

Promoting, Distributing, and Servicing of New Plants[®]

Brent W. Marable

Tree Introductions, Inc., P.O. Box 5014, Athens, Georgia 30604

INTRODUCTION

After a new plant selection is discovered, evaluated, and propagated to ensure genetic likeness, and patented and/or trademarked—the next steps for the plant owner should include promoting, distributing, and servicing. The following will elaborate on these three important steps through some of Tree Introductions' own experiences. In recognizing the need for more new tree cultivars—particularly for the southern United States, Tree Introductions, Inc. was founded. Tree Introductions is a research and development, licensing, distribution, marketing, and customer service entity focused on new and improved cultivars. The first goal is to select, evaluate, and introduce superior landscape plants with a focus on trees that are sustainable in the urban landscape. Most of the introductions come from other growers, researchers, and industry professionals. These plantmen may not have the time, resources, or network of growers that is required to have a plant propagated in large numbers, patented, and distributed on a large scale. For this reason they look to Tree Introductions to assist them in achieving these tasks so they are able to benefit from their discovery for the long-term—thereby becoming cooperators with Tree Introductions in the introduction process of their new plant.

STEPS TO GET A PLANT INTRODUCED AND DISTRIBUTED

- Select and Evaluate for Economic Potential — what makes the plant worthy?
- Propagate — ability to reproduce and increase quantities of a new plant.
- Patent and Trademark — obtain and maintain legal protection for new plants.
- Market — promote and distribute the plant to each level of the industry.
- Service — assist the grower with production and marketing of new plants.

SELECT AND EVALUATE FOR ECONOMIC POTENTIAL

The first thing to consider when selecting and evaluating a new plant for economic potential is to identify its need or niche. Does the new plant have a place? Is there already something better out there? For example, one such niche that Tree Introductions is attempting to fill is for own-root cultivar oaks. The oak genus is commonly propagated from seed, and is therefore very variable in habit, growth rate, foliage qualities, etc. Producing and distributing oaks from own-root vegetative cuttings would provide consistency, predictability, and uniformity to a widely used genus. Tree Introductions has worked with other industry professionals in developing own-root cultivars of live oak (*Quercus virginiana* 'QVTIA', PP#11,219 Highrise[®]), willow oak (*Q. phellos* 'QPSTA', PPAF Hightower[®]), nuttall oak (*Q. nuttallii* 'QNFTA', PPAF Highpoint[®]), and overcup oak (*Q. lyrata* 'QLFTB', PPAF Highbeam[®]).

Another need in the plant industry is for upright growing, narrower canopy trees. Tree Introductions receive a lot of requests for more upright growing trees for the urban landscape. As our country continues to become more populated and urbanized, planting space will continue to decrease; therefore, current and future plant selections should be more narrow and upright to accommodate such spaces.

When selecting and evaluating for economic potential for the new plant, it is important to define your target market. Where should the new selection be promoted first? Should the new plant selection first be promoted to the retail industry, landscape industry, or both? In the past, trees have been first promoted to the landscape industry, while shrubs and herbaceous perennials are initially marketed to the retail industry. This also depends on the particular species of plant being evaluated.

Potential new plant cultivars are selected for a number of various characteristics and attributes. Some of the characteristics that are considered when selecting and evaluating a new plant include: shape, size, root density, pest resistance, cold hardiness, heat tolerance, rootability, ease/difficulty of growing, soil preference, moisture requirements, and ornamental characteristics such as flower color, fall and summer foliage qualities, and bark characteristics.

The evaluation of new plant cultivars never ends, especially as new landscape sites and growing techniques are tested. Tree Introductions looks for assistance from arboreta, botanical gardens, and growers in continuing this evaluation process.

PROPAGATION

The scope of this paper will not cover the propagation in depth. However, it is very important that proper propagation protocol be established. There are various propagation options to consider when experimenting with new plants. Tree Introductions prefer for our plant selections to be on their own roots because of problems that can occur with budding and/or grafting. However, sometimes budding, grafting, and tissue culture is essential in increasing quantities quickly or in establishing a stock block for future vegetative cuttings.

