

Small Plants Big Profits from Home!

**The fun and exciting business of
growing plants at home and
selling them for profit.**

By Michael J. McGroarty

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This manual is being sold as information only. There is no guarantee of success, either written or implied. Much more study and research is needed before any person should venture into a business.

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Entering into any business venture involves risks. If you are not comfortable with taking risks, then the business world is not for you. Any person considering a business opportunity should seek the advice of a competent tax accountant, and an attorney before proceeding.

I would also like to point out that if you are conducting any type of business from your home, your home owners insurance will not cover somebody who slips, falls, gets bit by your dog or comes to harm in any other way while on your property. Discuss this with your insurance agent and or seek legal advice.

Welcome to the fun and exciting business of growing small plants for profit!

Enjoy, learn, and prosper.

Thank you for the order!

I wish you incredible success and the best that life has to offer.

-Mike McGroarty

Table of Contents

Getting Started	page 5
Properly Labeled Plants	page 9
Growing Patented Plants	page 11
Keeping Proper Records	page 15
A Quick Tip on Selling Your First Plants	page 19
Sell a Plant Get a Name	page 20
More about Selling Plants	page 21
Set Up Shop Downtown	page 21
Fundraisers	page 22
A Nursery on Wheels	page 22
A Really, Really, Really Important Plant Selling Tip	page 23
Selling to Wholesale Buyers	page 25
Selling Un-Rooted Cuttings	page 25
Becoming a Plant Broker	page 27
Selling Plants from Home	page 28
Zoning	page 28
Even more Ways to Sell Your Plants	page 29
Aren't Retail Sales the Best Way to Get the Most Money for Your Plants?	page 31
Why is a Large Retail Operation So Difficult to Maintain?	page 33
The big box stores have entered the market.	page 35
How to Get Free Pots and Free Customers	page 38
The Lifetime Value of a Customer	page 39
Free Advertising for Your Nursery	page 41
Doing Co-Op Plant Sales	page 41
Attracting Retail Customers to Your Nursery	page 42
Newspaper Advertising	page 43
Should You Offer Discounts?	page 52
Buy More Plants to Boost Your Curb Appeal	page 55
Doing Everything within Your Power to Give People Great Value	page 56
The Power of the \$4.97 Pricing Model	page 58
Plant Guarantees	page 59
Nurseries who don't offer guarantees	page 61
Why Wholesale Growers Do Not Guarantee Their Plants	page 61
How to Minimize Your Losses When You Guarantee Your Plants	page 62
A Customer Loyalty Program	page 63
Start a Plant Buyers Continuity Program	page 63
The Pricing Cheat Sheet	page 64
Where Do I Buy 2 Quart Containers	page 66
Why a Soil-less Growing Mix?	page 68
Mike's Big Mistake in Life	page 69
Plant Propagation	page 69
Where Do You Buy Coarse Sand?	page 71

Should I use Flats or a Bed of Sand for Rooting?	page 72
How Much Sand Do I Need?	page 72
How and When Do I Remove the Cuttings from the Sand	page 73
Should I Plant them in a Grow Bed or Should I Pot them?	page 74
The Schedule of Growing Events	page 75
Potting Up Your Plants	page 76
Fertilizer	page 76
Weed Control	page 77
Weed Barrier Fabric	page 77
Keeping Weeds Out of Nursery Containers	page 78
Pre-Emergent Herbicides	page 79
Organic Weed Control	page 80
Pest Control	page 81
Air Pruning	page 82
Where to Buy Rooted Cuttings	page 83
Mike's List of 21 Plants that are Easy to Grow and Sell Like Crazy	page 84
How to Make Your Own Potting Soil	page 86
Protecting Your Plants from the Harsh Winter Weather	page 89
What about Plants in the Ground?	page 90
Why Doesn't Mike Cover his Plants for the Winter?	page 91
What about a Greenhouse? Do I Need One?	Page 91
How many pots will one yard of soil fill?	page 92
Selling at Flea Markets and Swap Meets	page 92
Telling Stories in Print	page 93
More about Selling to Wholesale Buyers	page 94
Lifetime Value of a Wholesale Customer	page 96
Selling One Gallons by the Truck Load	page 96
Making Your Business Recession Proof	page 98
The Arithmetic of Buying Rooted Cuttings	page 99
This Book Contains Information that Some Nurseryman	
Don't Want You to Have	page 100
Free Advertising for Your Nursery	page 102
The Backyard Growers Business Center	page 103

Getting Started Growing Small Plants for Profit

So you would like to be a plant grower would ya? Great idea! Growing plants at home and selling them at a profit is a wonderful, wonderful business to be in. Not only can it be quite profitable, but it is an extremely rewarding business to be in.

Growing a plant from scratch with your own two hands, and having somebody gladly pay you money for that plant, is a tremendous thrill. When I say “gladly pay you money” I mean just that. There is no work to selling plants. When people come to buy plants they are like kids in a candy store. People love plants, and don’t hesitate for a second when it comes to turning over their hard earned cash for them. Just like the movie **The Field of Dreams**, I like to say “If you grow them, they will come.” And they most certainly will, and they will buy.

There are dozens and dozens of ways to sell the plants that you grow. For a number of years I held plant sales at my house. Those plant sales were crazy! People came from all over to buy our small plants and on a good day it was like some kind of a crazy plant buying frenzy. Often times it was all we could do to keep up just taking the money from people. I know that sounds far-fetched, and if you want to believe that I've embellished the truth here with that story that's fine, because I know it's really difficult to think that that many people, all at the same time, on the same day, would come to you and buy plants. So I'll just throw it out there and you can believe it or not.

I'm not even going to suggest that you hold a plant sale at your house. That's up to you and we'll discuss more plant selling options in this book.

Of course you will want to position your home business in such a way that it serves a niche market. Don't try to be just like the full service garden center across town. Make your nursery unique enough that your customers will drive right past those full service garden centers and nurseries to get to your place. Or better yet, make it so unique that the customers of the full service nurseries will drive right past the place that they usually shop to get to your place. How do you do that? We'll get to that a little later in this book. But for the most part all you need to do is make certain that your customers are getting more value for the money they are spending. That's easy to do when your operating expenses are almost nothing.

Once you establish your little tiny backyard nursery people of all walks of life will regard you as a true expert, and will feel honored to consider you a friend. When people visit our little tiny nursery they are completely in awe of what we do here. And get this, our original backyard nursery was just 1/20 of one acre, and it brought in thousands of dollars per year, and we could have done more. It's just a matter of choosing what type of plants you would like to grow, and what type of sales you are looking for.

Today my nursery isn't much bigger than that, but I've got more room to expand. Right now I'm growing a lot of specialty plants like Japanese maples, Lavender Twist Redbud and a few other ornamentals.

Even though all of these Japanese maples are in demand, doing what I'm doing requires more of an investment because I'm buying my Japanese maples from growers who specialize in grafting. I often pay from \$8.00 to \$18.00 per tree that I buy for my nursery. Even though these trees will sell for as much as \$100 each or more, it's not the business model that I recommend when you are just starting out. It requires too much of an investment and that increases the risks.

Not only that, most people really don't know a lot about Japanese maples and they are delighted to buy just a Red Japanese Maple and I'll show you how to buy those for less than \$1.50 each and you can sell them for \$4.97, or you can grow them for a few years and sell them for \$50.00 or more. At the time of this writing I am buying Japanese Red Maple seedlings for as little as \$1.06 each plus shipping. That's for small trees about 12" tall.

Now here's the secret. It's always a good idea to have some of these Japanese Red maple seedlings on hand because when you advertise them at \$4.97 each plant buyers will beat a path to your door because nobody else sells them at that price. Sure they're small, but the plant buyers don't care. They're plant buyers, they like to watch things grow.

Now, if you live in a warmer state, zone 8 or above, Japanese maples might not be the best thing for you to grow. They tend not to like it in really warm climates. However, there are a few varieties that do well in warmer climates. Just do an Internet search for "Japanese maples for warm climates" to find those varieties.

With that said, I've got a backyard grower in Alabama that is growing a lot of different Japanese maples and she is doing really well with them. So . . .

I buy a lot of my Japanese maple seedlings from Heritage Seedlings in Oregon. Heritage is a great company, but they do have a minimum order that you have to meet before you can order from them. I don't know exactly what their minimum is now, but last I knew it was around \$350 or \$400. Check the Wholesale Directory that came with this book for their contact information.

If you are not yet ready to place an order that large we have members of our own [Backyard Growers Private Group](#) that sell Japanese Red Maple seedlings and all kinds of other plants in much smaller quantities.

Up to this point we have discussed only selling your plants retail with customers visiting you to shop. If this does not appeal to you, you can do quite well growing plants and selling them wholesale to other nurseries and garden centers. I have done both. I sold

mostly to wholesale buyers, then I sold mostly to retail buyers, now I'm working my way back into the wholesale market. Selling wholesale is actually a great way to make money, with less hassle than selling retail.

Selling retail is fine, and it's a great way to get started and a great way to generate cash flow to build your inventory, but I really, really like wholesale because I can sell dozens or even hundreds of plants at a time, all to the same customer. And better yet, that same customer is likely to come back and buy from me over and over and over.

When I was selling to the wholesale market before I was growing larger plants like Pink and white Dogwood trees, Weeping cherries, Weeping Birch, and a variety of other ornamental trees. Selling them wholesale I was getting about \$35. a piece for them, but I had to dig them by hand and burlap them. Digging is a lot of work, and time consuming. I was also growing Burning Bush and Rhododendrons in the field, but they too had to be balled & burlaped.

Of course wholesale buyers will also buy small plants that can be sold bare root. Bare root means to dig the plants up and shake all of the soil from the roots before delivering them to you customers. Bare root nursery stock sales is definitely a big business.

The nursery business is both a hobby and a retirement plan for me, and I don't want to work that hard at my hobby. Of course it is a profitable hobby, which makes it all the more enjoyable. So plan right now is to grow a lot of small flowering shrubs in one gallon containers as well as a lot of perennials. I can sell the flowering shrubs and perennials to garden centers. I can also sell a lot of perennials to landscapers. They always need nice perennials for their jobs.

Of course you don't have to grow large plants to sell to the wholesale market. As a matter of fact there is, and always will be a huge market for people who do nothing but propagate plants and sell them as rooted cuttings to wholesale nurseries. I have a friend who has a large wholesale nursery who bought all of his rooted cuttings for years and years. A few years ago one of his foreman talked him into doing the propagation themselves at the nursery. But before that happened he was spending almost \$50,000. dollars a year on rooted cuttings. Of course his business was doing over 1 million dollars a year in business. But even after they started doing their own propagation they still bought tens of thousands of dollars worth of rooted cuttings!

More recently I was talking with one of the head propagators for one of the large wholesale nurseries in this area and was surprised to learn that they had completely closed their plant propagation department and are now buying all of the rooted cuttings that they need from other growers.

I know of another nursery that grows and sells only Lilacs. But instead of propagating them he buys all of the plants as rooted cuttings or liners from other growers.

Liner is short for "lining out stock". A liner is a rooted cutting that has been grown for one full season after it is rooted. A rooted cutting is just as it sounds, a cutting with roots. Where a liner is a small plant with a heavier root system and some small branches. A liner is sturdier and will make up into a finished plant sooner.

I'm not going to promise you that you can easily break into the business of selling rooted cuttings or liners to other, larger wholesale growers. But I won't tell you that it's impossible. Those that buy liners and rooted cuttings need them, and they are going to buy them from somebody. If your quality is up to par, your prices are competitive and your service is good, there's a good chance that they will buy from you.

If you were doing nothing but propagation, how many customers like that would you need? Almost all large commercial nurseries buy at least part of the plants that they grow as liners or rooted cuttings. Different nurseries use different size plants as liners. Some will put a rooted cutting in the field, while others prefer to use plants that are two or three years old as liners. Just recently I sold 200, 4 year old Burning Bush to a wholesale nursery, and they bought them to plant out in the field and grow on to a larger size. That's one of the things that is so nice about this business. No matter what size plants you prefer to grow, there is a market for them.

Why do nurseries buy some plants from other nurseries instead of growing them themselves? There are many reasons, but the most common is because once a plant reaches a certain age, they become much easier to care for. So rather than try and grow Japanese Red Maples from seed and nurse them along until they are large enough to plant out in the field, many nurseryman would prefer to invest the money in the liners, and only have to wait a few more years before they can sell the plants at a 1500% profit.

On the other hand, the nursery that opts to grow the seedlings is set up to grow hundreds of thousands, if not millions of plants at one time. Many of these growers start the plants from seed, then pot them up in very small 2-1/4" containers, grow them for another year and sell them. The plants never leave the greenhouse. Because they are growing so many at one time, the income adds up quickly, even if they are only getting one dollar for each plant they grow and sell. Of course they have the expense of building and operating greenhouses. Using the techniques you will learn in this publication, you will never need a greenhouse, unless of course you would just like to have one. But it certainly isn't necessary.

Only you can decide what exactly you would like to grow, and whether or not to sell retail or wholesale. A few plants that are in very short supply today, and more than likely will continue to be for some time are Gold Thread Cypress, Crimson Pygmy Barberry, Viburnums, Dogwoods, and many others. This spells opportunity for anyone who grows these plants in quantities of 500 or more.

When plants like this are in short supply you can start growing them and sell them to wholesalers who have a market for them, but do not have enough inventory to meet the demand. You can sell them as rooted cuttings for 60 cents each, or you can sell them in 1 quart, 2 quart, or 1 gallon containers with the price reaching up to \$4.50 each or more. Or you if you have enough room you can plant them out in the field and grow them to landscape size and sell to garden centers, landscapers, or retail customers.

Finding a market for them might be as easy as placing a classified ad in the **American Nurseryman** magazine. **American Nurseryman** is the most popular magazine of the nursery industry, and everybody in the business reads it. All nursery stock buyers scour the pages looking for the plants they need. All nursery trade shows are advertised in the magazine as well. At a trade show you will find thousands of nursery stock buyers and sellers. You'll find the address for subscribing at the end of this book.

To get started in this business it isn't absolutely necessary that you know exactly which plants you would like to grow for the next twenty years. Use your common sense to decide which items you would like to start out with. Ask around in your area. Talk to to garden center and nursery owners. Some of them may not want to talk to you, but you'll be surprised at how many will be willing to offer you advice. If you intend to sell retail, flowering trees and shrubs are always a big hit. Once you get into the business, you will eventually decide what direction is best for you.

This is important! You have to get started! You can spend weeks, months or years thinking about this. Just get started. Buy some properly named stock plants and start taking cuttings from those plants and you are on your way. Buy some properly named perennials and start dividing them.

Just get started! Don't over analyze this. I've grown all kinds of plants, some I only grew once and never grew again, but eventually I managed to sell most everything that I grew.

Properly Labeled Plants

Should you start out growing your plants from scratch, or would you be better off to buy some rooted cuttings wholesale to get started? That is totally up to you, but the most important thing you need to know is that you **absolutely, positively, must know exactly what it is that you are growing. Make certain that you know the correct botanical name, and the common name.**

For instance, the botanical name of Burning Bush is *Euonymus Alatus Compacta*. Don't let these botanical names discourage you. You will pick it up much quicker and easier than you think. Botanical names can be found in gardening books at the library. Be careful about just going out and taking cuttings from any plant you see. There are two reasons for concern when you do this. One, some plants are patented and it is illegal to reproduce them without first entering into a legal agreement with the patent holder. And

two, if you are not absolutely sure of the botanical name of the plant you are propagating, you won't be able to sell the plants once you have them to salable size.

