

senior examiners or people recommended by the County Proficiency Test Committee. Their main duty is to set and maintain standards nationwide. They do this by involvement at examiner training days and monitoring tests in progress. They meet regularly in order to update and streamline the tests. They are sometimes elected to specialist panels in order to keep a weather eye on any new technology, such as the use of computers and micropropagation.

How can the industry help itself with regard to training? I hear a lot of comments about this or that being too soft an option, or something else being too hard to achieve, so I suggest the best way to get things done, or altered, is to become actively involved. As an examiner be heard by your County Committee. Finally, prepare the candidate properly before sending him or her for testing so that both you and the candidate will benefit.

What is a craftsman? The English Dictionary's definition is "A man with ability, skill and guile, and possessing a manual art". Is this the type of person we are hoping to pass or is this setting our sights too high? For most nurseries this definition, while being desirable, is not really obtainable for a number of reasons. The student is not left for long enough time in any one department to learn the skill thoroughly, because he is required elsewhere on the establishment for other seasonal work. I suggest, therefore, that perhaps the term "craftsman — Grade II", and later when more experience and skill have been acquired "Craftsman Grade I". Perhaps another title altogether may be appropriate.

I believe that to a large extent, with modern ideas and technology, fewer true craftsmen as we know them will be required. But more well-trained nursery staff who can competently deal with a given situation will always be wanted.

## **SHARE YOUR KNOWLEDGE AND EXPERIENCE — THE NURSERYMAN'S ROLE IN PASSING ON CRAFTS**

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Are we, as nurserymen, passing on all the skills we have personally, or are we leaving this to the colleges, day-release schemes, or Training Boards? The modern nurseryman or woman is so involved with computers, cash flow, profits, plants, pots and pans, and all that sells well, that he or she is

often far too involved with these things to spend a few hours teaching (and getting to know) staff, particularly the junior.

I can look back 55 years when George Tucker showed me how to graft *Gypsophila paniculata* 'Bristol Fairy' and how he taught me to tie a reef knot instead of a granny. It is good to see he is here in our Society today. I was apprenticed to his father to learn the nursery trade. I believe that time spent with staff is a good investment. They appreciate the fact that the boss or manager can spend time teaching and that you can do the job that you are asking them to do!

When I intended to retire at 65, I sold my nursery to Rochfords, the houseplant growers, my nursery being Barter's Farm Nursery at Chapmanslade near Westbury in Wiltshire. I was asked to stay on as Managing Director of my own company and also to become Director on the main board of Thomas Rochford and Sons Limited. During this time I spent some time at Rochfords teaching three or four of their senior apprentices how to bench graft. We tried such things as wisteria, hibiscus and *Robinia*. We were hoping to start a tree and shrub propagating department within the glasshouse company. I was surprised how much interest these lads showed. A director spending time with them and teaching a skill was something new for them as they had spent all their working life on house plant production.

How many skills and old crafts are we losing? Take our beautiful buildings of Salisbury and Wells Cathedrals and many hundreds more. Where have all the skills in woodworking and stone carving gone today? The late Mr. Russell of Windlesham Nursery once told me how, as a young man, he used to bud *Acer japonicum* 'Aureum' in the field and obtain good whips in a year. This plant is now good only for bonsai! Why not get it grown again if there is any plant left when the virus has been taken out! Budding and grafting purple beech and birch was often done successfully in the open ground.

I suggest you spend a day with three or four of your younger staff and really talk to them. You will get to know them and they will know who you are and that you have craft skills which they could learn.

- 1.) Start by locking the door, cutting off the telephone and sit down at a table. You could start by asking their names. Do you even know them?

- 2.) Ask them if they have ever used a sharp knife

- 3.) Show them how to sharpen a grafting knife. Also show them where the first-aid box is!

4.) Show them how to hold a knife and draw it through the wood, starting with a whip and tongue graft.

5.) Show them how to make a straight cut and keep them practising. Don't forget that boys and girls are not allowed to take knives to school these days like we were. Desks would have lasted longer if this had been the rule for my day!

6.) Show them how to tie a graft with plastic or rubber. Shows them the simple way of finishing a tie by passing the last turn under the thumb instead of tying a knot. One craft you can tell them about, but don't demonstrate it, is the material that was used to protect the graft: Cow manure and chopped straw mixed up and applied by hand.

You may learn something yourself. You will know your staff better, and you may have discovered a potentially very skilled young person for the future.

## **SUN FRAME PROPAGATION**

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This paper reviews work the author was involved with while working at Efford Experimental Horticulture Station, Lymington, Hampshire. Work on field-grown nursery stock was started at Efford in 1981. Investigating aspects of propagation was a logical starting point. Following developments made with the rooting of cuttings under glass, it seemed likely that improvements could be made with the relatively cheap low tunnel or sun frame technique.

The sun frame technique for propagating softwood cuttings is not new — cold frames covered by Dutch lights were in use from the 19th century. Modern materials such as polythene sheeting for tunnels and automatic misting have brought it up to date. As the plant material from sun frames has been mostly destined for field planting and the landscape market, the range of species grown has been limited. If plant quality could be improved there would be an opportunity to extend the species range as a cheaper alternative propagation technique to heated glass. This would, in turn, create opportunities for supplying a range of markets such as containers and pre-packs.

The two major problems encountered on nurseries who were using sun frames were: