

So, You Want to Be a Proper Gator?

Greg McPhee

Horticultural Communications, PO Box 339, LISMORE NSW 2480

Well, I have been asked to give you some handy hints about plant life, the universe and all that. Not being one to shy away from such a task here are ten hints that may, just, get you a little further along the path of your propagating career.

HINT 1. THE BOSS PAYS THE WAGES, SO THE BOSS IS ALWAYS RIGHT.

Well that's what they would like you to think anyway. I have found that in very small nurseries, the real boss is the partner who speaks less, works hardest, and gets little of the glory. Aim to please this person and you should be OK. In a big nursery forget the pay person, aim to get along with the head propagator. Now experienced propagators are not always friendly loving little creatures, you see they have a job to do and you can easily get under their feet. Accept this and take time to look, listen, and do **WHATEVER** they say. After all they have a history of success, and you don't.

HINT 2. DON'T TELL DIRTY JOKES AT I.P.P.S. MEETINGS.

Not to a full conference session at least. I have it on authority that it is a good idea to put a funny story in every presentation you give. I have found this prerequisite hard to achieve, as I have been endowed with a rather warped sense of humour. That means no one laughs at my jokes but me and I know very few clean jokes anyway.

HINT 3. IF YOU ARE GOING TO USE OVERHEADS WITH A TALK PLEASE CHICK YAW SPILLING AND DOUGHNUT REALLY ON COMPUTER SPIEL CHEQUES.

Technology is great, so long as your life doesn't depend on it. Check any overheads you may have for a talk and learn the lesson about microchips, **they are stupid.**

Hey! Forget working out which day it is, they can't even tell which millennium it is. Mix this with human frailty and you really do have a recipe for disaster. Remember this fact when you rely on the sprinklers working when you are out or the inventory being up to date when you need it.

I would not go away from the prop shed on 1 Jan. 2000, especially to go flying.

HINT 4. ANYONE WHO GETS 100% SUCCESS RATE DOESN'T (KEEP RECORDS THAT IS).

You can try, you can get things really moving, but a consistent 100% forget it. That doesn't mean you stop trying. There is nothing better than to get close, and brag about it. Get a book and keep your own records, put in the book everything you do in the minutest of detail. This is important particularly if you fluke a high take. Especially keep records of anything that has gone wrong, you may need the excuses later when your take really drops. It is surprising how many things you can forget without accurate records.

HINT 5. IBA AND OTHER HORMONES ONLY WORK ON PLANTS.

I guess some of you were waiting for this, so I decided not to disappoint.

My conclusion follows some discrete studies (made scientifically at the bar last night) that were somewhat inconclusive, depending how much the respondent drank and the company they were keeping.

There was a suggestion it helps a few studs, but maybe they were mixing it with other things... now there is a bit of research, I wonder if plants would take longer to wilt if you watered them with Viagra?

Seriously though, these chemicals are not play things and can cause serious health problems, far worse than pregnancy. Be safe and keep them away from your hands, mouths, or other body parts.

HINT 6. YOU WILL BE IN GREAT DEMAND IF YOU KNOW HOW TO PROPAGATE *IPOMEA HORSFALLIAE*.

This is the most requested propagation question at I.P.P.S. meetings. After you have cracked it, people will beat a path to your door. You will be feted, paid large sums of money, and generally seen as a great in propagation. For the first few weeks anyway until some one else claims that they told you how to do it months ago.

HINT 7. ASK NOT, LEARN LITTLE.

Keeping quiet has its benefits, but not at I.P.P.S. meetings. If you have a burning question no matter how basic, ask. If you have a suggestion, suggest. I have NEVER seen anybody ridiculed for asking a question or making a comment.

I have however seen plenty of people walk away without getting the answers they wanted because they were shy or nervous. The basis of I.P.P.S. is to share, so get yours.

HINT 8. PROPAGATING PLANTS BY CUTTINGS IS EASY.

If you start with good parent plants, take the cuttings at the right time, look after their every need, keep their bottoms warm at night, and have the right attitude you will have success. Sounds like it could apply to kids as well.

If you were to look up the Proceedings and see what is familiar about propagating all hard to do lines, and you will see that this is true.

Also remember to keep all your equipment clean. To do so use alcohol in liberal amounts.

You know maybe that is the way to propagate *I. horsfalliae*; try it out when you get back to work, and if it is a goer send me a card, attached to a pressie. If you are successful then I'll claim that I told you how months ago!!

HINT 9. YOU WILL NEVER KNOW IT ALL, BUT THAT SHOULDN'T STOP YOU FROM TRYING.

We all need a challenge, something to keep the mind in operation as well as the hands. So try to propagate the unpropagatable, you never know it just may be possible. Check out new techniques that may at first seem unbelievable. Sometimes the most offbeat idea works, so keep an open mind about any idea until you have proven it doesn't work.

Who would have thought that smoke would have such a profound effect on seed germination? I wonder what the next breakthrough will be?

We have witnessed a real advance in propagation in recent years and yet we really know so little. The reality of living in the 90s is that things are changing faster than they ever have. It is quite possible that all that we have learned so far probably won't relate to tomorrows nurseries.

I can foresee that in the near future nurseries will be very different from what we now see. I bet that most will not even have sprinklers in 10 years time and be able to operate with nil runoff and sod all ground or mains water, as it won't be available.

HINT 10. IN THE END WHAT YOU GIVE IS EQUAL TO WHAT YOU TAKE.

Well the real lines are "and in the end the love you make is equal to the love you take" (Beatles) but that didn't neatly fit into our sort of propagation.

It is amazing that so many people still want to take and never give, they only look at what they can get without ever giving some back in return.

I have been around long enough to see that those who are open about what they do and share really do get ahead. This is why I.P.P.S. is so successful.

Being a good propagator is like taking a journey of discovery. Remember it is the journey that is important in life not the destination.

SO what of the proper gator of the future?

The propagator of the future will be highly skilled, a professional, sought after, and well paid. You don't get to the last point without the others.

I thought I would end with a graduated scale of measure for the successful propagator.

YOU KNOW YOU HAVE MADE IT AS A PROPER GATOR WHEN:

- You can choose the radio station at the work bench.
- Another nursery tries to poach you.
- Your propagation rate for grevilleas tops 80%.
- Des Boorman asks you for a propagation tip.
- Frances suggests you would make a good board member.
- Flash Gordon tells a story about you at a dinner.