And . . . guessing at the name of a plant could get you into trouble.

For those reasons you should do one of two things. You can find a wholesale source and buy a few hundred rooted cuttings of the plants that you would like to grow, or you can go to a garden center and buy a full grown plant that you can plant at home to use as a stock plant which you can take cuttings from.

I much prefer that you buy your stock plants from a wholesale source, somebody that specializes in propagation and sells to other wholesale nurseries all over the place.

Why do I say that? Why do I prefer to buy my original stock plants from a somebody that specializes in plant propagation and sells to big wholesale growers? Because that person takes plant identification very, very seriously because he or she knows that they are selling to growers who are going reproduce those plants over and over and over.

They also know there could be serious legal ramifications if they sell 10,000 rooted cuttings to a grower and that grower later figures out that the plants were not what he or she said they were. In the nursery business, that is a serious violation of the law and business ethics.

A landscape contractor could be sued for planting 300 five foot arborvitae on a commercial job only to find out later that they are not Techney Arborvitae, but instead they are Dark Green Arborvitae. Two very different plants. And who do you guess would get dragged into that law suite? The person that sold the plants to the landscaper that's who.

I'm not trying to scare you, or I don't know maybe I am. Because that's how serious it is that you now for sure what you are growing. You can't guess! Anybody can look at a Japanese Holly and know that they are looking at a Japanese Holly. But knowing for sure exactly what the variety of Japanese Holly it is is an entirely different story.

You could take a branch from the plant and show it to an expert and the expert without batting an eye would give you an answer. He'd say; "It's xyz holly", just like that without batting an eye. He's an expert right? You asked him a question and you expect him to know the answer. So he gives you an answer. No doubt about it that's what it is!

Now, after the expert tells you that and you say to him; "The reason that I am asking is because I own a nursery and I'd like to start growing this plant and I hope to grow a thousand this year, 5,000 next year and then 10,000 each year thereafter. Would you be willing to sign a statement swearing to the identity of this plant because I don't know for sure what it is, but I don't want to take any chances?"

The expert would instantly start back peddling and tell you that he is “almost” certain that's what it is, but in no way in the world is he going to sign that statement. Even though five minutes earlier he knew for sure, without a doubt.

In order to know with any reasonable degree of certainty of what it is that you are propagating you have to know the history of the stock plant that you have. Where did it come from? Who said it was this or that?

That's why I truly only trust professional plant propagators who sell to the wholesale market on a large scale. They have their own stock plants and they know where they got them.

This system isn't perfect, but that's the best I've come up with. I urge you to get started off on the right foot.

Now at first it might not be practical to buy from large wholesale propagators because they do require minimum orders. In that case I suggest you pick a local wholesale grower that you know and trust and get your stock plants from them.

Just starting out? Do what you have to do, but don't intentionally cut corners in this area.

You can get a lot of cuttings from one full grown plant. I have two Burning Bush in the landscape around my house, and I get over 500 cuttings each year from these two plants. Visit the discount stores and home warehouse type stores in the spring, they often have plants in one gallon containers at reduced prices. This is a good way to get stock plants without spending a lot of money if that's all you can do at this time.

Growing Patented Plants!

If you buy rooted cuttings, the first year you should be able to get two or three cuttings from each the first season. Make certain that the plants you buy are not patented, or that the name is not a registered trade mark. You can determine this by examining the plant tag. Look for the “®” symbol for registered trademarks, or for the words “Patent Pending”. Don't worry, there are plenty of plants that you can freely propagate, but more and more retail stores are selling a lot of patented plants.

As Backyard Growers I believe it is our responsibility to find all of the non patented plants out there and continue to reproduce them and keep them on the market. At this time there seems to be a huge effort to push these plants out of the market place. Why is that?

It's simple. Let's say you are a wholesale plant propagator and you sell me 1,000 Pink Weigela rooted cuttings. They aren't patented so I can take cuttings from those cuttings

and I'd never have to buy any more of that variety of Pink Weigela from you again. But if you sold me 1,000 Pink Weigela with a fancy name and they were patented it would be against the law for me to propagate those plants. So when I needed more I'd have to go back to you for additional plants.

I don't blame the patent holders. Especially if they've worked really hard to produce a new plant through cross pollination and experimentation etc. It can take years and years to create a new, superior plant and bring it to market. They deserve to collect royalties on that plant for the effort they put forth developing that plant.

But for you and I and the general plant buying public? There are so many plants that are not patented and they are beautiful. Plants that we are free to propagate over and over and over. It's our job to make certain the world never forgets about those well established, beautiful plants. It appears that they are being pushed into obscurity. We cannot allow that to happen.

Does that mean that you should never grow a patented plant? Absolutely not. That's not at all what I mean. You are welcome to buy a rooted cutting, liner or even a larger plant that is patented. You are free to grow that plant on to a larger size and sell it at a profit. But what you are not allowed to do is propagate that plant.

Do I grow any patented plants? Yes, at this time I have a few. Currently I am growing the Lavender Twist Weeping Redbud tree. The tree was discovered growing wild in upstate New York and was eventually brought into production and patented by my friend and fellow, local grower Tim Brotzman of Brotzman's Nursery in Madison, Ohio.

Because Tim found it actually difficult to propagate this tree here in our Ohio climate I don't buy my small trees from Tim, I actually buy them from one of his many licensed growers. Currently I am buying them from Heritage Seedlings in Oregon. They collect a royalty on each plant that I buy from them and forward that royalty to Mr. Brotzman. Because the trees are patented I am also required to buy plant tags for each tree that I buy. They want to make certain that when I sell the trees I buy that they are properly tagged with the patent information on the tag.

I also have another Redbud tree that I just started growing a few days ago that is also patented. I don't know much about the tree, I bought just a few to see whether or not this is something that I'd like to continue growing. Other than that I am not currently growing any other patented plants. Will I add more? Possibly. I'm sure I'll experiment with a few just to see how well they do for me.

But at no point in time will I quit growing a nice plant that has been doing well for me and replace it with a similar patented plant just because some big nursery has pumped tens of thousands of dollars into a marketing campaign trying to convince the buying public that this particular plant is "The" plant that they should be asking for. Instead I

will always be looking for good alternative plants that are not patented or protected in any way and simply explain to my customers that I feel my alternative plant is the better choice.

Am I resisting this massive effort to replace non patented plants with patented plants in the market place? Absolutely I am. And so are a lot of other established growers. As I mentioned, I don't blame the patent holders one little bit for trying to get a piece of every plant sold in America and beyond. But my goal is to make sure I continue to grow plants that I am free to propagate.

So how do you know for sure whether or not a plant is patented? That's not the easiest question to answer. There is a plant patent database on line that you can search. I do not use this database because I've been told that it is difficult to maneuver around in. So I can't even give you the URL because I've never used it. Nor do I feel that it is the most reliable means of knowing whether or not a plant is patented. I just don't trust the results or my ability to properly search the database.

This is what I do, and this is what most people in the industry do. We pay very, very close attention to “who” we are buying our rooted cuttings and liners from. There are thousands of wholesale nurseries across America, but there are a much smaller number that specialize in selling rooted cuttings and liners. Most of the trusted sources that I use are listed in the wholesale directory that you got when you purchased my growing system.

When I say “trusted sources” I really mean that. For instance, D&B Plants in Michigan is a large supplier of liners and rooted cuttings to the wholesale nursery industry as is Appalachian Nursery in Pennsylvania and Musser's Forest also in Pennsylvania and Liner Source in Florida. These nurseries sell to other wholesale growers who depend on them to either sell them only non patented, non protected plants, or to properly disclose in their catalog or price list which plants are protected and which ones are not.

These growers advertise in all of the major trade magazines and display at all of the major trade shows that serve the nursery industry in America. They are very high profile within the industry.

Their customers and the industry as a whole depend on them to get this right. It's what they do and they do it really, really well. They know the plants that they grow like the back of their hand. They have been growing them for years and years and I'm sure they know where they got their original stock plants. This is not something that they take lightly. It's probably one of the most serious things they do.

So when I, or any other grower in the industry orders plants from them, we know that we can trust them to either sell us non patented, non protected plants, or to properly disclose the ones that are patented.

Typically if a plant in their catalog does not have a patent symbol or a trademark symbol by the name the plant is not protected. This is pretty much standard throughout the industry, to only mark the plants that are actually protected. Why is that?

Let me explain it this way. About two years ago I was at a trade show talking to one of the owners of one of these large propagation nurseries and I asked him about patented plants. I asked him if they grow and sell any patented plants and he told me that they do propagate and sell a few from one of the popular lines. So I asked him how many different patented plants that would be and he said; "About a dozen." So then I asked; "How many non patented plants do you sell?" and at first he didn't even know, then after thinking for a minute he told me that he wasn't sure of the exact number, but it had to be well over 150 different kinds of non patented plants.

So out of 162 different kinds of plants in their line, only about 12 are patented. And that's why they only clearly mark the patented plants in the catalog and simply list the rest of the plants with no indication at all.

I had a similar conversation with a Hosta grower and pretty much learned the same thing. 200 different kinds of Hosta if I recall correctly, and of all of those only about a dozen are patented.

So now you might be wondering; "If these plants are patented, how can they propagate them and sell them?" The answer is simple. They become a licensed grower which gives them that permission. They buy a license from the holder of that particular plant patent, then they have to collect a royalty from each plant they grow and sell and remit that royalty to the patent holder. They are required to keep meticulous records and must also make sure that for each plant that is sold the buyer also purchases a plant tag with the patent information on the tag.

But it's getting even more complicated than that. Apparently people were illegally propagating patented plants then printing bootleg tags to provide with the illegally propagated plants. So now some of these patent holders are also requiring the person that buys a particular line of patented plants to purchase pots that are imprinted with the logo associated with that particular plant.

So now you not only have to buy the liner, pay the royalty, buy the tag, but you now have to buy a pot for each plant that you buy. That's a lot of money to layout up front since you haven't even grown the plant out yet!

Which is why I truly believe that you and I have a responsibility to chase down and grow every plant we can that was produced before all of this craziness started. There are hundreds and hundreds of plants that we are free to propagate. Beautiful plants. Breath taking plants! We have a responsibility to make sure these plants never get kicked to the curb. You and I, the Backyard Growers of America, need to look out for these special

plants and for the buying public that should have the right to have these plants in their yard.

So where will all of this craziness lead? At least I call it craziness. Good question and all of this is creating another issue that nobody seems to be talking about. Many growers, especially our Backyard Growers recycle plant pots. They get them from their customers and they get them from landscapers. It not only saves them money, but it keeps all of those plastic pots out of the landfill.

So now what happens with all of these pots that are imprinted with a certain brand name? What are we supposed to do with them? Fill up the landfills just because the pot has a brand name on the side of it? Good question and I don't have the answer. But I do know what's happening with a lot of them because I see it. The pots are being recycle back into nurseries and “random” plants are ending up in these pots imprinted with a brand name. Is that right? Are we allowed to do that?

I don't know the answer. This is a legal question and good luck finding a lawyer that will address this for you. But I see it happening and as more and more of these pots go into the market place, and they are going in now by the millions I'm sure, I suspect that earth conscious consumers are going to want to see the pots reused rather than dumped.

What a tangled web we do weave! That's what I say!

Keeping Proper Records

Having your own part-time business has many rewards, including that of someday being able to pursue your business on a full time basis. There are also some tax advantages to having your own business, but in order to take advantage of them, you must keep proper records, and know what you can and can not claim as business expenses.

What you are about to read is my interpretation of what are and are not legitimate business expenses. I encourage you to seek the advice of a professional, and or do some research on your own. An excellent source of information is the website of the Internal Revenue Service <http://www.irs.gov> .

It is important to understand when you are starting or operating a part-time business that you must conduct your business as a business, and you must have a profit motive. If you don't have a profit motive, then the I.R.S. may consider your business a hobby and not really a business, and will not allow you to take deductions for your business expenses.

There are all kinds of rumors floating around that are simply wrong. Things like; “All businesses lose money for the first three years.” “If your business doesn't make a profit within three years the IRS will deem it a hobby and you'll owe all kinds of back taxes.” Statements like that are, in my not so expert opinion are just crazy talk. The IRS does

have rules about “business verses hobby” and those rules are in place for one simple reason. Some people have expensive hobbies so they try to make their hobby look like a business so they can claim all of those expenses as business expenses. If the IRS sees all of these “odd” expenses on a tax return, they might ask to see some documentation. They might ask you to prove that this “so called business” of yours actually does have a profit motive.

To the best of my, not really an expert, knowledge there is no hard deadline as to when the IRS expects a new business to make money. Truth be told lots of businesses are started that never do make much money and that's not because anybody is trying to dodge the income tax that would be due on profit, but because they just can't make the business profitable.

In cases like that they truly do have a profit motive, they just can't make it work!

So what do you need to know?

First of all, keep accurate records of all business transactions, and save all of your receipts. It is also a good idea to have a separate checking account for your business. You don't necessarily have to get a “business checking account” because the banks charge much higher fees for a business account. But not always. Some banks offer small businesses free checking accounts as means of attracting new clients to their bank. Check around. If you can find a free or inexpensive business account by all means get one. It will make your record keeping so much easier, and the IRS would expect you to have one. They do not like it when people mingle personal funds and business funds.

Set up some kind of bookkeeping system to track all of your business income and expenses. This is as easy as making a spreadsheet with a series of columns and rows, with a column for business income and columns for each category of business expenses.

Depending on the laws in your state, you may or may not be required to collect sales tax. If so you have to keep track of which sales are taxable and which sales are tax exempt. In Ohio if a customer wants to be considered tax exempt, then they must provide the seller with a signed “Certificate of Exemption”, that explains why they are exempt.

The most common reason for exemption is for “Resale”, which means that the customer is buying the product for the purpose of reselling it. Sales tax is usually collected from the “end consumer”, so the business selling the product to the actual consumer is responsible for collecting the sales tax and sending it to the proper authority. Churches and government agencies are also usually tax exempt, but they still are required to provide a certificate of exemption.

So how does all this apply to your backyard nursery business? I will tell you what it means in Ohio, most states are probably very similar, but you must find out for sure when

you apply for your vendors license. If you sell a plant to a homeowner, you must collect sales tax. If you sell a plant to a garden center or landscape contractor, they are likely to provide you with a certificate of exemption, which means you don't collect sales tax. If you buy plants that you intend to resell, you should be able to claim exemption and not pay any sales tax on them at the time of purchase because you will eventually resell those plants.

Think about a hardware store. When your local hardware store buys 12 hammers and 10 shovels they do not pay sales tax on those items because they are not the end user. They are simply a reseller. But when they sell the hammers and shovels they have to collect sales tax on each item they sell and they have to keep records of those sales and remit the sales tax to their state department of taxation. I know it sounds complicated, but it's much simpler than you think.

It's also important to understand that sales taxes are a state tax and not a federal tax. Usually the county in which you live also gets a portion of the sales taxes, but the state sends them their share. So when you sell a plant inside of your state you collect the appropriate amount of sales tax and you will eventually send that money to the state. But if you sell a plant to somebody outside of your state, in most cases you will not have to collect any sales tax. But that's a really, really, really gray area because of all of the Internet commerce that's taking place these days so you have to discuss that with your local tax authorities and or a CPA.