Until this year, Tree Introductions worked solely with a very small, close family of contract propagators. These propagators not only did the trial and experimental propagation, but also the production propagation that is critical to increase quantities for distribution. Tree Introductions and Select Trees developed a new propagation division this year, Prodigy Propagation. Prodigy Propagation will continue to work with other contract propagators in determining propagation protocol and in establishing quantities for distribution.

PATENT AND TRADEMARK

The scope of this manuscript will not cover patenting and trademarking in depth due to the subject being covered in detail by other presenters during the course of the conference. However, we will define a patent and trademark. A plant patent is granted by the United States government to an inventor (or the inventor's assigns) who has discovered a new variety of plant. The patent, which lasts for 20 years from the date of filing the application, protects the inventor's right to exclude others from asexually reproducing, selling, or using the plant so reproduced. A trademark is a mark applied to the use of a particular plant. If done appropriately, it is officially registered with the U.S. government. In doing so, the owner of the trademark can

prevent others from utilizing a mark in a manner which creates a likelihood of confusion with the use of the mark by the trademark owner.

Why should someone patent and trademark a new plant variety? Essentially, to protect the inventor's rights of ownership and to have the opportunity to benefit long-term from the invention — especially with trees, where it takes longer to recoup the investment. It is also very important to extend the patent period. If done properly, patenting and trademarking can lessen the confusion caused by multiple names given to the same plant.

MARKETING

Once a new plant has been discovered, evaluated, propagated, and protected through a patent and trademark, the next step is to promote and distribute the new selection to the industry. (Again, these steps are based on Tree Introductions' own experiences.) The distribution starts with the selection of high quality liner producers who produce the new selection. Liner producers may include propagators, 3.8-liter (1-gal) through 18.9-liter (5-gal) container producers, and/or bare-root liner growers.

From the liner producers, the new selection will be distributed to growers of larger size plants in order to target the landscape end of the industry. Large tree growers may include field (balled and burlap) growers, container growers of 68 liter (15-gal) to +1364 liter (300-gal) trees, as well as growers of 61 cm (24 inch), 91 cm (36 inch) and larger sized box trees. The inventory that large tree growers produce should be targeted toward landscape clients that include, but are not limited to, landscape architects, urban foresters, and landscape contractors.

Depending on where you define your initial target market, the next step is to promote to the retail side of the industry. Initial targets for retail include independent garden centers, mass merchandisers, and even mail order catalog companies.

Opportunities in countries other than the United States should also be explored. In doing so, keep in mind that other countries will have different laws than the United States in protecting new plants.

In promoting to the various segments of the industry, Tree Introductions uses several tools to help disseminate information. Various tools may include printed materials such as color flyers, brochures, posters, slides, and tags or labels, as well as magazines and journal articles and advertisements. The internet is also becoming a very important vehicle in publicizing information.

Trade shows and conferences are also valuable in spreading information. Tree Introductions currently attends between 12 and 15 trade shows or conferences per year across the United States. In addition to promoting these new plants ourselves, Tree Introductions provides growers of their new introductions with information for their own personal marketing, thus forming partnerships in disseminating information about new plant selections.

Direct mailing has also proven to be an effective tool in publicizing information. Sending press releases and promotional materials to growers, specifiers, and garden writers is a valuable way to spread the word about new plants to individuals who otherwise may not hear about them.

SERVICE

Tree Introductions believes customer service of a new plant is essential in the overall introduction process, and that it is the determining factor of Tree Introductions'

future success. Tree Introductions most important objective for plants they represent is to make sure growers and cooperators are successful and profitable with these introductions. Every plant has some cultural challenge for some grower somewhere. Tree Introductions spends a lot of time and resources working with growers to assist them in learning the best way to produce a particular new plant. This challenge appeals to many quality growers who are looking to add new plants to their product mix and to not just grow commodity-type items. Successful growers of new introductions understand the risks involved in growing new plants and, if necessary, adjust their growing techniques to accommodate desirable new plants.

