Bailey's the major question asked of any potential plant addition used to be—how cold hardy is it? This is still an important consideration, but now the questions of heat tolerance and regional suitability are also being addressed. Tatarian maple, *A. tataricum*, is an example. It is very similar in habit and appearance to Amur maple, *A. tataricum* ssp. *ginnala*, but it is more heat tolerant and alkaline soil adaptable. 'Caddo' sugar maple, *A. saccharum* 'Caddo', is a sugar maple we are trialing for heat tolerance and adaptability for the Great Plains. It is a southern ecotype native to Caddo County, Oklahoma. Xeriscape plants are being increasingly requested. This past year has shown that water restrictions resulting from drought can happen in any area of the country. Apache plume, *Fallugia paradoxa*, shrub bushclover, *Lespedeza bicolor*, and some ornamental grasses are examples of xeriscape plants that have been added. The demand for dwarf colorful plants, suitable for small yards such as condominiums and planter boxes, continues to remain strong. Examples include: dwarf doublefile viburnum, *Viburnum plicatum* f. *tomentosum* 'Newport', which becomes 3 ft tall by 5 ft wide; Norman spirea, *Spiraea japonica* 'Norman', which has a darker pink bloom than 'Little Princess' spirea plus a maroon fall color; and Fairy Queen spirea, *S. trilobata* 'Fairy Queen', which becomes 3 ft tall and 3 ft wide, and has a long blooming time. Butterfly bush, *Buddleja davidii*, is popular for its long blooming period and colorful blooms that butterflies cannot resist. Retail customers are wanting unusual plants

such as dwarf Korean lilac tree, *Syringa meyeri* 'Palibin'; weeping pussy willow tree, *Salix caprea* 'Pendula'; and *Prunus cerasus* 'Sparkler' montmorency cherry. 'Sparkler' is a new introduction this year. It is a weeping, spur-type, montmorency cherry from Fruitland Nursery in Idaho. These are all results of customer requests.

When a new plant become available to customers, a follow-up on acceptance and any growing problems is given by the sales representatives. Often the plants are trialed in our own yards. This supplements observations during production. Ivory Halo™ dogwood, *Cornus alba* 'Bailihalo', a compact and finer textured selection of variegated dogwood, and Emerald Carousel™ barberry, *Berberis* 'Tara', a cross between Japanese green barberry and Korean barberry, are recent introductions. Early feedback from customers indicates that they will have a wide appeal.

After the new plants are considered, the rest of the week is devoted to plant production quantities. Input from the sales representatives on trends and future demands helps determine whether to increase, decrease, or even drop from the growing schedule a certain plant. This is a slow but necessary part and continues into the following week or weeks as needed.

The Plant Planning Meeting is the opportunity for sales representatives to relay the information we have gathered from our customers. We are the eyes and ears of the nursery. However, we are only one source used for new plant selections. Additional information is gathered through our own selections, association with other nurseries, universities, arboreta, and plant groups such as the Canadian Ornamental Plant Foundation (COPF) and the Metropolitan Tree Improvement Alliance (METRIA). All of this, helps Bailey's keep abreast of what our customers expect from us today and in the future.