You will need separate columns on your spreadsheet for taxable sales and tax exempt sales. If you sell plants to a landscaper, a garden center or another nursery it's really your obligation (don't get confused here, read this carefully) to collect sales tax from that person. Chances are, they are not going to want to pay the sale tax because they are "tax exempt". That's fine, but that shifts the responsibility to them to provide you with a certificate of exemption. You if you are selling to wholesale customers you should have blank copies of this certificate of exemption on hand so your wholesale customers can fill them out for you. Basically the certificate of exemption is a simple form that your customer fills out and signs stating the reason why they are not required to pay sales tax.

If you sell plants to any customer and do not collect sales tax, you should have this certificate of exemption on file for that customer just in case you're ever asked for it. Let's say you sell 100 plants to your local city or village or a church. Chances are they are also tax exempt. But it's still up to them to prove it by filling out that certificate of exemption.

On your spreadsheet you will also need separate columns for all of your expenses, which could include plants purchased for resale, plants purchased to grow on for resale, growing medium purchased, or materials to make your own growing medium, fertilizers, plastic pots and trays, advertising, bank charges, etc. Any expense that is exclusively for your business should be deductible.

You can have as many categories as you like, then at tax time your accountant can combine them as he or she sees fit to include them on a schedule “C” form, which is a profit and loss statement that goes to the I.R.S. Don't hold me to the “schedule C” form. How you file your business expenses is between you and your CPA and I urge you to use a professional to at least help you get things set up the way they should be. I'm good at growing plants. My CPA is good at the tax stuff. He lets me grow the plants and I let him do the taxes.

I used to keep my records on a spreadsheet, then I started using the computer program **Microsoft Money** to keep track of my business income and expenses. I don't think the MS Money program is still available, but Quicken does the same thing and I think you can still get that. I really like this method because it's easy to look up what you spent with who, and then at tax time I just print a report that shows the totals for each category and subcategory. The only thing that it does not keep track of for me is sales tax. I still run a simple spreadsheet on the computer for sales tax. If I were to switch to **Quickbooks** I could probably do everything in one program, but I can assure you, Quickbooks is over kill for what you need right now. Keep it simple!

I have an account on the computer for my business checking account, and then I also have another account for expenses that are not paid by check. At the end of the year these are combined into one report which makes tax time a breeze.

For deposits I put all business income into the category “Business Income”, but then I have subcategories depending where the income came from. In my case I have business income from my backyard nursery, as well as the products that I sell via mail order or from my website. So I have three subcategories under the main category “Business Income”, then with a few clicks of the mouse I can see how much business we do in the nursery, how much we do on line, and how much we do through the mail.

The items that you are allowed to claim as business expenses can include telephone expenses, the purchase of a computer, tools, supplies, office supplies, advertising, mileage, books, reports, and videos you bought at <http://www.backyardgrowers.com>, and anything else you purchase exclusively for your business. Just make sure you can justify the purchase. If you buy a computer for business, then you had better be able to prove that is what it is for.

You can claim household expenses if you have a home office. However, a corner of your living room does not qualify as a legitimate home office deduction. The room you claim to be your home office must be used exclusively for business.

I used to have two computers and two desks in our living room, a desk, filing cabinet, and shelves of booklets and videos in the utility room, 3 VCR's for making videos in one of the bedrooms, boxes of books and reports and video cases in the garage, thousands of

plants in the backyard, a well pump in the crawl space, irrigation lines all over the backyard, piles of compost and potting soil in the backyard, we turned the driveway into a retail sales lot for two months, and my accountant says I do not qualify for a home business deduction because we use all of those areas for non-business uses also. Oh well . . .

To this day I have never taken a deduction for the use of my home as a business expense because we've never had one room that we used exclusively for the business.

When you are starting out in the nursery business your first year or two could be nothing but expenses and little to no business income because you'll be buying lots of small plants, pots, potting soil etc. Of course it doesn't have to be that way. If you are in a position where you quite simply cannot afford to invest money into your business without getting a fast return on that investment, then you can move slower and do things differently. In that case, this is what I'd do . . .

A Quick Tip on Selling Your First Plants

In this example we'll use Nikko Blue Hydrangea. I'd buy 20 Nikko Blue Hydrangea liners from a wholesale source for somewhere around \$1.75 each. I'd print up a flier with at least one or several color photos of the Nikko Blue Hydrangea and offer them for sale for \$3.97. They're liners so they are going to be a little too small to sell for more than that. I'd hand those fliers to every person that I know and some that I don't know. On the flier make it very, very clear that you only have 10 available and if they want them they have to act quickly.

You'll quickly sell those 10 plants at \$3.97 each. That's \$39.70 in income. You paid \$35.00 for the 20 plants that you bought. So you got a quick return on your investment with a tiny profit of \$4.70. Of course if you put the \$35.00 in the bank and received an interest rate of 2%, after 12 months you would have only earned \$.70 in interest. So that \$4.70 is actually pretty darn good.

But . . . you still have 10 plants that you did not sell! Those plants you can grow on and take cuttings from and eventually you can put them in a 3 gallon container and easily sell them for \$15.00 each. That's another \$150.00 profit on your original investment of \$35.00. And since you took cuttings from those plants several times as you were growing them, you now have a perpetual supply of Nikko Blue Hydrangea.

But the best thing of all is that your new business was profitable within a matter of two weeks in this simple scenario.

Now if you did this over and over on a regular basis you could actually earn a few thousand dollars or more in your first year. But if you have some money to invest and would like to build your business first you are going to buy pots, soil, fertilizer etc.,

which means that for your first year or two in business you could actually have a legitimate loss, which you should be able to claim on your tax return with the help of a tax professional.

So just exactly how does the I.R.S. distinguish the difference between a hobby and business? As I mentioned earlier, you must have a profit motive. That means that your only motive is to make money. Here are some things that the I.R.S. would look at when making a determination.

If your business fails to make money within a reasonable time frame, would you give it up, or continue to pursue it because it's what you enjoy. In the latter case they would consider it a hobby. How much of a commitment are you making to your business. Do you perform these business functions daily, or just when you feel like it? A hobby is something you do to pass time, while a business is something you do on a scheduled routine. Have you spent any money to promote your business? If you are operating a serious business, then you will put some resources toward promoting it.

Are you beginning to get the picture? The I.R.S. will allow you to claim losses, as long as they are legitimate. But just by spending a lot of money on roses to create a rose garden does not entitle you to deduct the cost of the roses, soil and mulch. On the other hand, if you buy 15 rose and plant them in a bed with honest intentions of using them as stock plants from which you can take cuttings and eventually sell those cuttings at a profit, then you should be able to claim the deductions, providing your business meets the requirements of a business mentioned earlier.

Keep in mind these are just my interpretations, and should only be considered as a guide so you know what questions to ask your accountant. As long as you are sincere about starting a business for profit, you should be able to claim all your start up expenses, and on going expenses, but at sometime you must show some income to justify that you are selling something.

Just keep track of all of your expenses and income with some sort of record keeping system, and then at the end of the year check with your accountant and see what he or she recommends. You can also visit the I.R.S. website and do your own research.
<http://www.irs.gov>

"Sell a plant, get a name. Sell a plant, get a name."

New to this? You don't have to wait forever to have a big plant sale. Just ease into this business selling a few plants at a time. Print up some fliers featuring one plant. Use nice color photos on the flier. No photos? Get a photo somewhere. Don't let the photo be a reason not to do this. You'll find a photo if you really want one. Ask here. Tell us why you want it, somebody will give you a photo.

Anyway, on the flier feature one plant, but mention that you only have X of these. Maybe

it's 3, maybe it's 11. If you have 381 of them say, "I've only got 7 right now for sale."

Use scarcity. On the flier tell them that you only have 7 of these and spend a lot of time explaining the virtues of the plant you are selling. People hate to miss out. "If you only have 7 I'd better get one. Especially at \$4.97."

When they come they'll buy more. If they don't, you need more plants, nicer plants, more plants with flowers and color. If you have other plants around that are nice they'll buy them. That's how it works.

Put that flier in many hands as you can. Don't be timid about this! Get the word out. When they come get their name and mailing address. Not an Email address, a mailing address. You will mail to them later and often. They'll come back and buy more. They'll like you, they'll tell others about you. Don't be cheap about this. You'll go through some stamps, but you'll make lots of friends that will get in the habit of giving you money.

"Sell a plant, get a name. Sell a plant, get a name."

More about Selling Your Plants

No matter what business you may venture into, in order to make money, something has to be sold. All businesses sell something. Some sell tangible products, some sell intangible products such as services. But everybody sells something, and the selling process is the secret to success!!!

Set Up Shop Downtown

Let's say that you can't or don't want to sell plants from home. This is where you put your subconscious mind to work for you. When you start thinking about this it's amazing what you will see that you've never noticed before. There are businesses all over your town and adjacent towns that could use a means of attracting attention to their place of business. Let's just say that after a while many businesses become static and almost invisible. You need to start looking and make notes of potential prospects that you could approach about selling plants in front of their place of business.

Crazy idea? Not really. Some businesses like lawn mower repair shops and other similar businesses have very little traffic in and out during the day, but they happen to be located on a busy street or street corner. All you have to do is approach them and ask for permission to sell plants in front of their business on one or two days a week. Offer to pay them \$1.50 for each plant that you sell. Also make them aware that you will be attracting people to their business that have never been there before.

A lawn mower shop for instance should take advantage of your offer and park several new riding mowers out near the area where you will be selling your plants. You never know, they might sell a \$5,000 garden tractor because of you. If that happens, you will

certainly be welcomed back.

Fundraisers

We have a few Backyard Growers that sell plants through fundraisers. There are all kinds of groups that need to raise funds. An easy way to do this is with the flier idea. Pick about four plants, get really good color photos and put them on the flier with a very appealing description and let them take orders by showing around the fliers. You offer to deliver the plants to all of the local buyers. Make sure you get a phone number with each order so you can call and set up a time for delivery. When you make the delivery take along a few other plants and two or three more fliers featuring other plants that you have to sell.

A Nursery on Wheels?

In most towns and cities it's against the law to drive around and go to door to door selling things. But if you are invited to stop by that's a different story. So if you can get people to pre-order a low priced plant from your full color flier, I don't see why you can't show up with a lot more plants for them to see, or a truck or trailer load of plants for them to see. If you can get them to come out and look at your plants in the truck or trailer, you might get other neighbors out there as well.

Let's say that you have an order to deliver at 4823 Lockwood Road. You could mail your flier to all of the addresses on that street or at least the 10 or 15 closest addresses and let them know you have a delivery to make on their street this coming Saturday and ask them to place an order as well.

A couple of points I need to make here. 1. People love plants! They buy them all the time. 2. People love people. They really do and they really like people who do things that are unique and interesting. 3. People like to pull for and help out the underdog. In the plant selling world we Backyard Growers can be perceived as the underdog because we are selling up against the big box stores with huge advertising budgets. For that reason alone, people will want to help you sell your plants.

When people find out you have plants to sell, they will truly want to help you. Strangers that is. Friends and family? Maybe, but sometimes not so much. People are strange creatures and often times friends and family are threatened by you trying to do something that somehow makes them feel inferior. As much as they love you, some secretly want you to fail so you won't advance above your current status. I know that sounds crazy, but it's true, and often times they don't even realize those are the feelings they have.

Strangers aren't carrying any of that baggage with you. They see you as their new best friend. They are in awe of what you do. Seriously. It's an amazing thing to see happen.

One of our members recently posted that she now has customers coming back to her nursery, bringing friends with them and giving their friends tours of her nursery. They say things like; "This is where she has her hydrangeas. Last year she only had three kinds but this year she has a lot more. And on and on." This backyard grower was in

earshot and was really taken back to hear a stranger saying all of these nice things about her and her plants. Like I said, your customers will be in awe of you for what you do.

That's why you need the support of other Backyard Growers. You need somebody to lift you up when you're feeling down about your new business. We all feel that way from time to time, and we need a place where we can have people make us feel better and make us see things in a different light. That's why we have a [private group online for Backyard Growers](#). The support system alone is worth the extra investment of membership.

More about the nursery on wheels. If you choose the option of having a nursery on wheels that could become your Unique Selling Proposition and it really could set you apart from all other plant sellers in your area. Years ago I loaded up a big landscape trailer with plants and went to a new housing development or two and came home with an empty trailer that day. I'm sure I was breaking the law by knocking on doors asking people if they want to see the plants I had for sale. So I'm not suggesting that you do that, besides, getting invited over to deliver an order is better. That makes you the welcome guest, not an unwelcome pest.

Years ago as a 16 or 17 year old kid working in a large wholesale nursery one of my jobs was to load trucks. One day this older man comes in to pick up his order. On the side of the truck in great big letters it read; "Toreki's Nursery". So I'm standing in the back of the truck with the older man and I asked him; "Mr. Toreki, where is your nursery?" To which he replied; "Your standing in it kid!" Apparently he didn't actually have a nursery. He might have at one time, but at that time his truck was his nursery. He'd buy plants wholesale and resell them at a profit and deliver them with his nursery on wheels.

Today we call people who do that plant brokers or plant re-wholesalers and they buy and sell a lot of plants. Most of them do in excess of one million a year in sales. So they too are prospects for the plants that you grow and sell.

A Really, Really, Really Important Selling Tip

Have a conversation with your customers ***in print***. Did you catch that. I said in print. What??

Mike, I can't write! Yes you can. You can talk right? You can have a conversation with other people right? Then you can write. Just write down your conversation, just like I'm doing here. As I write this book I am giving absolutely no regard to proper grammar or proper punctuation, or sentence structure. And one in about 1,000 people might notice that. The rest don't care. They just want to read what I have to say.

I'm not saying you have to write a book or a report. But . . . you have to be yourself and let people know that you are a real live breathing human being with a pulse and feelings and emotions just like them. So this is what you do.

When you make up your flier with the four plants that you are featuring put at least one color photo of each plant in bloom. Then write a description for the plant. Be careful what you say about the plant. You have to be honest about the plant, but you also have to

say things about the plant that are flattering and not negative selling points. For instance, Burning Bush can get as tall as 12'. But nobody really wants a 12' tall burning bush unless they want a privacy hedge. So I say; "Can reach a height of 10', but can easily be kept trimmed to a height of 42". That's a true statement and much more appealing to most people.

Okay, that's not the writing part. This is where the writing comes in. Each and every time you send out or hand out your fliers, along with the flier you should include a one or two page letter that tells the story of your plants and at the same time tells a bit of your story. Don't make it all about you and don't say things like; I started in business in 1972 and and I've been trained by the big gumba and things like that. Tell the story of you and the plants that you are trying to sell.

Something like this; "I've only got 34 of these Java Red Weigela left. I rooted these cuttings summer before last. I've kept them trimmed so they are tight and compact, they've been fertilized and as much as I hate to see them go, it's time to find them a new home. I need the room. My little Backyard Nursery is quite small. Java Red is my favorite Weigela because it grows more compact than other varieties. I took these cuttings from the parent plant in my landscape, right near the deck. I really enjoy that plant. It's loaded with tiny purple flowers in the spring, then makes random flowers all summer right into the fall. My husband Bob likes the Variegated Weigela which is also a very nice plant with it's striking pink and white combination blooms. But me? I love the Java Red."

