

**The following three papers by H. William Barnes, Gied Stroombeek, and Calvin Chong were part of an evening program: Common/Uncommon Sense Ideas.**

## **Wells for Ideas**

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A brief history is in order to fully understand how innovative ideas come about and from what spring they emerge. First is an absolute love and admiration for the business of plant production and for plant life in general. For me plant production and exploration are the most fascinating of all endeavors. This thought is echoed by Dr. J. Artie Browing, noted plant pathologist of Texas A&M. He said "For a plantsman or agriculturist to experience a different climate, environment, and flora is an educational bonus and a justification in itself". I would echo his comments ten fold and fully support his suggestion that education is the gateway towards innovation (Browning, 1998).

I came into horticulture through the back door having a need for a job to finish my degree in biology. The back door was a job in the propagation and production department of a large wholesale nursery in Tampa, Florida. From there I moved on to nurseries in Colorado, Pennsylvania, and Delaware. Combine those years of experience with the more formal education of the University of South Florida and one comes close to what Browing is suggesting. In many ways much of my horticulture background is self taught and I personally feel that is perhaps the best education of all. Self teaching insures an interested student.

To be innovative means building upon existing ideas and then occasionally climbing out on the farthest branch there is. This is not without risk, but on the other hand exciting things can be gained by making the great leap. It is important to be in the outer orbit as fellow colleague Tim Brotzman suggests. My first talk before the I.P.P.S. was in 1986 when I gave a paper on *Use of Glycol as a Solvent for Root Hormones* (Barnes, 1988). Words like wow, crazy, and wildman were a common response to that paper. But as time became the judge my suggestions were heeded and the validity of the approach was confirmed, especially after my colleague Calvin Chong at the Vineland Experiment Station picked up the baton. The important thing to remember is that the procedures outlined do work!

Education for the propagator should not stop at the school door, it should be a life-long process and an never ending passion. It includes the I.P.P.S., formal training, and self-taught instruction, and listening. Listening to others, both experienced and not so experienced is important, as is listening to tall tales and far-fetched stories and truths. It means reading everything in site and it means understanding truths to be valid in so far as the circumstances surrounding the truths are valid. There is a series of books called the Plant Hunters; in one volume of the series there is a recounting of shipping seed from the South Pacific to Kew in England. To accomplish this the explorers packed the seed in honey which allowed the seed to make the long journey home safely. Why honey? It was a desiccant and prevented mold and mildew and it stopped bacterial action. Seed did not dry out. It appears as though honey might be an ideal subject for seed preservation. I am currently working on this for long-term seed storage.

Innovation should not ignore old technology. Many of the ways of our ancestors might have validity today should we chose to investigate them. Early propagation books by Laurie and Chadwick (1931), Kains and McQuesten (1950), Mahlstedt and Haber (1957), James S. Wells (1985), and *New Creations in Plant Life*, an authoritative account of Luther Burbank by W. S. Harwood (1941) should be read and reread. We all should wonder how things were done before the age of computers and the like.

As Browing (1998) suggested travel is a key ingredient for expanding ones mind and focusing on the new. It is important to see how the rest of the world is doing things.

Brent Elliot (1998) of *The Garden Magazine* professes an alternative viewpoint but one that is consistent with this thesis never the less. He suggests in a quote “The best way to appear original at least in your own eyes is to ignore the past” What he is really saying is to ignore the nay sayers and the cannots and go full steam ahead against the odds, for surely there will be rewards for those that do so. A long-time companion and friend and nurseryman, Dick Brady of Canon City, Colorado says to “Create your own luck”.

## PROGRESS AND NOT SO MUCH PROGRESS

### Want to Be's and Duds.

- We have a single plant of a dwarf *Metasequoia glyptostroboides*, but after years of frustration we have not developed a propagation program that does prevent the plant from restoring itself to a normal form. A no go so far.
- *Euscaphis japonica*, a splendid plant with great ornamental features has stonewalled all efforts to become a production item. Great treasures await those who crack the code.
- Witches brooms in *Cornus sericea* and *C. racemosa* are intriguing but they are pathogenic, being caused by a mycoplasma and hence can not be the “Holy Grail of Dwarfs”.

### Ideas From Others.

- One of my clients uses a giant open-air screened cage that revolves on an axis. They use this to tumble hosta crowns free of soil so that they can successfully and quite easily divide the plants.
- A nursery we visited on an I.P.P.S. trip used barbed wire as a support for hanging baskets, the barbs being strategically placed to prevent slipping of the basket holders.
- One nursery I have seen was growing flats of moss for a specific customer. There seems to be no end to what people will produce or sell.

### Things in Process at the Lorax.

- A new introduction after 12 years of study is *Cornus kousa* ‘Creme Puff’. A dwarf *C. kousa* with copious amount of flowers.
- We have been looking at *Juniperus virginiana* ‘Blue Sentinel’ for the last 10 years and we are impressed at its strict narrow upright features and blue juvenile foliage that is accented by bright blue fruit.

- Currently under investigation for production is a seedless sweet gum, *Liquidambar styraciflua*, which we have been watching for close to 7 years. Production and propagation has not been worked out as of yet.
- *Chionanthus virginicus* can be rooted but there are many problems to be solved. However, it can be rooted.
- Studies with oaks have shown similar progress particularly with cultivars of *Quercus palustris*.
- *Viburnum lentago* 'Show Girl' is a variegated *Viburnum* found in southern Vermont. Production has been slow but grafting seems to afford a possible propagation technique.
- *Metasequoia glyptostroboides* 'Silver Splash' is a variegated form of *Metasequoia* that does propagate from cuttings but is slow. More work needs to be done.
- The literature suggests that *Austrocedrus chilensis* is a Zone 9 plant, but plants growing in Martha's Vineyard and in Pennsylvania contest that. It is a strong grower and could be a welcome addition to the upright conifer market.

### Success Stories.

- *Lagerstroemia indica* 'Spitfire' has been under development for 10 years and it has stood the test of time and climate and appears to be hardy to at least 0F and maybe lower.
- *Magnolia macrophylla* var. *ashei* is a northern Florida native but is quite hardy and content just North of Philadelphia. It has proven to be a winner after 12 years and has never frozen back or been injured.
- *Cercidiphyllum japonicum* 'Tidal Wave' was found as a weeping variation in a block of seedlings. It is distinctive and quite attractive and is becoming available in the retail mailorder market.
- *Viburnum dentatum* 'Moon Glo' was found as a late-blooming form of the species in a block of seedlings. It blooms later and has both glossy green foliage and wonderful fall color. It is a welcome addition to the viburnum markets.

### Inspirations.

- While on a trip to Florida I saw maidenhair fern growing in pure limestone. This is something to ponder, considering the pH in which the fern is growing.
- The inspiration for my talk, *Grasses from Cuttings* (1994), came about from seeing adventitious roots form on corn plants in a field.
- While on another trip in the wilds of Florida I happened upon a large witches broom in a *Pinus elliottii*. Florida and the S.E. coastal states do not have a plant that can be used like mugo pine (*P. mugo*). Perhaps a cultivar could be developed from that plant to fill this niche.
- *Chorisia speciosa* is the world famous kapok tree. The large purple to pink flowers are an inspiration unto themselves.

- At the Henry Leu Botanic Gardens in Orlando, Florida is a large collection of palms, of the many is *Bismarckia nobilis*; perhaps the most stately and artistic of any plant that I have ever seen. A true inspiration to anyone who is a plantsperson.

It is important to “Dare to be Different”!

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