

sharply with the depression I felt after so many of my interviews.

I would like to see propagators take a pride in their worth and stop being 'deferential workers'. Nurseries are nothing without their propagators, they represent the first link in the chain. But I have an abiding impression of a group of key workers perpetually cap in hand, unable or unwilling to assert themselves.

Propagators, what are you worth? Do your own home work and establish what you contribute to the success of the company you work for. It is no good sitting on the sidelines feeling overlooked and unappreciated.

There are a number of medium sized nurseries developing successfully around the country and run by market-oriented and development-minded men and women. On the whole they come into horticulture from other fields and have brought with them a clear understanding of the job they wanted to do. They know they can't do it alone and they know they must be surrounded by keen, enthusiastic, knowledgeable, and, of consequence, well-paid managers on every level. They are not afraid to pay good wages and not afraid to ask for more than 100 per cent effort but it's my impression those nurseries are getting on, doing an honest job, setting new standards and shaping attitudes for the next generation. I would commend you all to seek this team spirit and recognize the energy and inspiration that can come out of it.

## **NOT TO THE COLLEGES—ANYONE?**

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Recruitment for the National Diploma in Nursery Practices course is declining at Merrist Wood College, and at other county colleges with similar courses. The number of students enrolling for certificate courses in nursery practices is also falling, although not quite so dramatically.

In contrast to this, courses in arboriculture, landscape, and countryside recreation at diploma level are oversubscribed.

The question may well be asked, 'is this a true decline or only a decline in comparison with the 1982 and 1984 peaks?' If the decline is a real one, then why is it that young people fail to see the prospect of a worthwhile career within the nursery business? Do they not realise that someone has to propagate the trees which are to be climbed; the 'soft' landscape material which is to be planted, and the forest species which are to play such an important part of leisure and recreation in the future?

My thoughts go back to a college industrial liaison day in 1982, when 44 people were invited from the nursery industry and only eight attended, two of whom were past students of Merrist Wood! Could this apathy be one reason for the demise of student numbers?

Perhaps it is because horticulture has a 'bad press'. Our image within the schools in this country is often a poor one with comments being made such as 'horticulture is a basic job with basic pay' or 'he or she is not very bright, perhaps horticulture would be the best thing'. There again we are lucky if horticulture is even mentioned; it is far more likely to be referred to as 'gardening'!

Speaking to a recently qualified ND student from Cannington College, Somerset, yet another question came to light: what is 'nursery practice'? Young people who wish to follow a career in horticulture often think this means amenity or commercial glass-house production. Where does hardy nursery stock come in? People go to garden centres often oblivious of the mysterious nurseries which have provided all the plants!

Do we pay people in the trade enough? £6,500 per annum after three years at college may compare unfavourably with a similar situation in engineering or computing. The freedom of working out in the open air may not fully compensate for the inability to raise a mortgage.

These are all possible reasons for low student numbers based upon 'feelings'. Perhaps the answer is far more simple and very easily explained by birth rate statistics.

It is clear that the birth rate bulge of the 60's is coming to an end. The prediction for the future is given with falling numbers in the 90's. We in education are being forced more and more into a market situation. Where a market is contracting, positive thinking is paramount. How do we market our product more effectively? Publicity is one way, but does it work? A small amount of research shows a possible link between magazine article publicity for Merrist Wood College and student recruitment figures. But how many young people at school ever pick up trade magazines like *Horticulture Week* or the *Grower*? Probably there are very few. Would it not be more profitable to advertise in gardening magazines such as *Amateur Gardening*?

Finally, where do all the students go? We may design a course to provide people for jobs which we know are there but do they take these posts up? Local authority employment has declined, while garden centres have taken increasing numbers of students. Many of our students now start their own businesses in landscaping, or become journalists, train as company representatives, or join British Telecom.

Probably there is no clear answer as to why people are not filling nursery practices courses but falling numbers may be a result

of a combination of factors described in this paper. Colleges are in business to educate and train students. Much work is done in order to try to promote our industry's image but much more could be achieved with the help of the nursery industry itself.

## ALLIUMS—MORE THAN JUST ONIONS

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When hunting allium material and slides, for a talk in America in 1982, no one seemed to have any interest in the genus, but suddenly alliums have become respectable, indeed, sought after. While their appeal may be less than that of gentians or primulas, there are plenty of good onions for the average garden.

When collecting plants of a genus the faint-hearted would do well to stick to *Belamcanda*, *Acorus*, or *Paradisea*, all two-specied genera. Contrariwise, there are around 600 alliums world-wide. Some would say that the only good ones appear on plates—not so.

Most alliums would love life in a Greek meadow, few relish rain-soaked Cumbria. *A. amabile*, (10cm) deep pink, dodging the slug packs, does well; *A. mairei* is a pale pink look-alike. *A. polyastrum* (50cm), purple, and *A. tuberosum* (Chinese chives, 40cm), white, are quite hardy and brighten the September border. *A. macranthum* (40cm), purple, flowers a little earlier.

*A. splendens* (20cm), lilac, is not spectacular but dries to a pleasant parchment shade. With long exserted stamens, *A. splendens* var. *kurilense* (10cm), is probably correctly named *A. thunbergii*. This small charmer makes a neat pot plant.

*A. cyaneum* (12cm) flowers in August, and is the toughest and most commonly grown of the bright blue alliums. Easily recognizable by its exserted stamens, it appears under many names. *A. sikkimense* flowers earlier and the stamens are included, as they are in *A. beesianum* (15cms), which flowers in September. This species is difficult to obtain, *A. cyaneum* being most frequently the masquerader under the label.

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