Read that paragraph again. It's just conversation but I managed to weave in that my Backyard Nursery is quite small and that I am married to a guy name Bob.

Sounds simple and irrelevant. But it's not. It makes you a real person that the person reading the letter would like to meet. Think about the plant buyers options. They can go to a big box store and buy from a kid wearing a mandatory company vest or they can buy from you. A real person who truly is going to appreciate the business that they give you. That too is really important to people. If they are going to give up their hard earned money they want it to go to somebody that truly appreciates receiving it. Not a huge corporation.

Here's something to think about. A friend of mine, lifetime member of the nursery industry and a writer for one of the large gardening magazines. She visited four garden centers over the weekend. Two were the same name big box store and the other two were independently owned garden centers. The reception that she received at the big box store was much warmer than she received at the independently owned garden center. At the independent garden center she was not greeted nor did anybody come out to help her. The service at the big box store was better!

Why is that? Probably because the small independent garden center is forced to cut staff to a bare minimum and of course the owner is overwhelmed.

Now we all know that at times the people trying to help you at the big box store really have little to no expertise when it comes to plants. They are wonderful people I am sure,

and they try really hard to help you, but they don't know what they don't know.

So where does that leave the average plant buyer? Can't get waited on at the independently owned garden center, at least not when my friend went, and can't get good information at the big box store.

Are you beginning to see why you are the better option and their new best friend. Not an expert yourself? I know that. Not now you aren't. But believe me, it won't be long before you are. You don't think so now, but in a few years you'll be rattling off botanical names as if you are speaking a foreign language. You will become an expert. I know you will. On the Backyard Growers Board we have hundreds of members who were just like you not that long ago. Now they truly are full blown experts. For me it's an amazing thing to watch.

Selling to Wholesale Buyers

So how do you let wholesale buyers know you have plants for sale? A small classified ad in American Nurseryman magazine is one way to reach wholesale buyers. However, American Nurseryman is a national magazine that is distributed all over the country, and even though that increases your chances of selling your plants, you may not need quite that much exposure. Why pack them up and ship them half way across the country when there might be a wholesale nursery in your area that will buy them?

Selling Un-Rooted Cuttings

Let's take a few moments and brainstorm about some of the options that you have for selling the plants that you grow. But first, when is a plant actually salable? As soon as a plant has roots it is salable and it can be sold. That's right, a cutting with roots is a rooted cutting and the market for rooted cuttings is huge. Wait! That's not right. This might surprise you but there is actually a market for cuttings without roots! You read that correctly. A 5" cutting with no roots can be sold and they are sold all the time.

Who would buy a cutting with no roots? Me. You. Or anybody that grows and sells plants. For instance, it's May 31st and here in Ohio softwood cutting season typically starts around June 1st. Today I am going to work on this book for an hour or two, then I'm going to the nursery to set up my propagation system for softwood cuttings. As you know, we moved and I closed my nursery for a few years and I just started back up last spring (2011). So far I've spent the past 16 months or so clearing ground and planting Japanese maples, Lavender Twist Redbud, Harry Lauder's Walking Stick Rhododendrons and a few other assorted plants. Because I've been doing so much land clearing etc. I really haven't had a place where I could plant things like Weigela, Viburnums, Red Twig Dogwood etc. that I could get cuttings from.

So here I am today setting up a mist system, but I don't have a lot of stock plants from which I can get cuttings. That's a problem! So if I can find somebody that can sell me softwood cuttings that I can root myself, I'd buy them in a heartbeat. Shipping unrooted softwood cuttings is tricky because they are quite fragile, but it is done with success.

They just have to be shipped by a fairly fast method.

Hardwood cuttings are a lot more durable and can be shipped without stressing the cuttings at all because they are shipped when dormant. Lots and lots of hardwood cuttings are sold during the winter months.

Are you beginning to see how many different options you have in this business? Basically when you sell a hardwood cutting you are getting paid for selling a stick about 5 to 8 inches long! Amazing right? For instance, if you had 5, 10, 50, or 100 Purple Sandcherry growing at your house you could let them grow all summer long and not trim them. A Purple Sandcherry left unpruned will put on 24" to 36" worth of new growth in one season. Come winter, after Thanksgiving, you could remove all of that new growth, literally cutting the plant back to about 8" to 10" from the ground. You could cut those canes as we call them into hardwood cuttings 5" or 6" long, box them up and ship them to willing buyers. I'm sure you could sell them for 35 cents to 50 cents per cutting easily.

Where would you find the buyers? The easiest place would be on the Backyard Growers Buy/Sell Board. Those folks would love to get their hands on some Sandcherry hardwood cuttings in December.

So you can sell a cutting without roots. You can sell a cutting with roots (rooted cutting), you can sell a liner, that's a rooted cutting that has been grown on for one season, you can sell plants in a one quart container, or shake them out and sell them bare root and you can sell plants from 6" tall to 16' tall trees. So basically, just about any plant that you grow can be sold.

Back to finding wholesale buyers. First of all, if you want to sell plants on the wholesale market the most important thing of all is to make sure your plants are of the highest quality. Wholesale buyers buy plants everyday, but in most cases they have a lot of options of where they can buy. So if you want to sell to them there are three criteria that you have to meet. One, your quality has to be equal to or better than what they are buying now. For the most part I'd guess that what they are currently buying is of high quality.

Secondly, you must offer them a competitive wholesale price. In order to do that, you have to know what the going wholesale prices are. Finding that out can be kind of tricky. You can start by contacting all of wholesale growers in your area and requesting their wholesale price list or availability list. When you contact them use your nursery name, or they may not send it to you.

There are big wholesale nurseries and there are much smaller wholesale nurseries. They price things differently. Often times large wholesale growers will publish a catalog or a price list, but those published prices are not always the best price they offer. Small buyers have to pay those published prices. But larger customers might have an unwritten deal with the nursery where they get 10% to 25% off of that published price. There's really no way for you to know that unless a buyer that is getting that kind of deal tells you so. The nursery is not going to tell you about those discounts.

Small wholesale growers on the other hand usually don't do that. They publish their

prices in their catalog or price list and that's what everybody pays. So make sure you track down the small growers and get their catalog.

Third, you have to make it easy for the wholesale buyer to buy from you. Sounds simple right? But think it through. Understand how they are currently placing wholesale orders. In many cases they just pick up the phone and say; "This is Jack at XYZ Landscaping. I need 5 of this, 25 of that, and 37 of those." Bing, bam, boom the order has been placed and will be ready for pick up at such and such a time. That's how they order. That's how they prefer to order.

They do not want to get your voice mail box because, calling them back is not easy. They are busy, and if you do reach them they won't have the list of what they need in front of them. Also, once they call you they want to know that you have the plants and that you will have them ready. They need to know right now whether or not you can fill that order. They need to place the order and move that piece of paper off of their desk right now! Once they hand it off to you they have to trust that it is taken care of because that's the last you'll hear from them. The next step in their mind is to send a truck to pick up the plants.

So here's a little secret. Sending a truck to pick up the plants costs money. It's very, very expensive for a landscaper or a garden center to "send a truck to pick up plants". It ties up the truck and driver for one to four hours. The driver is probably getting paid at least \$12.00 per hour, and that costs his employer closer to \$15.00 or \$16.00 per hour after taxes. The truck is worth at least \$50 to \$75 per hour and if it were on a landscape job delivering materials etc. that's what the truck would be worth. Therefore it costs the landscaper or garden center close to \$100 per hour to send somebody to pick up plants.

Truth be told you can double that \$100 per hour figure because that truck and driver could be earning the company \$200 per hour if they were busy delivering a service rather than chasing around to pick up plants.

So, if you want to make it easy for wholesale buyers to buy from you, you should offer to deliver the plants for free, or for a fraction of what it would cost them to send somebody to pick them up. **That will make it very easy for wholesale buyers to buy from you!** That will set you apart from the wholesalers that they are currently dealing with. You just upped your worth to that wholesale buyer.

Becoming a Plant Broker

Mike, wait! Who said I wanted to become a plant broker? Here's the deal. Once you start delivering plants to your wholesale customers they are going to be asking you for plants you don't have. If you say; "I don't have those, but I think I can get them for you if you'd like." They are likely to take you up on that offer. Because, in their world time is money. If you are willing to call around for them and find the plants they need, they just might be willing to pay you the extra dollar or two that you are going to mark the plants up just to save them the hassle of trying to find the plants. Who knows, the mark up

could be much higher because the better you get at buying plants on the wholesale market the less you will be paying for them. Therefore you can mark them up more and still sell them to your customers at a fair price.

I have two friends that are plant brokers. Landscapers and garden centers from three or four states call them up and give them the list of plants they need. These two guys call around, locate the plants and make the sale. In many cases they don't even handle the plants. They just bring the buyer and seller together and in many cases it's the seller that actually pays them a commission on the order.

These two guys have been in the business as long as I have and they quite literally know where all the best plants in two or three states are. It's what they do, it's all they do. Buy and sell plants. Bring wholesale plant buyers and wholesale plant sellers together day after day.

Of course I'm not suggesting that you attempt to do that right now. But I can assure you, once you find a few wholesale customers, they are going to ask for plants you don't have. Faster than you can imagine you will quickly become an expert on who has what plants in your area, how much you can buy them for, and how much you can sell them for. It's an exciting business to be in!

And of course, as you do this, you quickly realize what plants you should be growing to offer to your customers. Let's say that your customers are looking for Green Mound Juniper in a 3 gallon container. You can find them for them, mark them up and sell them what they need. But at the same time you can look around and see if you can find some Green Mound rooted cuttings, liners, or even one gallon plants that you can put into a 3 gallon container and have a really nice 3 gallon plant the following year.

All of these things are possible if only you let the world know that you exist are eager to do business with them.

Selling Plants from Home

You can sell plants from home. You can have a plant sale at your house. However, you have to be aware that inviting people to your home to conduct any business can raise liability issues. If somebody is coming to your house to buy a plant and they slip on your steps and get hurt, chances are your regular homeowners insurance won't pay the claim. You have to buy special insurance coverage for conducting a home based business.

In some cases you can just add a rider to your home owners policy and in other cases you might need a separate policy. Recently one of our members told me that their insurance agent added a rider to their homeowners insurance for "road side stand coverage". Most people really don't want customers coming to their home so they find ways to sell plants that don't require people to come to their homes. And of course zoning is also a problem when you sell from home so you have to know what you can and cannot do from home.

Zoning

Zoning varies from city to city and town to town so I really can't tell you much about the

zoning in your area, but I will give you a few tips. Things to think about. I'm not suggesting that you lie to or deceive anybody but before you visit your local government offices and ask about getting a business permit, do some research first. Find out exactly what the code says, what's allowed and what's not allowed then structure your home based business around what is allowed.

When you are speaking with your local government representatives and say; "I want to start a nursery in my backyard," all kinds of red flags go up. When you mention the word nursery they envision huge greenhouses, tractors, cars parked everywhere etc. You have to be careful to "control" the visual image that you give them.

There's a fine line between gardening as a hobby and operating a nursery. If you feel that "operating a nursery" from your home is not going to be allowed you have to spend some time thinking about how to approach your local officials. If you are inside of the city limits, or in a homeowners association, you have to be careful about how much attention you attract to yourself and your business. Some backyard growers keep things low key and consider what they do as a hobby. They might sell a few plants, and of course they do get a nursery stock producers license from the state and all of that. But they quietly ship rooted cuttings and other small plants and do so in such a way that they don't upset their neighbors.

When you approach your local officials and say; "I grow plants as a hobby, it's just something that I love to do and I find it very therapeutic. I give a lot of my plants away, but if I were to turn this into a very small, low key business where I box up some plants and ship them from my home, would I need a permit to do so from the city? And if so, how do I get that permit?"

That's sounds a lot more "neighborhood friendly" than; "I want to start a nursery in my backyard!"

Now, if zoning is an issue, don't let that scare you off. There are all kinds of people that live outside the city limits and can do pretty much anything they want to do in their backyard. I mean within reason. You could hook up with such a person and get them involved. You could work together and let them grow the plants for you and you pay them so much per plant that you harvest and sell.

Another option is to find a place in town that is zoned for what you want to do and grow and sell plants from there. There are all kinds of buildings owned by landlords that have room behind the building where plants could be grown. Work out a deal where you cut the grass around the building and take care of the grounds. In return the landlord allows you to use a certain amount of space to grow plants. To protect yourself draw up a written agreement that both parties sign. This agreement should give you access to your plants until it's time to harvest them.

Back to . . . more Ways to Sell Your Plants

Here in Ohio the Department of Agriculture prints a directory of all of the licensed nursery stock growers and dealers and makes this directory available to anyone who

holds a license for a small fee. Actually anybody should be able to get this listing because it is a public record and in the State of Ohio, and I'm sure all states have similar law, public records are open to anybody that wants to see them. Usually these public records are provided for the cost involved in sending you the copies and here in Ohio they can only charge you for the cost of making the copies and the postage, not the labor to do so. The directory lists what type of stock each nursery produces, how many acres they farm, and their mailing address. The listings are separated by county. Today they provide this on CD so you can export the files to create mailing labels.

If I had 5,000 Gold Thread Cypress in one quart containers that I wanted to sell, I would print a postcard that reads something like this:

5,000 Gold Thread Cypress in one quart
containers for sale! Excellent quality,
very full plants. \$1.35 each
Call Billybob Plant Grower 000-1234

I would mail the postcard to all of the nurseries in my local area. If I did not get any takers immediately, I would mail to more nurseries just outside my local area, and just keep expanding my mailing radius until I found a taker. If your plants are good quality, your price is competitive with the industry norm, and if you have chosen to grow a plant that there is a good market for, you probably wouldn't have too mail many cards before some nursery owner jumped at the chance to buy your plants.

Of course I wouldn't grow 5,000 of any one plant unless I was quite sure that there was a market for it. Once again, ask around. Many growers will tell you not only what to grow, but to contact them when you have a crop for sale. Entering into casual conversations with these growers is a great way to learn which plants seem to be in short supply and which plants seem to be in excess in the market place.

Of course it's difficult to predict what is going to be in short supply. In 2008 when the economy took a dive the wholesale growers across the country felt it in a big way. People quit building new homes and almost all new construction came to a halt. The need for plants was greatly reduced. Consumers in general quickly changed their money spending habits. Even those who had money to spend quit spending, or started spending differently, more conservatively. Which buy the way plays right into the hands of we Backyard Growers because we tend to sell smaller plants and we sell them for less money. So when the economy took a dive, we looked like a much better deal than the big garden centers.

So when many, probably all, of the wholesale growers watched their sales decrease dramatically two things happened. One, they had way too many plants on hand and many reduced the price of these plants just to move them. This was actually a huge benefit to those of us who belong to the [Backyard Growers Business Center](#) because

some of our members found these incredible deals on the wholesale market, they bought them up and passed them on to us inside of the Business Center.

We got some really, really good deals and I for one jumped on the opportunity to get these great plants at reduced prices. Not only were the prices were good, but these were plants that had been in short supply a year earlier. So much in short supply that we often could not buy them at all. The suppliers were always sold out way in advance. Their regular customers would place orders for the following year as soon as they received the plants they were waiting for. The down turn in the economy changed all of that and we in the [Backyard Growers Business Center](#) could not have been happier.

