

Horticultural Opportunities

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INTRODUCTION

There are numerous production opportunities in the nursery industry. Some opportunities for producing nursery crops include: specialty floriculture items, specialty nurseries, mitigation and restoration, specialized propagation nurseries for seed production and rooted liners, and site preservation.

Specialty Floriculture. This includes — fresh, dried or preserved foliage, flowers, twigs, branches, or seed pods. It is difficult to develop a new business in this industry since established companies are quite protective of their interests. At trade shows company booths may be walled-off and it is understood that competitors enter only on invitation.

Herein is where the opportunity lies. A grower of floral materials has the options of selling to the local retail market, or selling larger quantities to the wholesale market at reduced prices. Growers have confided in me that they can grow these products, but that there is no market for them. I suggest the formation of a nationwide growers co-op. The Association of Specialty Flower Growers may be of help to potential producers.

Even though dried or preserved floral products have extended shelf life and storage advantages, I believe the greatest market potential is with producing fresh floral material. Access to a good airport is imperative for shipping.

Specialty Nurseries. These nurseries have the greatest market potential in today's industry. While dwarf youpon, Chinese hollies, kurume azaleas etc., are still the staple crops for larger nurseries, more new plant introductions occur. There is greater diversity of product assortment offered by larger nurseries for one-stop shopping. While these nurseries sell significantly more bread and butter plants than specialty items — the production capabilities of large-scale nurseries may indirectly create market demand for specialty items produced by smaller specialty nurseries.

The specialty producer invests considerable time in selecting, evaluating, and building stock of the product to market. For small growers considering entering the specialty nursery niche, it is important to develop a good relationship with more progressive mail order nursery companies. Generally they are willing to pay a premium price for unique plants. They might mark-up specialty items as high as 500%. Plant patents and trademarking should also be considered when developing and marketing specialty products.

Mitigation or Restoration. There are great opportunities for specialty nurseries which produce plants for sand dunes and wetland areas. Native plant nurseries in Florida can not keep up with the demand for plants which aid in the restoration of sand dunes destroyed by recent hurricanes. I am greatly concerned about rapid development of condominiums, etc. in sand dune and wetland areas. The lack of regulation on construction encroaching the dune lines is unfortunate. Typically, these areas are paved with asphalt and planted with oleanders and pampas grass.

A more ecological friendly plant mix could be utilized if more dune plants such as beach golden rod, conredina, sea oats, dwarfed oaks, and magnolias were commercially available.

Constructed Wetlands. Coastal areas of the U.S. continue to be encroached upon by urban sprawl and development. In coastal Alabama, entire compounds on docks are being built over wetlands, neglecting environmental protection laws. There will be increased demands for native plant materials for wetland restoration and mitigation. Some of these native species come from nurseries, but most are dug from ditches. Hence, there is ample opportunity for nurseries to produce these fast turnover wetland plant species (Street, 1994).

Specialized Propagation Nurseries. Various speakers have commented on plant selections which should be grown, but are not available in the nursery industry. Propagation and production problems may limit the commercial availability of new material. Some seed propagated species are limited by insufficient seed availability. Selected plants grown as seed orchard plantings for seed production may be profitable. Two such plants are *Stewartia malacadendron* and *Magnolia ashei*. Specialty propagation nurseries producing liners from rooted cuttings is another option.

Site Preservation. This might, at first glance, seem counterproductive to the nursery industry, since preserved plants are not replaced with new ones. However similar principles which apply to container production or field production apply to full site preservation. Some of our native habitats must be preserved for plant diversification.

My company, Coastal Woodland, currently focuses on opportunities which lead towards preservation. These projects are large in scope and we anticipate that the utilization of nursery-grown container plants will compliment these native landscapes. One of the most difficult tasks we have is minimizing bulldozer damage of sites. The architect Frank Lloyd Wright was famous for designing homes which nested into the landscape. In one case after we pruned and shaped a wooded area surrounding a planned homesite, the architect aborted and redid his plans. This greatly enhanced the aesthetic aspect of the home fitting in with the native landscape site.

LITERATURE CITED

- Street, C. 1994. Propagation of wetland species. Comb. Proc. Intl. Plant Prop. Soc. 44:468-473.