

Educating the Next Generation of Propagators[®]

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Good morning and welcome to Gainesville!

To Seek and To Share — the motto of IPPS. This motto is the foundation of my presentation today. As we reach the first half of the first decade of the twenty-first century, I offer this challenge: (1) let us do our very best to educate the next generation of plant propagators, and (2) let us inspire these young people to a level above and beyond our own.

To achieve this objective, we must be steadfast and untiring. The future of plant propagation rests in our hands and, ultimately, in the hands of those we teach in the coming days, weeks, months, and years. The road to successful education should be never-ending, and room must be reserved to broaden this road and to keep the flow of information moving forward.

There are two main lanes in this road to the education of the next generation of propagators: one is the formal education, while the other is practical experience acquired from areas other than formal education — such as on-the-job learning and knowledge gained from self determination. Formal education is the transfer of knowledge from teacher to student. Most students begin their plant propagation learning, on a course basis, in junior high or high school. Organizations such as 4H and Future Farmers of America have been influential in this endeavor.

The next level of learning is community college or technical college; these institutions offer many fine horticulture programs across the country. Indeed, several members of this group are graduates of these community college programs.

University programs finish out the formal education part of the educational road. Some programs include a 2-year course of study offering an associate degree. Further educational opportunities exist with degrees being awarded at bachelor's, master's, and doctoral levels. Public and private institutions offer programs in horticulture, not the least of which includes plant propagation.

Now, how can you aid in this area of formal education? Perhaps you can volunteer to teach a propagation class at your local high school or be a guest lecturer at a community college or even a university. Maybe a field trip to your nursery would provide meaningful information to students. Some institutions require or at least encourage summer work-study experience for their horticultural programs. For propagators, the opportunity to serve on an advisory panel of an educational institution may be a possibility. Propagators should not be timid if you wish to share your knowledge with those in the business of giving our next generation of propagators a formal education. Likewise, you educators need to seek out the seasoned nurserymen for their inputs and ideas. All of us will be beneficiaries of these efforts. Nurserymen, I urge you to make the most of these opportunities! You just might have a great employee some day. Who knows — you might learn something yourself!

Financial assistance is another way you can help. A donation of plant material is a possibility. Horticultural scholarships endowed by you individually or by your nursery could help promising students in need.

Another important lane in the road to education of the next generation of propa-

gators is the knowledge gained by hands-on experience. This knowledge can be acquired working for large multi-state nurseries or any size operation down to small, backyard, hobby nurseries. Opportunities for education in plant propagation can exist across the entire spectrum of the industry. With proper motivation and a measure of inspiration, propagators new to the discipline have a chance to learn from many older generation propagators in the “school of hard knocks.”

How can we, the old guard, assist these new propagators? First, we need to remember that plant propagation is an art, as well as a science. Every single one of us has been brought to our knees in our quest for success. After such an experience, we should be humbled and should realize our fallibility. Just teaching the new kids on the block that success is not guaranteed is a substantial undertaking. If you have an interested person working for you, or with you for that matter, let them know you are interested in their quest. Remember, you were in their shoes once upon a time.

The assistance you offer can be of various types. Perhaps you can offer hints on ways to organize their efforts more efficiently, thus increasing total production. Another way to help might be guidance in propagating a plant that is giving the new propagator fits. Your donation of information might be what it takes to transform failure into success. A donation of cuttings may be another way you can help.

The tricks of the trade have helped many of us over the years. I remember Bill Barr helping me years ago with *Nandina domestica*, and I have the notes on my office wall to this day. We need to write these little tricks of the trade down for the next generation of propagators and generations to come. How many tricks of the trade have been silenced because the holder never wrote them down before he or she passed on? As far-fetched as it sounds, perhaps a clearinghouse for these ideas is in order sometime in the future. In addition to preserving this information, it is our responsibility to disseminate it.

Our imaginations are the only limitations we have as we educate the next generation of propagators. With determination, let us reiterate the challenge that began this presentation: (1) let us do our very best to educate the next generation of plant propagators, (2) let us inspire these young people to a level above and beyond our own, and (3) remember the IPPS motto — “To Seek and To Share.”

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