

New Plants at Andre Briant Nurseries

Pascal Pinel

Andre Briant Jeunes Plants, Angers, France

INTRODUCTION

Andre Briant Jeunes Plants is a specialist propagator of hardy ornamental nursery stock liners. The present owner, André Briant (I.P.P.S. GB&I Region President in 1993) purchased the business from his father's company in 1963 when it was a general ornamental nursery. Briant felt there was a market for a specialist propagator and transformed the general nursery into a liner producer selling to growers. Some 15 years ago, Briant met Didier Mathis, a passionate plantsman, and together they decided to make new plants a feature of the range offered by Briant. Mathis took on the role of finding new plants for Briant Nursery. The nursery currently propagates and grows approximately 10 million young plants each year (pot liners, bareroots, and plugs) which are sold throughout Europe (50% in France and 50% exported). Twelve percent of its turnover is represented by new cultivars, protected by breeders' rights. This paper describes how the nursery brings new plants to the market.

FROM THE BREEDER TO THE GARDENER

Definition of a New Plant. A new plant can be a real new selection or an old cultivar forgotten or never grown in large quantity, such as *Syringa microphylla* 'Superba'. A novelty can be a major new range of plants or a small improvement.

Source of New Plants. André Briant Nursery tends not to breed its own new lines although there are exceptions such as Weigela 'Olympiade' (registered name Briant Rubidor). More often, new plants come from public research such as that undertaken at the INRA Station in Angers, or commercial breeders or plantsmen, and amateurs. Often colleagues and other nurserymen with a good eye for spotting a more upright or more compact plant in a crop of seedlings bring them to the attention of the nursery. Workers on the nursery are also on the look-out for something which could appear different in the crop or in the stock plants.

Trials. Time is made available to test plants in propagation, containers, and open field. This varies depending on the type of plant, shrub or tree, and whether it is totally new or whether there is experience from growers in other countries. Trials in the open field are particularly advantageous as the plant has room to grow and show its real potential, perhaps after several years. When we need to test plants in different conditions (climate, soil, etc.), we work with colleagues or customers. Participants in the SAPHO group, which partly funds the research to trial-launch these cultivars on the market, test INRA cultivars.

Selection of Varieties for Marketing. The commercial team regularly visits the trial sites but it is not easy to motivate salesmen at the trial stage. The final selection decision is taken by André Briant and by the commercial manager and the production manager and is based on our knowledge of the market. Selections are made once a year.

Getting New Plants into Production. We aim to rapidly grow sufficient quantities as soon as possible, using tissue culture if necessary to bulk up numbers if the amount of stock material is small.

Market Launch. We have three methods:

Direct Launching. This is our classical method, using the catalogue with a good picture, posters, colour labels, press releases to horticulture magazines, competitions at trade shows, exhibitions to customers in our garden.

Organized Launching. Recently, we have tried to launch some new plants exclusively through selected nurseries who sell to the garden centre, landscape, or mail order market before the grower market. It will be included in our general wholesale catalogue 2 or 3 years later. The selected growers agree to grow minimum quantities and the promotion is more concentrated. Selected growers have more motivation to sell the plants and the technique can be used both for protected and unprotected cultivars.

Use of Specialized Launching Company. In 1990, André Briant founded, with two partners (Meilland and Flamand), a specialized company for launching new plants, called Selection New Plant. The system is based on a worldwide agent network which organises licencing and promotion.

The company is still young but has already launched two woody plants: *Robinia pseudoacacia* 'Lace Lady' (registered as Twisty Baby) and *Berberis thunbergii* 'Bogozam' (registered as Bonanza Gold). Two more are due soon and we will be monitoring the efficiency of the operation over the next few years for the right balance between costs and results.

CONCLUSION

Launching new plants is undertaken on a strategic basis and is part of the culture at Andre Briant Jeunes Plants. Several methods have been tried during the past 15 years and the nursery is still looking for the best balance between costs and results.