

# Connecting opportunities to a wider audience<sup>©</sup>

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## INTRODUCTION

I am an Australian foundation member and still, many decades later, passionate about propagation. I have been at various times, on most relevant committees and Presidencies of both the Australian Region and the International governing body. I have not only an intimate knowledge of how our Society has and is operating, but a “feeling” of time and attitude changes, surrounding our common goals of “Seeking and Sharing” in our plant propagation world.

I gained a Churchill Fellowship in the first batch of recipients in 1965, and departed Australia for 5 months in 1966 with almost no contact with home as overseas phone call costs were prohibitive.

When we started the Australian Chapter of this Society in the 1970s, telephone and letter writing were still the principal means of communication. Then we were overwhelmed with the advent of the facsimile machine and a rapid conversion to electric typewriters, still with a carbon copy. The lightning and ongoing speed of communication technology from the 1990s has affected the very foundation of so many not for profit organizations and we as members of IPPS are not immune.

## DISCUSSION

We are an international organization and we need to take stock of our world-wide role to preserve and propagate our plant life as the very foundation and continuum of our life on this, our only habitable planet. The original focus of our Society was, and still is, to share better ways to propagate plants, and for nurserymen and others to multiply these new findings.

The commercial necessity of survival, in an increasingly competitive environment, is pressurizing would-be innovative propagators to consider the bottom line as the prime reason for endeavour, and innovation can be the casualty. Difficulties with the now understood climate changes may well provide exciting opportunities. Despite the prevarication of Federal politicians trying to avoid global warming responsibilities, our need for agility to cope in Australia, one of the hardest hit continents, with heat extremes, massive storm events be they winds, floods, bushfires and increasing lightning strikes, may well demand we alter our concepts of the kind of plants that are much more resistant to these conditions, and play our vital role in reversing more frequent continental disasters.

Advances in the art of propagation, seldom come from big business. They make it clear—if it is not plainly going to be profitable now, it should be discarded. I have always believed “If life throws you lemons, make lemonade.” We need to play our role as part of a global strategy to reverse the worsening climate trends and not wait until someone else leads the way. I am privileged to have been a subscriber for many years to *Australasian Science* ([www.austscience.com](http://www.austscience.com) for full online access as part of your subscription).

If you want authenticated facts on our fast changing world I would recommend it. The incredible diversity of plants that are continuing to adapt to micro-climate changes and opportunities, may not lend themselves to rapid evaluation and instant profit making.

I have no need to tell you how long it takes to “discover” a cultivar and develop it to a commercial stage where, perhaps, there may be a place to make a profit.

In today's world that decision may well be in the hands of a bean counter in an enclosed office of a major retailer, with little direct contact with the world we inhabit. A current option is to go to a tin shed, be told the plant is in aisle 10, costs \$35, and pay on the way out! Despite all that's promoted, they are not the place to get sensible, accurate

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information tailored to the home gardener's need in their own micro-climate.

In the past 6 years, involvement in my chosen world of plant propagation has evolved to connect with aficionado home gardeners in communities who constantly inform me they want to be self-sufficient, by converting their limited garden spaces to productive plants that can feed their families. The proliferation of these determined plant people I have had contact with over the years, and continue to have, numbers the many thousands through Master Classes, Workshops, ABC TV, local ABC Radio sessions, direct phone, and email enquiries.

I am getting a relevant cross section of community endeavour pointing to a need for good, accurate KNOWLEDGE of how to produce a range of plants to improve: their home's internal and external aeration, to herbs, edible flowers, vegetables of all kinds and particularly fruit tree crops.

The basics they want to understand are based on our familiarity of the influence and effects of the BIG FIVE, namely aeration; heat; light; moisture and nutrition.

We need to connect more to this major sector of our communities. They are our greatest supporters. Sadly, I find some on both sides of this equation don't realize the need for this vital connection. If you feel you could do with a little inspiration and relevance, can I draw your attention to Jane Smith's 326-page book on Luther Burbank's life a hundred years ago, titled *The Garden Invention*. This marvelous epitome is encapsulated in George Bernard Shaw's "life wasn't meant to be easy my child, but take courage: it can be delightful." In fact, we should be enjoying those challenges and achievements.

It is one of the critical pressure points I have been under for the past decade having now completed the text last month, of a book titled *Common Sense Citrus*. It is much more than using citrus as a vehicle, but aimed to help nursery people and gardeners, understand interactions between the BIG FIVE—and what propagation means, to help them in sensible decision-making to establish the mix of plants they really need in their local environment and for Australia as a whole.

I hope those of you dyed in the wool nurserymen, practice your craft by sending a satisfied customer away, not only with plants that help them achieve self-sufficiency and beauty, but the KNOWLEDGE they need to grow them well. If you do that, they will keep coming back, and you will have made a positive contribution to understanding what plant life should, and must, mean to us all.

May I address those of you that passionately propagate plants, to assess your role in world plant preservation, to develop your own set of guidelines that contribute to the greater good, world-wide? I have been consulting with governments, United Nations, and private companies world-wide in many countries for well over 50 years. My lifetime in horticulture has involved a lot of direct contact with farmers producing food, and feeding an increasing population is a major challenge.

The incredible diversity of plants and our increasing scientific understanding of them through Plant Physiology and many other new sciences, are providing opportunities and challenges that humankind is yet to harness.

Consider the proverb: "from little acorns big trees grow." Utilize your valuable imagination

## **CONCLUSION**

If you are passionate about growing plants, allow a little time to reflect on where it is leading you.

Are there some specific aspects of plant propagation that might be more worthwhile?

What legacy are you developing, to hand on to succeeding generations in your capacity as a skilled producer of plant material?

Are you recording what you do, the minute detail could hold a valuable key to those who follow?

How might you positively contribute in some related field, in the future?

Appreciate what other members have recorded before you, to add to your experience.

There is a rich background to our combined contributions in and to the plant world. The far sighted creators of our Society insisted we should record our individual

contributions to this art.

As International President of IPPS in 1985, when I initiated the first changes to digital records, it led to a goldmine available to members instantly on disc, and was a start to a new era of availability of a treasure trove of information. It is your task to convert this information into KNOWLEDGE.

How and in what form will you make your contribution to our plant world?