From just one of my customers I bought over \$6,000 worth of Japanese maples that he had advertised in the business center. I bought almost \$1,000 worth of Harry Lauder Walking Sticks from another one of my customers. You read that correctly, I buy plants from my customers, the people that learned the business from me!

So anyway, the sagging economy forced the larger wholesale growers to reduce prices and move their excess plants. The second thing they did was cut waaaaaaaaay back on production of new crops. If people weren't buying like they used to many of these wholesale producers quit making new plants. So guess what? Today, 2012 some things are starting to get short in supply and I expect that to get worse before it gets better.

Problem is, it's difficult to predict in advance what is going to be in short supply. So you have to grow all kinds of plants in moderate numbers until your market indicates that you should increase production on any given plant.

Again, the more time you spend talking with other members of the industry or your fellow Backyard Growers, the more you learn about market trends and what's going on in the market. For years and years we had a small, family owned wholesale nursery in this area that sold ground cover by the flat. Lots and lots of Pachysandra and a couple different kinds of English Ivy. They suddenly went out of business, which of course really means that they slowly went out of business because they didn't do the things that you need to do to remain in business. Like taking really good care of customers and working hard to build your business and not just take from the business.

But anyway, as soon as they closed up this local area experienced a shortage of ground cover material that is likely to remain in short supply for some time. These are the things you need to look for and in talking to other members of the trade you learn to see these things coming. If a business is not taking care of their customers, those customers are practically begging somebody else to come along and sell to them.

Aren't Retail Sales the Best Way to Get the Most Money for Your Plants?

Retail sales are nice when you are first starting out because you get more money for your plants. The retail price of a plant is usually double what the wholesale price is. So a nice plant in a 2 quart container will easily bring \$4.97. If you sold that same plant wholesale

you're probably only get about \$2.50 for that plant. So yes, retail is the way to get the maximum amount of money per plant.

And selling your plants retail can be fun. You get to meet new people and it's a great feeling because they are completely in awe of you and what you do. So it really depends on how you want to structure your business. For me, retail customers started to drive me crazy because some of them would come and spend way too much time browsing, asking questions, and really wasting my time. It got to the point that I could barely do it any longer.

But that's me. Other people enjoy that as much as the customers do.

I like wholesale sales. The phone rings and in a matter of minutes you can write an order for hundreds or thousands of dollars. Remember where earlier I mentioned buying a lot of plants from one of my own customers? This is not a big wholesale nursery. This is a guy that just started a few years ago, he managed to find a great deal on rare Japanese Maples and I've been buying from him for a few years now.

The first time I placed a large order with him I was at a hotel in Columbus, Ohio. I was going to a nursery trade show that day but before we left for the show I logged onto the hotel computer and went to the [Backyard Growers Business Center](#) where I saw his ad for Japanese maples. Right there in the hotel I put together a list of what I wanted to buy from him and sent it to him via Email. Can you imagine his surprise when he checked his Email and found an order in excess of \$3,000? That's what I like about selling wholesale!

Wholesale buyers do not mess around. They know what they want and there is no hemming and hawing about which plant to buy. They pick up the phone and say I want this, this and this. Send me 100 of each and 200 of that. Bing, bam, boom just like that they place an order for hundreds or thousands of dollars.

Yes, you are selling your plants for less. But when you sell retail you earn those few extra dollars selling your stock one plant at a time. When you grow your own plants your cost per plant is really, really low. You can easily afford to sell them at wholesale and make a nice profit.

Now here's something else to think about and this of course is only my observation and I'm sure it's pretty accurate based on what I've witnessed in my 40 years in this industry. I've watched retail garden stores open, close and go completely out of business. Very few of those retail garden store operators retired wealthy because of their retail plant operations.

I can say that about the many wholesale nursery operators that I know and have known for years. I'm not saying you can get rich in this business. That's not what I do. I don't sell "get rich at anything". But I've watched the smart ones build wealth. They work hard and establish a nursery that does a nice swift business. Then at some point, if they so chose, they can sell that business for a nice sum of money because on paper the business is healthy.

The business has assets. A large inventory, structures, an irrigation system, a good water

supply, and all of the equipment it takes to run the nursery. The nursery also has an established and well taken care of customer list. In most cases the nursery also has some key people that will transfer to the new owner.

All of those things make a wholesale nursery attractive to prospective buyers and I've seen wholesale nurseries bought and sold successfully many, many times. I can't say that about the retail operations that we have around here. A few have done really, really well. Many others have failed completely.

Why is a Large Retail Operation So Difficult to Maintain?

Not enough diversity and not enough year round customer interest. Here in the northeast, and it's not much different elsewhere in the country, retail plants selling is a very short lived season. The season starts to heat up in early April, really gets cranking by mid May and right after Memorial Day weekend it really tapers off. I mean it tapers off a lot. By mid June most retail plant buyers have completely lost interest. Seriously they have.

Retail plant buyers are a psychological study worthy of study. I really mean that. There is a psychological transformation that takes place in human beings in the spring. I've not studied this, I have no idea what I'm talking about, I have no idea whether or not anybody has ever studied this but I will go to my grave believing it to be true. So why would I make such a "crazy" statement?

Especially here in the northeast human beings spend the winter couped up in the house. They get a little stir crazy, a little cabin fever and they start to long for warm sunny days, warm evenings and all of things that most of us remember the most from our childhood. At least in my mind, it was the time I spent playing outside that I remember the most fondly and I think a lot of people are like that. Not all, but many.

Now, before I go any further with my homemade psychological study I need to make a distinction so you don't argue with me. What I am explaining to you is the behavior of the typical retail plant buyer. Not the plant lover. I am a plant lover and chances are so are you. I know that because I know my customers pretty well. So don't confuse the two. There are retail plant buyers and there are plant lovers. Me and you? We're plant lovers. There's a difference. I am describing retail plant buyers.

The retail plant buyers comes out of winter with a ton of pent up "I need to get outside! I love being outside! I wish I could work outside! I envy people who get to work outside! I love to garden! I just love having my hands in the soil! Being outside is the greatest thing ever!

So as soon as the weather warms up they are off and running. Digging, planting, transplanting, re-arranging and buying. Oh boy, oh boy are they buying! They can't get enough of buying plants, digging the in soil, planting things and just wallowing in the dirt. It's what they live for!

Until Memorial Day. Then they lose interest. They don't just lose interest, they completely lose interest! It's like somebody flipped a switch. They've done all of the

yard work that they care to do. The rest of the summer they barely come outside long enough to cut the grass and water their plants. They've done all of the projects around the house that they wanted to do. They are done!

The change is so dramatic that I truly believe it to be an emotional state that people go through.

Plant lovers not so much. Plant lovers like you and me they just keep trudging along. Just this past week (the end of June) I've spent several hours each day in the nursery doing nothing but pulling weeds. On my hands and knees in the dirt, my favorite music in my ears via an MP3 player, the sun baking hot, sweat pouring off my head, clothes soaking wet, the dry soil clinging to my wet clothes, just me and my plants and I've enjoyed every minute of it. I wouldn't trade it for the world.

That's a plant lover.

But it's the retail plant buyers that actually support the industry. They make up a much larger group and out spend us plant lovers by a great deal. The industry would never survive at all if it just depended on us die hard plant lovers. We spend, and we love to buy plants and plant related things, but there are just not enough of us to support an industry. So the industry depends on the fickle retail plant buyer to do all of their spending during that short window of time in the spring.

And that's why even the wholesale nurseries do approximately 80% of their annual business between March 15th and May 31st. It's just the nature of the industry that we all come to love.

However, on the wholesale side of things there are plenty of productive things to do all year round. There are cuttings to be stuck, plants to be potted, small plants that need to be shifted into bigger pots, fields to prepare, pruning that must be done, weeding that must be done and lots and lots of watering to be done.

All of these things are part of the manufacturing process. We are in the business of manufacturing plants. We work year round making baby plants and caring for them. We are production workers making a product to sell. And we know that come March 15th we had better be ready to start the harvest because the window of time to do so is short!

So even if we aren't making any sales, and it's costing the wholesale nursery a lot of money to pay those productions workers, it's still extremely important work, vitally important work. Because if we fail to do all of those things, there won't be any plants to sell once the season starts. So even though the wholesale side of this business is very much seasonal, there really are two seasons. Selling and harvesting season which involves selling the plants, getting them dug and getting the trucks loaded and the much longer, plant making season.

Both seasons are busy, both seasons are equally important. Therefore the expenses occurred in the non selling season in the wholesale nursery are not really expenses, they are "the cost of producing a product to sell".

Now compare that to the retail garden center. A retail garden center needs good help.

People who know plants and can intelligently answer the myriad of questions that the customers ask. In order to get that kind of knowledgeable help you have to pay them a decent wage and you have to offer them steady employment so they are not forced to seek work elsewhere. They are an invaluable asset during the spring selling season.

But because most garden centers really don't make any plants, maybe a few in the greenhouse, but almost all of the plants they sell are purchased from wholesale growers, there really isn't a lot of productive work for these valuable employees to do during the not so busy seasons. So instead of being valued production workers like in the wholesale nurseries, they are really expensive liabilities. Just an expense that a garden center has to absorb until the next busy season.

Many retail garden centers experience days and weeks at a time where they know that when they unlock the door in the morning they are going to lose money that day. They are not going to make enough sales to offset the expenses they know they are going to incur. It's really not a good business model. And over the years, things have changed. They've changed a lot.

The big box stores have entered the market.

If you expect me to use this space to bash the big box stores I am not going to do it. I don't have a problem with the big box stores and like most everybody else I shop in big box stores. At least I give them a chance to sell me something when I'm in the market. Just last night I walked into one of those big box stores, credit card in hand, my mindset was to blow to the back of the store, spend about three minutes looking at refrigerators then make a purchase. I need a refrigerator to put in the garage at the nursery for cold beverages and lunch meat. Obviously I was looking for a low end refrigerator, but not a tiny refrigerator.

The guy that eventually waited on me was in the "Anti-Sales Department". All big stores have these types. His ego was the size of a bus and he must have suspected that I didn't want this frigg for home because he asked. When I told him it was going in the garage he started giving me a zillion reasons why what I was trying to do was impossible. He told me the only refrigerator in the world for me was one that was actually sold by the competition of the store that he worked at and he went on to tell me that an 18 cubic foot refrigerator that would work in a garage would cost me \$1,200.

He said that modern day refrigerators won't work in extreme cold, the compressor would freeze up and stop working. I told him that I'd unplug it come winter. So then he told me that it would also blow up or something to that effect if the temperature in the garage got above 90 degrees F. I obviously don't have air conditioning in the garage at the nursery. So he assured me it wouldn't work. So I said; "What if I lived in an apartment with no air conditioning? Could I not have a refrigerator in my apartment?" To which he replied; "No air conditioning on a day like today? (it was 94 that day) You'd die without air conditioning on a day like today."

This dumb bunny actually said that. I'm not sure where he grew up or how he happens to be a sales clerk in a big box store because I'm getting a disconnect here. Obviously, lots

and lots and lots of people in America and other, even warmer parts of the world, live without air conditioning. I grew up without air conditioning and Pam and I raised our family for years without air conditioning. We have it now and it's nice. But it ain't mandatory!

I'm sure there is some truth to what he was telling me about modern day refrigerators. But his attitude was; "Sorry, I can't help you. Go to another store."

I told you that story for this reason. If you are going to sell plants retail you have to consider big box stores as part of your competition. Can you compete with them? The answer is yes and it should be a double or quadruple yes.

For one, you are going to be growing your own plants. Your cost is a pot and some good potting soil. If you're really smart and I need to throw this in here now before I forget, you can get lots and lots of pots for free. The soil you probably won't get free, but it shouldn't cost you more than 15 or 25 cents for the soil for your smaller plants. If you have to buy pots that's going to cost you another 20 cents or so. Maybe less. But if you take advantage of all the ways you can get pots for free and average out your pot costs for the free ones and the ones you have to buy, your cost per pot is going to be pretty low. In other words, your cost to make a saleable plant is way less than one dollar per plant. At one time I had it figured out to around 35 cents, and things have gone up. But probably not that much.

Big box stores have to buy the plants that they sell. Therefore, you are already way ahead of them. Of course you can compete with them, you have almost no cost in your plants. Secondly, I've noticed that big box stores are advertising some low priced plants in their newspaper ads, but all of the other plants in their garden section are not at all what I'd consider low priced. It's actually a good strategy. They are using a few items to pull in potential customers, but then letting the customers themselves pick out some of the higher priced plants.

On some items the quality is good, but on other things, things that normally would sell for really high prices in a full service garden center, like Japanese maples, I've seen some things where the quality was not really what it should have been. But they sell them for less and the people appreciate the lower price and over look the quality. This is not always the case, but I've seen it.

So yes, on price and quality you can easily compete with them.

But where you really get to show them up is in customer service and sharing your knowledge and expertise with your customers. They cannot do that. And most certainly they cannot do it on a consistent basis. You can. The people that buy from you are going to love the idea of buying from the person that actually rooted the cutting and grew it on to a beautiful plant. That's where the big box store can never compete with you. They just can't and never will be able to.

Plus, you are going to do lots of other things they can't do. Like sending your customers a postcard and a newsletter, and a heart felt letter about what spring is going to bring. They cannot do that. And even if they did it just wouldn't feel the same nor would it have

the same impact. Your customers are going to consider you a friend. They are never going to feel that way about the big box store. They might like the big box store, but the feeling is different.

Okay, I started this big box store discussion to share with you the effect that they have had on the local mom and pop retail garden center. I'm not saying it's their fault that many of these small retail garden centers have closed up. We live in a free enterprise system and if you and I were as determined as Sam Walton was we too could change the way America shops like he did. It's free enterprise and it's a system that I hold dear.

The market place is a constantly changing thing and we all need to be aware of what is changing and how to best position ourselves for those coming changes. Some independent retailers have adapted and have done well. Others have not.

But one big advantage that the big box stores have over the smaller retail garden centers is diversity within their stores. Come spring they fence in part of the parking lot, pack that area full of plants, put sales people in that area and they serve those frenzied retail plant buying people. As soon as the frenzy is over they take down the fence, shrink the garden area to it's normal size and relocate those sale people to different areas of the store.

Once the crazy plant buying season is over they don't immediately start losing money every time they unlock the door. They simply shift their focus to another area of their business that is doing well.

We as small Backyard Growers get to do the same thing. We gear up for spring plant sales, we strike while the iron is hot, then as soon as it's over we move back into a more routine plant making mode.

So who is really in the cat bird seat? We are. On our own small scale. We can provide better customer service, we're better at dispensing quality knowledge, we make our own plants, we don't have to buy them, we can simply and easily stay in touch with our customers via postcards and newsletters and we can't lose money on a slow day. On a slow day we just spend that time making more plants!

So who's really in the worst possible position? The small retail garden center who doesn't have diversity and isn't in the business of making a product like we are and like the wholesale growers are. What has happened to them isn't really any body's fault. The market has changed.

My great grandmother as well as yours went to the butcher to buy meat. It was where you went to buy meat. That's no longer the case. Things change and you have to keep your eye on the market and know what the coming trends are going to be. You used to go to the gas station to buy gas and it seemed that there were independently owned gas stations on every corner. That's not the case any more. Today you can buy gas at the grocery store and groceries at the gas station. Things change.

