

25 Years of Plant Propagation and How They Have Helped my Business

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It is now 25 years since the W.O.G.G (Wholesale Ornamental Growers Group) of Queensland, now W.O.N (Wholesale Ornamental Nurserymen Pty Ltd), requested a mandate from the Annual Conference of the Federation of Australian Nurserymen in Sydney in March of 1973 to organise the inaugural meeting of the I.P.P.S. in Australia. This was granted by that Conference and the W.O.G.G (W.O.N) went ahead. The first Conference of the I.P.P.S. in Australia took place at Leura, NSW in October of that year.

The rest is now history, but I feel we should not forget the part played by those involved, many of whom are no longer with us. People such as the late Jack Pike, Alan Newport, Roy Rumsey, and Peter Spinks. Re-reading the papers from that Conference is quite illuminating. There is just as much relevance in them today as then. Jim Wells, the Founder of I.P.P.S., made a special trip from the U.S.A. for the occasion and his words certainly bear repeating. Jim titled his address "The plant propagator holds the future in his hands" and I would particularly like to quote the following:

"The Plant Propagator, the man who originates plants of all kinds is the cornerstone upon which all other parts of this vast industry depend. Without him, without his work and products there would be no horticultural industry."

Jim Wells is a man of great vision and today, although retired and confined to a wheelchair, enjoys reasonable health and still putters around with his bulbs. I would like to send "Greetings and Best Wishes to both Jim and his wife Cecil" from this Conference.

Twenty-five years seems unbelievable — until I look in the mirror! What a wealth of information comes to each of us in the Proceedings each year. When you consider that most of these articles are presented by people with many years experience over such a vast range of subjects covering all climatic conditions, the cost of belonging to the I.P.P.S. is very cheap indeed.

Certainly things change over time and a quarter of a century is quite a long time. In Leura I talked about *Grevillea* propagation, a very important part of our business at that time. Some types were readily propagated and others proved to be very difficult. Nothing has changed there except the cultivars but now the demand for *Grevillea* taxa with our nursery is practically nil.

In the years following that conference many propagators were kind enough to tell me that I had given them the best advice they were likely to get. I had suggested that if you felt like trying to propagate some of the difficult types you should put a couch in your propagation shed, so if (or when) the feeling came upon you, you could go and lie down until the feeling went away! This advice holds true for lots of other difficult species too.

But how has 25 years of I.P.P.S. helped my business?

The answer is — many ways, not the least being the opportunity of meeting people and discussing various problems and ideas. However, the most significant thing for

me was listening to a wonderful lady called Olga Goss, then the Head of Plant Pathology in WA at the Perth Conference in 1978. Dr. Goss was discussing the problems of *Phytophthora* and other water-borne diseases, and suggested that a lot of these problems could be effectively and economically controlled by the use of filters (in water lines). Further conversation with Dr. Goss got us started on filtering and this together with the use of aerated steam (also discussed in detail at the Inaugural Meeting at Leura by Jack Pike and Alan Newport) has kept us virtually disease free for over 25 years.

Hand in hand with aerated steam was the need to find an economical potting mix that would fit in with Dr. Ken Baker's U.C. System for producing healthy container plants. The way to this was pointed out to me by Kim Lassock, and so helped to start us on hammermilled pine bark as a most satisfactory soilless potting mix.

In conclusion, I can't help but make this observation. When I.P.P.S. commenced in this country the concept was eagerly embraced by the non-nursery side of horticulture. The sordid activities of the commercial nurseryman and the allied traders were frowned upon, and to be kept at bay at all costs. The fact that the Society was founded by nurserymen for nurserymen (plant propagators) was of no consequence — commercial words like nurseries were to be barred.

A display of allied products providing information for plant propagators' at this conference was indeed a sign of the times, changing times, but of course we have had these trade displays as part of our activities for some time now, and how welcome they are. It really hammers home the point of Jim Wells' philosophy, "The future of this Industry is in the hands of the plant propagators" and they need all the information they can get.