

Propagation and Plant Sales Community College Style®

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The year 2004 marks the 26th year of our annual plant sale at Cabrillo College in Aptos, California. The sale is always held on Mother's Day weekend which is usually near the peak of retail spring season in the Monterey Bay region approximately 100 miles south of San Francisco. We keep our prices close to the prevailing local market but never higher. The sale has become one of the long-standing must-attend "local annual events".

POT LABELS

All individual plants are labeled, grouped, and a sign is provided providing information on the horticultural requirements of the group. The pot labels and group signs are produced on a TXP 3.5 Thermal Printer. Pot labels from this printer have never faded in our sunny Mediterranean climate. We formerly had students hand-write labels but that took a lot of time and produced some notable "hall of shame" labels. One of the most memorable group of labels began as *Gaura lindheimeri* and by the end of the class had mutated into *Guano lindheimeri*.

NURSERY CROPS

Nursery crops are organized by venues which include bedding plants, California natives, cut flowers, fuchsias and baskets, shade perennials, salvias, succulents, sun perennials, vegetables, and herbs. Our emphasis is on plants appropriate to our Monterey Bay coastal climate although a significant number of customers come from the San Jose urban area, which is inland and features a distinctly different climate. We grow a combination of highly popular plants plus new introductions and hard-to-find selections.

Crops are grown and sold by Cabrillo College students in our Introduction to Horticulture class, the Crop and Nursery Management class, and Special Topics class. We have labs on asexual and sexual reproduction making sure that students have hands-on experience in propagating by division, cuttings, and seeds. Students study crops in assigned venues and then sell within that venue at the plant sale.

Our 2004 plant sale featured 1039 different plants spread amongst 80 plant families. Our top ten families were: Lamiaceae (249), Asteraceae (113), Onagraceae (101), Crassulaceae (76), Solanaceae (64), Schrophulariaceae (44), Fabaceae (28), Geraniaceae (27), Poaceae (27), and Curcubitaceae and Lilliaceae were both represented by 19 different plants. Total retail sales were over \$97,000 with another \$6,000 raised by a combination of friends of the garden memberships and a rare plant auction. The silent plant auction features rare and unusual plants donated by local retail and wholesale nurseries plus hardcore gardeners. The plant auction, book signings and free food occur on Friday evening when friends of the garden members get the first chance to buy plants. Memberships are \$25 per family. Saturday and Sunday sales are open to the general public.

NURSERY PROPAGATION

Plants are grown by seed, cuttings, and division in that order of frequency. Cuttings and seeding of perennials, natives, salvias, and succulents begin in late summer while vegetables seeding begins in January. This is closely followed by bedding plants. Sunflowers are the last seeded plant, which is directly sown into six-packs 2–3 weeks before our sale.

We stress good hygiene habits with sterile pots, propagation medium, tools, and clean and healthy plant materials. We do not use fungicides in nursery production. Teaching students good nursery hygiene habits is very important and we want to limit the use of chemicals around students for obvious health and liability reasons.

Our major nursery insect pests are mealybug on succulents, white fly on fuchsias, and aphids on new growth in any crop venue. Other larger pests include mice and rabbits and, of course, gophers in the salvia garden.

Most of our propagation from cuttings is begun in 17-inch-square flats under mist. We have four mist tables, each with separate controls. Some natives and large-stemmed plants are started in 2-inch-square rose pots including *Carpenteria californica*, *Ceanothus* sp., and *Fremontodendron* cultivars.

Other plants such as *Festuca idahoensis* are begun in 72-count plug trays. Most plants are lined out in 3½-inch liners (25s) and then canned up into gallons. A few perennials and shrubs are potted into 2- or 3-gal pulp pots. Vines are often started in 4-inch-square liners (16s) including *Clematis lasiantha*, *Lonicera* sp., and *Pasiflora* sp. and are eventually sold in 3-gal pulp pots.

Young plants move from the mist tables to the propagation wings of our greenhouse complex, then into unheated hoop houses to harden-off and finally are canned into 1-gal pots and placed in 50% shade houses. Our mild coastal climate allows us to safely move most of our crops outside by early March. Typically after the plant sale there are very few plants left and the entire staff and volunteers are near permanent wilting point.

Because we are a teaching facility we focus on growing a wide range of crops so that students will be exposed to a range of propagation techniques, crop management, and finished plant materials. While salvias are our most publicized crop, they still represent a minority of the crops we grow.

WATERING

All plants are hand-watered and groomed by students. Watering is an important horticultural skill that is best developed by practice. Once crops are sown on the propagation tables of the greenhouse complex, someone from the nursery staff is scheduled to work everyday, including holidays. Sunday and holiday watering responsibilities are rotated amongst the entire nursery staff.

Students who actively participate in the growing of nursery crops and the annual plant sale acquire hands-on horticultural skills and experience and help support each other and the Cabrillo Horticulture Program. The horticulture staff feels very comfortable in recommending standout students to local employers because we have seen their enthusiasm, watched their technical skills grow, and have witnessed their work ethic.

NURSERY STAFF

The student assistants and permanent nursery staff we hire are amazing. Their enthusiasm, horticultural skills, and commitment to the horticulture program are what makes it all happen. Having a group of dedicated nursery staff that work together as a team is extremely important. Lunch potlucks and field trips are excellent ways of bringing together a working nursery team. Our present nursery crew is the best with whom I have ever had the pleasure to work.

PUBLICITY

The local press has been very supportive with front section articles featuring some new aspect of our annual plant sale.

Press releases in 2005 will feature the formal opening of our salvia garden. We also run ads in the local newspapers and send press releases to every single contact we can possibly find.

Our webpage is updated every year with a list of the plants being offered at the spring sale. In 2001 two nurserymen came from Australia because of what they found on our website. We also distribute and post flyers throughout the community and at the college farmer's market.

The plant sale is the major public outreach event of our year. Proceeds from the sale buy our entire nursery supplies, fund our student employees, and one of our laboratory instructional assistants. Most of the new equipment such as computers, printers and new plants are also funded by the plant sale. In these lean years of state budget woes the plant sale monies are the safety net for our horticulture program.

FUTURE PLANS

Future plans include developing a significant group of community volunteers, opening a year-around gift shop and retail nursery, installing several new gardens based on our collections of species fuchsias, succulents, and native plants of the Monterey Bay Area. We are also planning to hold a national salvia symposium in the next 5 years.

We are aiming to become the national collection holder of both salvias and species fuchsias through the American Association of Botanic Gardens and Arboreta. Finding funds for all of our future needs, garden developments, and dreams is a continuing major challenge. We are extremely lucky to have brand new horticulture facilities, a climate that enables us to grow a wide variety of crops, and a staff that works hard to educate students and develop the gardens of our new site.