So what's that mean for us Backyard Growers? I truly believe their will always be a place for us. The one thing that we must do is hone our marketing skills. That's what I like about this business. There really is no selling involved. The plants sell themselves.

We just need to market effectively so potential buyers know we exist. If we do that, the buyers will come and they will buy. Be it wholesale or retail, they will come and buy.

Utilizing the [Backyard Growers Business Center](#) gives us a huge advantage because there are hundreds of us, all with our ears to the ground looking for the coming changes. We share what we learn about buying plants, growing plants, selling plants and all of the latest things in marketing that are working the best for us. Being connected to that many like minded people really is a huge advantage. It certainly has been for me.

How to Get Free Pots and Free Customers

There are stacks and stacks of plastic nursery containers piled up behind tool sheds and landscapers have hundreds or even thousands of them piled up behind their shop. Home owners often don't throw them away. They save them. They are not sure why they save them but they do. It's really irresponsible to put them in landfills since they can easily be recycled. So how do you get them?

Several ways. First let's talk about landscapers and the pots that they discard. No wait! First let's talk about landscapers. They can't hear us so they won't know what I'm saying about them. Landscapers can be your greatest resource for used nursery pots, industry feedback about what's going on in the market place, what plants seem to be in short supply etc. They can also be your best customers. Eventually. When you are first starting out you might not have many plants that you can offer the landscapers in your area, but that doesn't mean that you shouldn't start communicating with them. You should start communicating with them almost immediately after reading this manual. Communicating with landscapers could easily pay off for you in big ways. Ways you've never even considered.

So how do you do that? How do you start communicating with landscapers? First of all you have to look at all of the landscapers in 25, 35 or 50 mile radius of where you live and consider them potential customers because that's exactly what they are. So what you do is get a list of all of the licensed landscapers, or more accurately all of the licensed nursery stock dealers in your state. This should be easily obtainable on CD via public records request.

This list when you have it complete really won't be that many names. Maybe 100 or 200 I'd guess. Having a small list of potential customers like this is a huge advantage because the list is small enough that you can actually afford to mail to the list and not break the bank. Consider this list of landscape companies your farm. This is where you are going to go hunting for wholesale customers. But for right now all I want you to do is type a simple one page letter that says something like this:

The letter.

Hi, my name is blah blah blah and I live over here in xyz town. I'm starting a small plant nursery here at my house and I was wondering if you have any plastic nursery containers

that you'd like to get rid of. I'd be happy to pay you for them. Please give me a call.

I'm excited about my new venture but at this point I cannot afford to buy new nursery containers, there are too many other things that I have to buy so I was hoping to get some used containers if you just have them laying around.

Sincerely,

blah blah blah

P.S. If there is any plant in particular that you think I should be growing, please let me know. My phone number is 000-000-0000

End of letter.

Really. You really, really, really should send this letter to all of the landscapers in your area. But more importantly, make sure you get all of those names and addresses into a database so you can mail to these folks on a regular basis. Then send them this letter.

This letter is going to do a couple of things for you. One, you should get some phone calls from landscapers who want to get rid of their pots. Some are going to see value in their old pots and ask you to buy them. That's fine if the price is really, really low. Others will happy to get rid of the pots they have if you come and haul them away.

Hopefully this letter will get you some feedback on what plants landscapers would like to buy from you. There might be things that they are having a difficult time finding or maybe they have to travel too far to get some of the plants they need. They'd like to have a source that's closer.

So that's one way to get free, or low priced plastic nursery containers. But more importantly you should send regular communications to the landscapers on this list. Just send them a really short letter about every three months updating them on the progress of your nursery and remind them that you still need plastic containers and are still interested in their feedback regarding what you should grow. I know this idea sounds crazy, but these short letters will have a huge impact on these people, and soon they will feel as if they know you and some of them will want to help you. Trust me on that.

The Lifetime Value of a Customer

Very few business owners are aware of this, but all should be. For each and every business there is a number. That number represents the "Lifetime Value of their Typical Customer". If you ask 100 small business owners chances are they cannot give you that number. But it's the most important number to each and every business there is.

If you know that number, then you know exactly how much you can spend to attract a new customer. See, most business people don't think that way at all. The number they are most interested in is; "What is the smallest amount of money that I can spend to attract a customer?" That's the only number they are interested in. But that's really,

really flawed thinking.

So anyway, a landscape contractor can easily buy anywhere from \$5,000 to \$100,000 worth of plants from a nursery in a year. Depending on whether or not that nursery gets all of their business or just some of their business. But no matter how you slice it, the number is in the thousands of dollars. So the average lifetime value of a landscaper to a wholesale nursery could easily range from \$50,000 to \$500,000 over a ten year period if that's how long the typical landscaper buys from the same nursery.

There are some nurseries that I've been buying from for over 20 years now.

Why am I telling you this? Why am I telling it to you now? Because I want to get you thinking in the right direction. I want you subconsciously thinking about the potential lifetime value of a wholesale customer right out of the gate. And . . . I'm asking you to send hundreds of letters and I want you to see this act of mailing all of those letters as an investment in your business, not an expense. I want you to realize what the potential return on investment can be if you simply start sending those letters today and never quit mailing them.

Okay. Back to free nursery pots. You thought I forgot what I was talking about didn't you?

Here's another way to get free nursery containers and free customers. You can put a bin at the end of your driveway with a sign that reads; "Recycle your Plastic Nursery Pots Here". You can make that bin out of three wooden pallets simply nailed together. Make the sign large enough that people can read it from the road. Inside the bin place another sign that says; "Thank you for the plastic containers. Leaving them with me keeps them out of the landfill and I will put them to good use here in my little backyard nursery."

That's all it would take to make people curious about your nursery. Remember what I told you earlier? When you grow and sell small plants there is no selling involved. As soon as people find out that you have plants for sale they want to see them. If you really want to take this a step further you can add this to the sign inside of your container collection bin; "Thank you for your donation. Please knock on the door for a coupon good for a free plant." Bingo! That will bring you plenty of curious customers.

Since it's so easy to root cuttings and you can root thousands of them at one time, all you have to do is pot some up in a small 2-1/2" container (that you can now get for free) and give away these small plants as a thank you gift for the pots you receive.

What this really does is engage you in conversation with people who like plants. Make sure you get their mailing address. Ask them to fill out an address card so you can let them know when you are having special plant sales. Now you are building a list of potential retail customers.

Next you can post on Facebook that you recycle plastic nursery containers and ask your friends to share your post with their friends. Maybe something like this;

"Be earth friendly, recycle your plastic nursery containers. Just drop them off at (your address). Please share this post with your Facebook friends."

Free Advertising for Your Nursery

Next send a news release to your local newspapers and radio stations letting them know that you recycle plastic nursery containers. Make the news release sound like you are providing a public service which you are. Today people have to pay for recycling so if you are willing to take nursery containers for free that truly is a public service. It's also Free Advertising for your business!

You could actually turn this into a fundraiser and make a donation to your favorite charity for every X number of containers that you receive. It's for a great cause and again, you are getting free advertising for your nursery by doing a really good thing.

Many plant lovers are also pet owners. All you have to do is promise to donate X number of bags of pet food to the local shelter if people fill your bin with nursery containers. Now you are actually working for two great causes. Reducing landfill intake and helping out abandon pets. The media love to do stories like this. More free advertising for your nursery. Remember, if you do this to benefit a charity, make sure all of your Facebook friends are aware of what you are doing and ask them to share your post with their friends. Don't assume they will. Ask them to. Then they will.

Constantly think of more reasons to ask for nursery containers. Help out more causes. Do more good things.

If you get too many nursery containers you can always use those extra containers to barter for free plants with other members of the [Backyard Growers Business Center](#). Just let them know that you have too many plastic nursery containers and see if anybody who is close to you is interested in trading rooted cuttings or liners for pots. I'm pretty sure you'll find some takers.

You will also establish a valuable relationship with another backyard grower in your area. All of these things are great things to have happen. It always pays to network with others who share your common interest. Once you get to know one another you can go together to place wholesale orders with the larger nurseries and so on. Many of our members now do that.

Doing Co-Op Plant Sales

Doing a what???

Here's a problem and a solution. The problem. I can quietly grow plants in my backyard but I cannot sell plants from my home. It's not allowed in my community. The solution. Fellow Backyard Grower and member of the [Backyard Growers Business Center](#) whom we will call "Mary", lives just outside of town and is allowed to sell plants from her home. When I first joined the [Backyard Growers Business Center](#) Mary introduced herself and invited me to come visit her small but growing backyard nursery. It was a very nice visit and a friendship was formed. Mary and I talked about having a co-op plant sale at her house. This is how it works.

It's a typical Mike McGroarty \$4.97 plant sale. So we are going to have hundreds of

plants priced at \$4.97 each. I have my own little area in Mary's yard where I can display my selection of \$4.97 plants. When people buy plants from my area they pay me \$4.97 per plant. At the end of the day I pay Mary \$1.50 per plant that I sold. It's that simple.

What? I have to give "Mary" a buck and half for every plant that I sell? Yes you do. It's only fair. She is giving you an opportunity to access her customer base, she is paying for the advertising, she is allowing you to set up shop at her house. It's like selling your plants wholesale. You are still getting a fair price for your plants. How much you pay "Mary" can vary. \$2.00 or \$2.50 per plant would not be out of line. It really depends on how much each of you bring to the deal and whether or not you split the cost of advertising. The simple method is to just tag on to her sale and pay her a flat, pre-agreed upon price per plant you sell.

Can you pass out business cards to those who buy from you? That's something that you and "Mary" have to work out in advance. This has to be a win-win situation for the both of you.

Of course you can use different colored plant tags and mingle all the plants together and collect the money at one spot so as not to confuse the customers. Sorta like a multi family garage sale. That's up to you and "Mary", how ever you want to work it out. But in the heat of a very busy plant sale, keeping track of who bought what from who is not going to be easy. I've had many plant sales where it was all we could do to keep up with collecting the money from happy plant buyers.

I'm not saying that you are going to have a sale like that. Sales like that depend on a lot of things. And to be honest, selling a lot of plants to one wholesale buyer is a lot less hassle and I know that if I do it correctly that wholesale buyer will buy from me over and over.

Attracting Retail Customers to Your Nursery

Now, before I reveal some of the strategies that I've used and many of our members use to attract retail customers to your nursery or to a plant sale, you have to know that holding a plant sale at your home is all about attracting strangers to your home. And a lot of them might show up at one time!

They are going to park along the street and pull on to your grass. They will probably park on your neighbor's lawn. At least they'll have two wheels on your neighbors lawn. They'll pull into your neighbor's driveway. Think about a really busy garage sale. It can get pretty crazy.

We already talked about liability insurance. Your regular homeowners insurance will not cover these kinds of activities at your home. You have to have some kind of home business coverage or roadside stand coverage. Make sure you are protected!

When I held plant sales at my house, out of courtesy for my elderly neighbor I used to place saw horses along her front yard so my customers would not pull onto her grass. If I didn't do that, they would have parked on her lawn. She was a nice lady, but it was her lawn and she was a bit finicky about things. The rest of my neighbors couldn't have been

more gracious. Not everybody is that lucky and you have to realize that if people in your neighborhood see you successfully selling a lot of plants somebody is sure to have a problem with it.

I'm not trying to discourage you in anyway. I just want you to know that if you intend to hold plant sales at your home you have to know what to expect. And of course all of that varies by what kind of a neighborhood that you live in. If you live in a rural area then you probably won't have a problem, but do investigate as to what is allowed and what is not allowed before you trudge ahead. At the time I lived in the township and was told by a local official that as long as I was selling plants that I grew on my property I could sell them from home. But I could not buy plants and re-sell them from home like garden centers do.

We sold that home and moved into "a development in 2005". Selling plants from here would not go over well, and I'm now located in the village and they have lots and lots of rules. But I missed being in the plant business so in 2010 we bought an old farm house and 4.6 acres of land and I am now happily back in the plant business. My nursery is now located in the township and on a very busy highway. As a matter of fact, a little too busy for my liking and the driveway at this place can be tricky getting in and out of. For that reason I don't intend to hold those "crazy, people everywhere" kind of plant sales that I held at the other place. My plans as of now are to do things on a more low key basis and eventually develop some wholesale customers to whom I will sell my plants.

If you cannot sell plants from home, or are not sure if you can or not, we'll discuss other ways to sell your plants without "making such a big splash".

So if you anticipate complaints from your neighbors or local officials, don't do something that is going to attract a lot of attention to what you are doing in your backyard. There are a lot of ways to do this business without having retail plant sales from home.

How do you attract retail customers to your nursery?

There are several ways. The easiest way is to load a selection of plants on to a small utility trailer and park it in your front yard with a sign that reads:

Plants \$4.97

I did this with my other nursery and it worked pretty good. And it didn't cost me any money in advertising dollars. Of course it depends on how much traffic you have going by your home, and of course if you have zoning laws to contend with. I do this when I am only interested in making some passive sales. When I am interested in moving a quantity of plants in a hurry I have a different technique that I use.

Newspaper Advertising

You can also advertise in your local newspaper. This is what I do. You might be wondering if newspaper advertising is expensive. Our local newspaper has a circulation of about 55,000 and they charge \$31.65 per column inch for advertising space. One column inch of advertising space is the width of one newspaper column by one inch deep. The ad that I usually run is two columns wide by three inches deep, for a total of six

column inches, times \$31.65. A total price of \$189.90, and for that price the ad only appears in the paper one time.

Is it worth it? It is if the ad you run is extremely powerful, and if you run it at the right time of the year. So what is the right time of the year? Here in northern Ohio spring starts to poke it's nose out around April 1st. However, we often get temperatures down in the twenties as late as the second or third week of April. So you have to watch the forecast very close, because if you run an ad on a cold rainy day, it will not do well at all. On the other hand if you run an ad on a nice day, after you've have had three or four real nice days in a row, it will pull people to your place like a magnet. Providing your ad grabs their attention, and makes an offer they can not refuse.

The image shows a newspaper clipping of a plant sale advertisement. At the top left, there are two bullet points: "• Creative Faux Finishes" and "• Senior Discounts". To the right of these, there is a small, partially legible stamp that appears to say "1-800-234-5678". The main headline is "\$4.00 Plant Sale!" in a large, bold, serif font. Below the headline, the text reads: "We are over stocked, 1,124 plants must be sold. Every plant is priced at just \$4.00 and must be sold this weekend! Choose from Fragrant Snowball Viburnum, Blue Boy/Girl Holly, Burning Bush, Pink Flowering Weigela, Red Flowering Weigela, Boxwood, Annabelle Hydrangea, Gold Flame Spirea, Cranberry Cotoneaster, Coral Beauty Cotoneaster, Variegated Hosta, Stella D'Oro Daylily, Japanese Holly, Gold Drop Potentilla, Red Twig Dogwood, Emerald Green Arborvitae, Golden Globe Arborvitae, Blue Rug Juniper, Blue Chip Juniper, Blue Star Juniper, Forsythia, Ornamental Grasses, Variegated Euonymus and more. McGroarty's Backyard Nursery, 12345 Rd., Perry, Ohio 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Thursday, Friday, Saturday, and Sunday".

• Creative Faux Finishes
• Senior Discounts

1-800-234-5678

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DINING OUT?

