

Trends in the Nursery Industry in South Africa

Keith Kirsten

Keith Kirsten (Pty) Ltd. PO Box 1258, Parklands, 2121, South Africa

INTRODUCTION

Changes are taking place in the nursery industry in South Africa and elsewhere in the world. Twenty years ago, a nursery was a place where plants were grown and sold. Today nurseries are split between growers and retailers. A relatively new trend is the specialization of growers to produce plugs.

In this paper, I will present an overview of my view of how things are going to change in the retail nursery industry and how the propagator will be affected.

TRENDS IN SOUTH AFRICA AND ELSEWHERE

Internationally the retail nursery industry has to compete with other centers of entertainment such as sport and health clubs. There is thus a tendency to respond by prolonged shopping hours, children's playgrounds, coffee shops, butterfly houses, craft centers, etc. to attract people to nurseries. Eventually the selling of plants will become secondary to the mainline business of getting people into the nursery.

GARDEN NURSERIES

In the U.K. garden centers are often considered as places where plants are sold by people who do not know much about plants. The nursery is the place that is known to have the plants that you want and where advice on the cultivation of the plants can be obtained. In the U.K. a new trend is that of garden nurseries and I believe that it is a trend that will spill over to South Africa. The garden is planted to show people how plants can be used, where they are planted, how they grow, and how they look at different times of the year. Connected to this is the nursery where the plants in the garden are offered for sale.

HYPERSTORES

More and more plants are sold by hyperstores and do-it-yourself (DIY) centers. The selling power of hyperstores should not be underestimated because they are driven by customer needs. Hyperstores make sure that they give the customer what he/she wants, and their display and point of sale are often outstanding.

SPECIALIZATION

My prediction is that the private nurseries and the mama-papa nurseries will in 5-10 years time not be able to exist as they do at present. They will become part of a chain, be branded (for example Garden Pavillion in South Africa), they will join groups or become public companies. Three types of growers will emerge in the future: the specialist plant grower, large growers such as Malanseuns who grows everything, and smaller growers who will specialize in nich markets with special cultivars, etc.

MAILORDER

More plants are sold through mailorder companies in the U.S.A. than through nurseries. This is exiting news for the propagator: you grow them, they will sell it.

To reach that point, however, the grower must be connected to the Internet, not only to let retailers know what you have available, but also to keep up with market trends.

MARKETING

One-to-one marketing is going to become increasingly important. It happens more and more that clients come to a nursery with specific demands and needs. They no longer come to the nursery to see what is available, they see the plants somewhere else, and they always want the plants immediately. If you are informed properly (computer connected) you can sell more plants on a one-to-one basis than what you can in a nursery with a whole range of plants where they sell one-by-one.

Plants are going to be sold very differently in the future than what we are used to. There is an increasing demand for delivery and people are always busy. It is those growers who advertise on TV, offer delivery, and who are connected via Internet who will have an advantage. People will prefer to do shopping from the comfort of their homes to getting out in the heat or cold.

BRANDING

Branding is going to become increasingly important as people associate the colour, logo, and style with a certain type of product. A successful brand need never be changed. It is not only the name, but also the look of the truck, the presentation, the label, etc.

INFORMATION

Growers tend to assume that people know how to grow plants. They don't. To survive, retailers will have to provide customers with information on how and where a plant should be grown and how it can be used. This means that the propagator must supply the retailer with the relevant information since he/she knows the product well. The information should be short and sweet. People are always in a hurry. Thus the shorter your message, the better your chance of getting the message over to them. An example is perhaps the gardening program that I ran on TV on Saturday mornings. They were only 4 min. long, yet very popular.

Plants are the business and life of the propagator. Yet to the majority of people, plants are just another commodity. To compete successfully with the other commodities, plants must perform, be colorful, robust, and floriferous. Customers must be made aware of why a specific plant is unique and how it can be used in the home or garden.

PLANTS FOR THE FUTURE?

- Annuals will always be popular because of the colour. However, they may not be sold in the same quantities. Therefore, the quality will have to be outstanding.
- Perennials such as alstroemeria, daylilies other than the well known yellow ones, Japanese anemones, etc.
- Flowering shrubs.
- Indigenous plants for the different climatic areas in the country.
- Improved cultivars of well known plants. New colors, shapes, and sizes.
- Small plants. People live in smaller homes with smaller gardens than two decades ago and this trend will continue.

CONCLUSION

South African propagators and other nurserymen must take note of the trends in the marketing of plants in the rest of the world and be prepared to adapt to the changing needs of customers. Much can be accomplished by liaison with the Australian nursery industry, we can learn such things as nursery hygiene and marketing. International Plant Propagators' Society and South African Nurserymen's Association each have a different role to play, and gardening writers play a special role.

The Use of Taguchi Methods to Analyze Variables

Dudley Wilson

Hadeco, PO Box 7, Maraisburg, 1700, South Africa

Taguchi methods offer plant propagators an opportunity to develop optimal methods or conditions in a cost-effective way. An example used in our tissue culture laboratory is discussed and Internet addresses to find more information are given.

INTRODUCTION

Propagators often face the situation where a new method has to be developed, or an existing one optimized. Usually more than one factor affects the processes of growth, for example: temperature, age of the plant, season, light intensity, day length, growth regulators, etc. To complicate matters, one or more of these critical factors may have a more profound effect on the process than others. Even worse is that two or more of these factors may interact with each other. More often than not, limited amounts of material are available for experimentation and the propagator has little time for experimentation.

The conventional method of investigating all possible combinations and conditions in an experiment is known as a factorial design. It is based on the theory that for a full factorial design, all possible combinations are tested, obviously at great cost and time, with a statistical analysis of results. In contrast to the factorial design, Taguchi's robust design method provides the propagator with a systematic and efficient approach to determine the near optimum conditions. In this paper the method is briefly discussed and an example where I used it successfully is given.

TAGUCHI AND ROBUST DESIGN METHODS

Taguchi methods are a system of cost-driven quality engineering that emphasizes the effective application of engineering strategies, rather than advanced statistical methods. Taguchi methods are known as Robust Design methods in the U.S.A. The approach allows for experiments to be performed and prototypes tested on multiple factors at once so that the process becomes insensitive to experimental conditions and other uncontrollable factors. Dr. Genichi Taguchi developed his philosophy on quality engineering over a period of 30 years after he was recruited to repair Japan's telephone system. Not satisfied with trial and error methods, he developed his own method to design experiments. One of Taguchi's key ideas is the upstream optimi-