

## **My Path into the Nursery Business<sup>©</sup>**

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I'm here to talk about my path into horticulture and why I started it. I started it because I was bored; bored with fixing cars at my uncle's shop in Wayne, Pennsylvania. Four years at it, and the next 30 years looked like a concrete coffin. I was a mechanic because it paid well. I had been dead broke, a college dropout (twice), with the debt to prove it. But I'd cultivated a work ethic at the shop; and a little veggie garden in the back, my sun soaked theater for watching tomatoes grow, and getting my hands in the soil. That's where my idea for the future came. I wasn't interested in agriculture; those farmers get up too early, and go to bed too early. Maybe ornamental horticulture I thought, plant production won't take over my life (especially not in the spring)!

I attended the Pennsylvania College of Technology in Williamsport. My classmates and teachers were great people and inspiring – there are no people like horticulture people. They have a passion and love for what they do, and genuinely want to be in the plant business. But I remember when I fell in love, in landscaping class. We were cleaning Iris off the pond's waterfall, giant unbelievably tough mats. All we could do was peel off the top layer, in a month you couldn't tell we'd done anything. Then we hacked it into chunks and transplanted it. I was awed at its resiliency, the will to live! and I'd channeled that will to make it into more plants! Facilitating life like that was amazing. I was hooked on propagation.

My school required an internship and I was fortunate enough to work at Chanticleer for a summer. The gardeners are true artists and make that place a plant paradise. My eyes were opened; what we do brings happiness to people, and a connection to nature. After college I tried to follow that idea by landscaping with Fine Garden Creations (Swarthmore, Pennsylvania). It was hard work, and fulfilling! It definitely got my hands dirty, but it didn't include any propagation! So the search continued.

I received a tip that Lloyd Traven of Peace Tree Farm in West-Kintnersville, Pennsylvania, was looking for a grower. This job had it all, propagation and everything that comes after. This included IPM which became my second love, the disgusting and disturbing, but fascinating, insect world. All the experience I gained was field grown. The point is that I didn't get my job with education or experience, I really had none; Lloyd and Candy hired me because they saw my motivation, passion, and desire to learn. The desire to learn is important because there is no end to the learning here, there's more than you can attain in a lifetime. If you take only one thing with you today, take this: We don't just cultivate plants in this business; we cultivate that dedication, in ourselves and in our peers.