Look to TGIF
for the best
places to eat,
every Friday in
The
News-Herald

Surplus Landscape Plants Must Be Sold!

Every plant must be sold this weekend! Beautiful Japanese Red Maples, Blue Boy & Girl Holly, Burning Bush, Pink Dogwoods, White Dogwoods, Japanese Holly, Rhododendrons, Weeping Cherries, Magnolia, Flowering Cherries, Black Walnut Trees and Arborvitae. All landscape size and priced to sell immediately.

You won't beat these prices! All quantities are limited!

Plus 1,389 plants @ \$4.00 ea!!!

Choose from Variegated Euonymus, Burning Bush, Emerald Arborvitae, Rheingold Arborvitae, Blue Rug Juniper, Cotoneaster, Gold Mount Spirea, Variegated Dogwood, Flowering Weigela, Gold Thread Cypress, Flowering Sandcherry, Forsythia and more!

Don't miss this sale!!!

April 22-25, Thurs., Fri., Sat. & Sun. 8:30 am til 5:00 pm

McGroarty's Backyard Nursery

Perry, Oh.

CARPE OUTLET OF GEORGIA



Ask Ab

Peel & Stick

45¢ ea
Ctn. Only

Vinyl

Starting at
77¢ a sq. ft.

PARM

Across from Home Dep
216-267-066

Above are two advertisements that I have used in our local newspaper. How well did these ads work? Fantastic!!! When I used them, they brought me a lot of anxious plant buying customers! Let's look at the top ad first. Study it closely. Why does it work so well? Because it creates a sense of urgency. The reader of the ads realizes this is obviously a very special sale. A sale that any serious plant buyer would not want to miss. That is the type of person this ad brings in. All serious plant buyers, who know the price of plants, and are willing to pay a fair price, as long as it is a savings over regular garden center prices.

Note. When I first started selling low priced plants I used the price of \$4.00. It worked incredibly well. Later I raised the price to \$4.97. No change. The extra \$.97 did not change response at all. If anything we did better with the \$4.97 price.

The people that respond to these ads are willing to drive 25 or 30 miles to take advantage of these great deals. If you have more expensive plants that's fine, but I'm not sure that I'd mention them in the ad. I created incredible success by becoming known as the guy that sells plants for \$4.97. The \$4.97 price really sticks in people's heads, and since it only costs me 35 cents or less to produce a plant, I can sell them at \$4.97 all day long.

Just because people come to get the \$4.97 plants doesn't mean that they won't fall in love with a \$50.00 or \$100.00 plant. They absolutely will! It happens all the time. Use the \$4.97 plants to bring them in, and they will fall in love with your other plants. Just make sure you have a good selection of \$4.97 plants so they don't feel deceived. Make it a

point to try and sell them the \$4.97 plants, and allow them to fall in love with your other plants on their own. They will!

Notice how many different kinds of plants I offer at \$4.97? Many of these plants I go out and buy bare root for \$1.50 to \$2.50 each, pot them up and resell them just so I can list them in my ad. Some of the plants I buy in one gallon containers from other growers for \$3.35 each, just so I can feature them in my ad. The larger your selection the more powerful the ad. Read that again. **“The larger your selection, the more powerful the ad.”** That's why you have to work really hard to create a wide selection of plants that you can sell at \$4.97. You don't have to have hundreds of each plant. But having only one or two just so you can put them in the ad really isn't fair either.

That's where the **Backyard Growers Business Center** is a great resource because not only can you sell plants there, you can buy a wide variety of different plants at wholesale prices and you don't have to buy large quantities. You can often buy as few as 5 or 10 of each type of plant that you buy.

When you run one of these ads with a large selection of plants at \$4.97 each people will show up at your plant sale with the ad in their hand and they will have circled the plants that they are looking for. That's why it's so valuable to have a large selection. You never know for sure exactly which plant or which combination of plants it is that will convince them to make the trip to your plant sale.

That's why it's important to have plants that you know people are looking for. Japanese Red Maples are a huge customer magnet. Especially at \$4.97 each. I buy my Japanese Red Maple seedlings in quantity from Heritage Seedlings in Oregon. They are in the wholesale directory that you got with my system. They do have a minimum order and you'll have to ask them about it. Could be as much as \$300 or \$400, I don't know for sure. I'm an addict so when I order from them I invest thousands of dollars at a time. They are also a great resource for all kinds of rare trees and they have a really nice selection of grafted Japanese Maples.

You can also get Japanese Red Maples at the **Backyard Growers Business Center**. From Heritage I usually pay around \$1.35 each (2012 price) for them and buy several hundred at a time. At our own business center you can get the same trees in smaller quantities for \$2.00 or \$2.50 each. At least that's what I saw them advertised for this spring. Yes it's more money per plant, but you can buy smaller quantities. As a member of the **Backyard Growers Business Center** you can also work with other Backyard Growers and go together and place a joint order with a company like Heritage Seedlings if you want the better price or some of the rare varieties.

But in any case, work hard to offer your plant buying customers a wide selection of plants that you can list in all of the advertising that you do.

Go back and look at the top advertisement again. Notice how nondescript the ad is. No photos, no clip art, no fancy looking borders, no color ink. These boring looking ads work! The sales rep from the newspaper will try and convince you that you need photos or fancy borders or clip art. I mean no disrespect to people who sell advertising. They

are wonderful, hardworking people who believe in what they are telling you. They believe every word of it to be true because that's how it was explained to them by their advertising manager. However, and this is a great big however, people who sell advertising, especially advertising managers, really know very little about advertising.

They know how to sell advertising. That is their area of expertise. That's not a bad thing. It's a good thing. Because if they didn't know how to sell advertising they wouldn't be able to provide for their families. And in all fairness to them, even if they did know a great deal about what makes for a good advertisement they would spend all day banging their head against a brick wall because most, almost all, small business owners **"think they know a lot about advertising"** when in fact they don't. So life for the advertising representative is much easier if they just deliver the ads the way the small business owner wants them.

Boy oh boy am I stepping on toes here. But it's true. I'm sorry if you sell advertising or have ever sold advertising, but it's true. People who sell advertising are taught "how to sell advertising". They are not taught anything at all about what really makes for a good, powerful advertisement. That's just the way it is. They will tell you that advertising is all about repetition. They say things like; "Your ad must be seen 7 times before it really starts to work." That's a bunch of hogwash! So why do they say things like that? Because that's what they have been taught.

I know what you're thinking. "Okay McGroarty, so what makes you the expert if people who sell advertising don't know much about advertising?" That's a fair question and I'm glad you asked it.

I have earned the right to have very strong opinions about what makes for good advertising and what does not because since 1976 I have been investing my grocery money in advertising. Which is a lot like taking the grocery money to a casino. In the early days, much like being at a casino, I lost the grocery money on poor performing advertising. It was painful, it was frustrating and it was hard on my marriage. When you lose the grocery money, you're not very popular at the dinner table.

Today there are people all of the country and a few in different places around the world who consider me a full blown expert on advertising and marketing. Not many people know that about me, but it's true. I truly am an expert on advertising and marketing and plenty of people seek my advice on the topic. I've written a book on the subject, I've been asked to contribute chapters to other books on the subject and even though I don't seek speaking engagements I do occasionally speak on the subject of marketing and advertising.

So how did I become the sought after expert?

I lost the grocery money on terrible advertising way too many times. Then buy a stroke of pure luck and a crazy idea, like a true gambler, I rolled the dice one more time with a \$150 advertisement. I can't even begin to tell you how badly we needed that \$150 for other things. We had a 10 month old baby and I was more broke than you can imagine. But none the less, I took the last \$150 that we had and placed that ad. Why? Why would

I do that?

Because in my heart I felt that it was the right thing to do. I knew that if the ad worked even a little bit I could get the \$150 back and maybe even another couple hundred dollars. Even though I was as broke as broke could be, something inside of me told me that I had to take the chance. I know it sounds crazy, but I was truly caught between a rock and hard place and pretty darn desperate.

The ad worked. It worked to the tune of 33.5 times ad cost. That little tiny \$150 advertisement in a coupon book brought in \$5,000 worth of new business. I was ecstatic and confused. I didn't know why the ad worked and whether or not it would ever work again.

At the time I was selling landscaping, not plants.

The ad did work again and long story short I eventually went to the library and got a book on advertising to figure out why the ad worked. I was hooked. That was 26 years ago and I have been a voracious student of advertising and marketing ever since. I study something on advertising almost every single day.

I've invested tens of thousands of dollars in advertising. I know what works and what doesn't.

And that's what makes me the expert.

My advertising and marketing book is titled; **"Can Any Small Business Make You Rich?"** It's available at <http://getmikesbook.com> or from Amazon.com.

I'm going to let you in on a little secret. It's called R.O.I. Return on Investment. Each and every ad that you place must bring you a return on investment of X. What is X? That depends on what you need. But if you spend \$200 on a newspaper ad then you darn well better get well over \$200 in sales from that ad. My \$4.97 plant ads often brought me 20 times ad cost. That means that if the ad cost \$200, for that ad I would immediately get \$4,000 in direct sales from that ad.

Can you expect 20 times ad cost? No. Is it possible? Yes. But it would be foolish of me to tell you to expect that. There are just too many variables that can affect how well an ad performs.

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This ad is a little different and this is an ad that I ran before I started selling only \$4.00 plants. This ad starts out with larger plants. This was back in the day when I, with a couple of friends of mine were growing plants to landscape size in the field. Larry and I would spend a few weeks each spring working evenings digging and ball and burlaping the plants. Then once all the digging was done I'd hold a few retail plants sales using this ad. We also sold a lot of our Dogwood trees and Rhododendrons to one of the local nurseries. That meant we had a lot of digging to do.

So this ad really has two different offers. The first headline is about "Surplus Plants that Must Be Sold" and actual prices are not mentioned. Just a short mention of "You won't beat these prices and quantities are limited." Those two ideas suggest two things. Low priced plants and scarcity.

The second headline in the ad is "1,389 @ \$4.00 each!" The specific number is important. Did I actually count the plants I had available? No. But I knew for sure that I had at least 1,389 that I could sell for \$4.00. Being specific in an advertisement is important. This ad worked well and we sold thousands of dollars worth of plants as a result of this newspaper ad.

But selling small plants at \$4.00 each quickly became addictive. I started working in a nursery when I was sixteen years old. I've done every miserable nursery job you can think of, worked in all of the miserable weather conditions imaginable, and started carrying really heavy trees on my back when I was way too young and really too small to

be doing so. After about a year of just doing general labor in the nursery I worked my way to the loading dock where I learned to pull orders and learned the common and botanical names of all the plants in the nursery.

From there I headed up a crew of myself and two other high school kids whose job it was to follow behind the digging crews and haul everything dug that day back to the main farm. We'd come to work a 3:00 p.m. And work til dark carrying balled plants out of the field and loading them on the truck. Some of the stuff we were "commissioned" to carry out of the field was so heavy that two of us, using a piece of burlap as sling, would hoist the balled tree into the air and place it between the third guy's shoulder blades, almost on the back of the neck. Try walking one of those puppies out of the field trying to dodge all the holes left behind from plants previously removed from the field. Is it any wonder that my back hurts everyday?

I told you that story for two reasons. One, I am the real deal. I've lived and breathed this stuff for forty years now. I know what I'm talking about. Secondly, remember what I just mentioned about selling \$4.00 plants becoming addictive?

When I was holding those retail plant sales "somebody" had to load the balled trees into the customers cars. Lifting a balled tree onto a truck is one thing. But lifting one into the trunk of a car is an entirely different kind of a "lift" and it's much harder on one's back. I don't remember exactly what year it was, but as our spring sale was winding down I sold the last tree that we had dug for that year and placed into the trunk of a nice, big, white Cadillac.

As the customer was backing out of my driveway I walked up to Pam and I said; "I just loaded my last tree into the trunk of a car." Puzzled she said; "What do you mean?" I explained to her that I had been lifting balled trees all of my adult life and was done doing so. I explained that from here on out we are only going to sell \$4.00 plants and if the buying public aren't interested and won't buy them, then "We are out of the plant business."

I was dead serious. I had no idea whether or not my latest crazy idea would work or not, but I was sure that I liked selling those small \$4.00 plants. I could carry three in each hand and walk comfortably to a customer's car. So with that the \$4.00 plant business was born.

We had some really good weekends when we were selling \$50.00 dogwood trees and Japanese maples, so I really had no idea what going to such a low priced product would do. But I quickly learned the following spring that my "crazy idea" had merit and our sales volume the following year with only \$4.00 plants went up and each year thereafter we were able to increase it as well. It seemed that the buying public loved the idea of being able to buy a lot of plants for \$50.00 instead of just one.

Yeah, sure we had some people show up expecting larger plants and they quickly left. But the majority were like kids in a candy store. And I really mean that! They were ecstatic over our \$4.00 plants that quickly went to \$4.97 per plant.

Now I'd like to share with you a revelation that I had just a few weeks ago. I decided that

I wanted to plant a row of Arborvitae at my nursery to create a permanently shaded area. Brainstorming I was trying to think of where I could buy these arbs, and keep in mind, we have about 100 wholesale nurseries in our little towns of Perry and Madison, Ohio and I can easily buy from anyone of them that I want. But it occurred to me that even at wholesale I would have to pay at least \$18.00 each for the Arborvitae that I wanted. And that's when I realized . . .

That as Backyard Growers who make it possible for the buying public to buy all kinds of plants for just \$4.97 each, we are providing a tremendous service to the buying public. That's why when you grow and offer plants for sale, there is no selling involved. All you have to do is let the public know that you have plants for sale and immediately they want to know what you have, and they want to see them.

I mentioned this earlier and I am going to mention it again.

The way that people buy plants has changed. Small independent garden centers all across America have gone out of business. Many blame the big box stores and I explained all of that. But the point that I want to make is, there are very few places that truly sell plants at affordable prices. As I mentioned, when I was at the so called low priced big box stores this spring I was shocked at how much they are charging for most of the plants in their garden area.

Think about it. I saw a Red Twig Dogwood for either \$22.00 or \$28.00, I don't remember now. You can root a Red Twig Dogwood in about 4 weeks, pot it up and the following spring (late spring) you can probably sell it for \$4.97. Your customer would much rather buy a small Red Twig for \$4.97 then have to pay well over \$20.00 for a larger plant. Then once they get it home and plant it and realize how quickly it will grow to that \$28.00 size, they will forever remember that *your are the place where they should be buying their plants.*

Remember what I taught you earlier. Sell a plant, get a name. Sell a plant get a name. Send them a postcard and tell them if they bring a friend you'll give them a free plant. Get the friends name!!!!

Now, don't misinterpret what I just wrote about rooting a cutting this summer and selling it for \$4.97 the following spring. With something as fast growing as a Red Twig Dogwood that is possible. Especially if you pot it up as soon as it's rooted or plant it in a grow bed for the rest of that growing season. But many plants take two, three or maybe even four years to really reach a nice saleable size.

But the secret is to root thousands and thousands of cuttings (come on! It costs almost nothing to root a cutting.) and always have a steady stream of new cuttings coming on. That way once you get up to speed you'll always have a nice supply of plants to sell. And . . . don't be afraid to buy rooted cuttings or even liners and pot them up. If you pot up a liner in the early spring you can probably sell it for \$4.97 just a few weeks later. I have always purchased a lot of rooted cuttings and liners to sell and I probably always will. I root the easy stuff myself and I buy other things from growers who have a lot more patience than I do. I buy a lot from my own customers at the **Backyard Growers**

Business Center!