By personally visiting the growers, Tree Introductions is able to view the production systems and offer advice on how they may be able to improve growing techniques. This also allows a chance to see and evaluate the quality of available inventory.

One approach to getting information to growers of new plants is by distributing growing information. Such information may include particulars about each plant in regard to pruning, potential pests, fertility, irrigation, hardiness, soil and media, and other vital facts that are important to producing a quality plant.

Tree Introductions not only assists with information regarding the production of new selections, but also helps in sales and distribution. Tree Introductions encourages growers to let them know availability and upcoming inventory in order to send potential purchasers their way. Tree Introductions developed an internal "plant finder" for keeping track of current and potentially available inventory. When they get an inquiry, they can refer them to a source in that region that has available inventory of a particular plant.

Tree Introductions continually strives to improve the service they offer growers and buyers of new introductions. In order to determine specific areas of focus, surveys and questionnaires are conducted among growers and buyers. The feedback that is gathered from this and other communication enables them to respond in a more effective way to those who use their new introductions.

CONCLUSION

"What can we do to help you grow better plants and help to make our introductions more profitable for you?" It is a question that Tree Introductions asks the growers and buyers of their new introductions. In order for a new plant selection to be successful long-term, it is important that many details receive proper focus during all phases of the process—from research and development to a large-caliper landscape tree being planted on a prominent job. Tree Introductions is positioned to assist and support growers, researchers, and other industry professionals who discover new plant selections so they have the opportunity to benefit from their discovery for the long-term. Tree Introductions is currently evaluating over 40 potential introductions from several different individuals in various stages of development, and continues to accept and evaluate new plants. They strive to provide the Green Industry with the best new cultivars available. Through the attainment of this goal, Tree Introductions is confident of their success through the success of their growers, cooperators, and the industry. Please contact Tree Introductions for further information through e-mail, <newtrees@treeintroductions.com>, or visit <www.treeintroductions.com>.

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The Effective Propagator — Keeping a Focus on Key Issues in Propagation Management[®]

Gene Blythe and Jeff Sibley

Department of Horticulture, Auburn University, Alabama 36849

INTRODUCTION

Effective operation of a commercial propagation program goes beyond the essential knowledge of propagation practices such as cutting, seeding, and grafting. Various aspects of propagation as a business must also be considered if the propagation operation is to be successful. A commercial propagator will seek to focus on ways of improving and maintaining the effectiveness of the operation for reasons of personal career enhancement, company profitability, and employee relations. This discussion focuses on some key issues in commercial production that, if made a part of a propagator's scope of operations, can help a propagator to be a more effective manager in day-to-day operations and over the long run.

KEY ISSUES IN COMMERCIAL PROPAGATION**Identification**

A source of frustration to landscapers and home gardeners is the discovery that the plant they installed in the landscape months or years ago is not the cultivar that it was supposed to be. Misidentification of plant materials can occur at numerous stages during production of the plant, but nowhere can it create more problems than in the propagation stage. Since numerous cuttings are often obtained from a single stock plant (or even just a single shoot), errors in identification can have a compounding effect that may not be discovered until weeks or months later.

If cuttings are to be obtained from stock plantings, the planting should be clearly identified either with durable labels in the ground or on the plant, or by means of a clearly delineated planting map. At least once per year, the plantings should be inspected for branch sports, suckers, or seedlings that may appear within the stock planting. Stock plants should be inspected for aberrations well in advance of collecting propagation materials, and particularly at a time when off-type plants or shoots can be most easily identified, such as during the flush of new growth or during flowering. There should be no room for doubt as to the correct identification of plant material for propagation. "If in doubt, take it out!"

Errors in identification can occur easily if cuttings are obtained from container-grown plants. Mixing of crops may be due to human error such as when a few leftover plants are incorrectly consolidated into a bed of another cultivar. Animals may be