Okay. We were discussing newspaper ads remember? Don't you just love the way my mind wanders! Then I just type it in a completely unorganized manor that would make any editor scream. However, that's how you get all the good stuff. If it comes to mind, I type it. People seem to like my style. Others have called me an idiot. Why I don't know. If they wanted perfect literature they should have bought from a scholar not a dirt farmer. But the irony of that is this . . . more than one college professor has purchased my program to use in the classroom because it's "real". So, some of my written material has been to college but I have not.

About the ads. A couple of things really important I need to point out. Look at the name and address of my nursery. Where is it? It's at the bottom of the ad in relatively small print. Why? Because nobody cares who you are or how catchy of a name you have for your nursery. All they care about is what you can do for them. Once they work their way through the ad, they will figure out how to find your nursery. Do not put that info any higher in the ad. You have to sell them first.

Secondly. Did you see where I put my phone number? I didn't. I never do and further more, on sale days I don't answer my phone. I'm really hard headed about this but I don't want you calling me up and asking; "How big are they?" "How long will it take them to get bigger?" "If I buy 7 will you give me a better price?" "Do you give senior citizens a discount?" "Can you save me two, I'll pick them up next week."

I want you to load your fanny in the car and come and see my plants. They're \$4.97 each! If you don't like them don't buy'em. But chances are, if you come out you'll find something you like and you'll be happy you made the trip.

Should You Offer Discounts?

To retail customers? No. \$4.97 is a deeply discounted price. You should be proud of your product and stick to your price. After several weeks of spring selling your plants tend to get smaller and picked over. People naturally choose the biggest and best and as the sale season goes on what's left isn't as nice as the plants that you started with. At that point you can discount everything you have, just before you call it off for the spring.

I used to fall for that "If I buy 10 will you give me a better price?" But when I did that, it left my wife in difficult situation because I'd give somebody a discount on Saturday, then on Tuesday they'd come back and say; "Your husband sold them to me for this." That made her mad because she didn't know if it was true or not.

So one spring she says to me before we started selling for the season; "No discounts. Got it?" As firmly as she could say it. So I agreed. I promised her that I wouldn't give anybody a discount, that way no matter what somebody was telling her when I wasn't around, she knew what to believe. I promised.

First day of our spring sale and the driveway is so packed full of plants we had to park the cars on the lawn over night. Nice stuff! I'm mean really nice stuff, it looked great.

Photo on the next page. First thing in the morning some guy pulls up in a shiny silver Dodge Ram 4 wheel drive pickup. First words out of his mouth are, and this is true; “If I buy 200 will you give me a better price?”

I'm thinking to myself; “200! That's a lot of plants to one 'retail customer'. Then I remember the promise that I made to my wife. Urrrrrg. So before replying I thought about the situation I was in and I realized that if I give this guy the discount that he is asking for, he is going to cherry pick my complete selection, and take the very best plants that I have. I had a lot of plants, but some were (intentionally) a far better deal than others. They were all a steal at \$4.97, but I intentionally had some 3 gallon Miss Kim lilac that I was selling for \$4.97 plus a lot of other really attractive items.

So I explained to my anxious, potential customer; “This is the first day of our sale. I will continue selling until Memorial Day which is weeks away. Without a doubt by Memorial Day we will be almost completely sold out. As much as I'd love to give you a discount, I just can't. We only sell once a year, we sell at a really low price, I just can't discount it any more than it is. If you want to come back the last week of May and see what I have left, I will happily give you a discount then.”



I just took a customer that was ready to spend almost \$1,000 and pretty much kicked him to the curb. But he was a reasonable man and he knew what I was saying was true. He also made up his mind when he left home that he was coming to Perry to buy 200 plants. Might have even take a vacation day from work to buy those 200 plants. I don't know. So he said to me; “That's okay, I'll still take 200 at your price of \$4.97. So we loaded up his truck. He left very happy, he got a lot of nice plants and thanks to my wife (don't tell her I said that!) I started off the day with a sale of \$994.00. This was going to be a good spring! All set up and ready to go!



Some things were just starting to leaf out.



The left overs and we re-stocked the driveway many times in those 4 weeks.

Now here's the funny part of that story. There was a local gal who had purchased my Backyard Growing System and was starting her own nursery in our area. She saw my ad and decided to stop by and check out my sale just as we started loading the guys Dodge Ram with \$994.00 worth of plants. She couldn't believe her eyes! She left that morning really, really pumped up about her plant business.

Buy More Plants to Boost Your Curb Appeal

Keep in mind. My nursery at that time was only 1/20th of an acre. I had two, relatively small areas in my backyard where I grew my plants in 2 quart containers. I had another small area where I rooted all of my cuttings. I really didn't have that much room for growing plants and Pam certainly wasn't about to give up any more of the backyard. And to be perfectly honest, I didn't want to care for any more plants than that. I should also point out, now that I have a lot more room for growing at my new location, I'm wasting a lot of space with isles between the beds etc. and keeping it all weed free is a challenge. I'm seriously re-thinking my approach. My first set up truly made more sense.

So anyway, because my space was limited, I was limited by how much stuff I could grow. And since I really didn't have room for hoop houses etc. and I used my system of lowered growing beds for winter protection I was also limited by what I could grow. Things that needed more winter protection than I had to offer I did not grow. Keep in mind, I'm all about keeping it simple, maximizing the space that I had, and not making myself crazy with plants that are difficult to grow. I did the easy stuff. More about that in a minute.

So I grew thousands of things that I deemed to be easy to grow, and things that grew relatively fast. Other things I would buy as rooted cuttings when somebody local had some to sell. I should have been buying more from more distant places, but again, I only had so much room. But I would also buy some bare root plants from a couple of local growers in the early spring, pot them up and offer them for sale at my spring sale.

One local grower had some Miss Kim Lilac listed on his wholesale list for \$1.30 each. We always had requests for Lilacs, but they were one of those items that opted not to propagate so I ordered 400 of them. When I went to pick them up I couldn't believe the size. Many of them would have to go into a 3 gallon container. They were that large! As we were loading the truck this guy starts to share with me his opinion of how much I should sell these plants for. He knew that I was the \$4.97 plant guy. He also was probably aware that I had written a book on plant propagation and on the back cover of the book I said; "This book contains information that some nurseryman don't want you to know." Yeah, I actually printed that on the cover of my book because . . . it was true! And I'll tell you that story because . . . I like to tell stories.

So anyway, this guy says to me; "These are nice plants and you can't sell them for \$4.97. These should be sold retail for at least \$14.95 and it's not fair to my other customers if you were to sell them for \$4.97." I just listened to him but to myself I was thinking; "Now that they are paid for and on my truck, they are my plants, and I'll do with them as I please."

So I took them home and we started potting them up. Actually I think Pam potted them all up (Yes, I did work in the nursery too, but I was working full time and she just got laid off) and it was all she could do to get some of them into a 3 gallon container. A little frustrated she told me that I'd be crazy to sell these for \$4.97. I'm hearing it again! But she was also aware of the simplicity of selling everything for one low price because of

our pricing “cheat sheet”.

So I'm thinking about these Miss Kim Lilacs. Yes, they are very nice plants and obviously worth a lot more than \$4.97 each. But . . . I only paid \$1.30 each for them, some went into 3 gallon containers that I had left over from years of landscaping, so other than the price of the plant I had some soil invested in them. And I had 400 of them. I knew I could sell 400 at \$4.97, but I was pretty sure that I couldn't sell 400 at \$11.97 or more. And . . . I wanted them gone. I like to move plants, not keep them forever.

When you keep a plant too long they tend to attract pests that can raise an issue with your nursery inspection. I discovered that when I turned my plants over quickly I rarely had issues with plant pests and rarely had to spray any kind of an insecticide. Back to my theory of keeping it simple.

I also knew that if I sold all of those Miss Kim Lilac for \$4.97 I would make 400 people very, very happy. And . . . since the guy that sold them to me told me that “I could not sell them for \$4.97”, I decided that I almost had to sell them at \$4.97 because I don't like others telling me what I can and can't do. Yeah, that got me in a lot of trouble in school.

Doing Everything within Your Power to Give People Great Value

But the most important point of all, is doing everything within your power to give people great value. We already discussed the lifetime value of a customer. But there is also something I call “The water cooler effect” and the “Over the fence effect”.

When you sell somebody a beautiful Miss Kim Lilac in a 3 gallon container for \$4.97 you have done a couple of things. You've created a new, very dedicated new friend and customer. And you've given them bragging rights!

The next day at work, over the water cooler, they are going to be bragging about the deal they got from you. Which is why you should create some kind of a customer loyalty program. And at home, over the fence in the backyard, they are going to be bragging about the deal that they got from you. Your goal, and your job is to make sure to make that happen. One of the easiest ways to make that happen is to scour the wholesale market, find some deals that you know will give you that kind of power, buy them up and pass them onto your customers, even if it's a small amount of profit. You are using these incredible deals to sell the rest of your plants. The plants that you make full profit on.

So for all of those reasons I sold the Miss Kim Lilacs for \$4.97. And the guy that sold them to me lost a customer. I never went back. He obviously didn't believe in my philosophy of selling so there really wasn't any need to give him more of my money. I had options. And my customers were delighted! They couldn't believe their eyes when they saw those beautiful plants for only \$4.97. Mission accomplished.

The other thing that I did to raise the bar and add great value to my spring sale was the day before the sale I'd go to a nursery owned by a friend of mine. He had a lot of one gallons and his wholesale price was \$3.35 each. I'd buy about 400 one gallons from him. All things that I didn't grow, all things that were really, really nice looking. I'd put them

right out by the road so they'd be the very first thing that my customers would see. These too I'd sell at \$4.97.

Now that's not much of a profit margin, only \$1.62 per plant. Didn't matter. I wasn't doing it for the profit that I would get from selling his plants. I did it to give my sale more curb appeal which gave my customers more of an incentive to stay longer, shop more and buy more. And one customer sees other customers shopping and building little piles of plants to purchase there's a lot of social proof in know that the other guy thinks this is a great deal. So now you have one more person shopping and building a small stable of plants that he is going to buy and then more and more people follow suit.

Don't believe it? It's true, you'll see. When people see other people picking out plants they want to buy, that starts the plant buying chain.

I should also mention that I sold all 400 of those one gallons that I bought the first weekend. 400 times \$1.62 is \$648.00! That ain't too shabby. I invested \$1,300 on Friday and by Sunday evening my return on investment was \$648. Selling plants is fun!

Now this is what else happened. While you were sleeping, remember that movie? While we were busy with that first weekend sale, selling a bunch of our own plants, a bunch of those Lilacs and all of those one gallons, our own plants were continuing to leaf out and put on new growth. So by the time the next weekend rolls around, our plants look totally different because they woke up and took on a whole new look. So our plant sale gained additional curb appeal on it's own.

So pretty soon it's the third week of May and our plant selection is starting to look picked over. My kid has this girlfriend right? So after a successful Saturday of selling plants we decide to go out to dinner. Which means we have to first drive across town and pick up the girl friend. Got the girl friend in the car and as I am driving away from her house I see a friend of mine in front of his house, out by the road, so I stop to say; "Hey!"

A little chit chat and he asks me how the plant sales are going because everybody in this town knew at that time that I sold a lot of plants from the driveway. I tell him that things are going great and our selection is starting to get picked over. To which he says; "I've got a bunch of one gallon Azaleas, if you need any let me know." (all of my friends are in the nursery business) "How many do you have?" To which he replies, with a big smile on his face; "Too many. I bought out Greg xxxxx and I've got about 10,000 one gallon Azaleas and I need to move them." "How much?" "Hmmm how about \$2.25 each?" "Okay, can I get 200 in the morning?" "Yep!"

So Sunday morning I go to his nursery and load up 220 Azaleas. They were in full bloom, nice and big and they looked great! Now remember, my plant sale is pretty well picked over so it truly needed a shot in the arm and these beautiful Azaleas would certainly do the trick. We unloaded them and spread them out more than normal to create the illusion of; "Yes, we still have a lot of plants to sell!"

No, wait! I'm lying to you! I saw my friend on Friday night, loaded up the Azaleas on Saturday morning and sold every single one of them that day along with a lot of our own plants. So I called him up and told him I needed another 100 Azaleas for Sunday. He

was a little shocked and asked if I sold all of the first 220 that I got. And I said; “Yep!”

So Sunday morning I get another 100 Azaleas and we sell them all on Sunday along with more of our own plants and that concluded our spring plant sale. By that time our plants were really, really picked over so we closed up shop for the spring. Time to finish potting then getting ready to stick cuttings.

The Power of the \$4.97 Pricing Model

Now here's something to think about. My friend Mike, the one that sold me those Azaleas? At that time Mike also had a retail garden center and I saw his newspaper ad for that weekend. He was advertising the same Azaleas that he sold to me for 3 for \$10.00. He was retailing them for \$3.33 each. I was getting \$4.97. And that's why he was shocked when I told him that I sold all 220 on Saturday and another 100 on Sunday.

I'm pretty sure I sold more of “his azaleas” that weekend than he did. Probably a lot more. And I was getting \$1.64 more per plant than he was. How can that be? How could I sell more than him when he was advertising them for considerably less money? The answer is in the “every plant for \$4.97” pricing model. As I mentioned earlier. You don't have to sell all of your plants at \$4.97. But I highly recommend that you take full advantage of this powerful strategy. It really is powerful. You have to ask yourself. Do I really need to charge \$6.97 for that plant and only \$4.97 for this one? Can I afford to sell them all at \$4.97? Chances are the answer is yes, you can afford to sell them all at \$4.97.

Yes, you can still sell other plants at \$50.00 or even \$100.00. But if you work really hard to come up with as many plants as you can for the \$4.97 selection you will be doing yourself a huge favor. Nobody else is willing to do this. “It's unprofessional” they say. That's a bunch of crap! The last thing in the world that you want is to look like just another garden store with similar garden store pricing.

I'll let you in on a little secret. Way back in the day when I was just getting started working in this industry as a kid, we handled a lot of one gallon plants. Did you know that you can fit 7,000 one gallon containers in a semi trailer stacked 7 high? I know that because I unloaded many semi trailers packed to the gills with one gallon containers. Yes, they really were stacked 7 high and they traveled from the west coast to the east coast and arrived in good shape. Stacking containers in a semi trailer is a skilled job and one that I got really good at. As I mentioned earlier. I really have done it all in this business.

But here's my point. Back then, wholesale nurseries were happy to sell you a plant in a one gallon container. Garden centers used to buy them up like crazy and sell them like crazy. Now this is where I head off into more of “Mike's opinion and maybe not so much fact”, but it seems to me when the big box stores got into the plant business they wanted to, and still do sell a lot of plants in one gallon containers. And about that time, I found it more and more difficult to buy plants in a one gallon container from the local wholesale growers.

When I was landscaping I liked one gallon container plants. I didn't want everything in a

one gallon container, but many things that I was just using as accent plants I much preferred to get them in one gallon size because . . . they were cheaper, and we had to dig a lot less hole to plant a one gallon than we did a three gallon. When you're planting dozens or hundreds those two reasons make a big difference in both your wallet and the time it takes you to do a job.

And . . . don't get me started, often times I'd buy something like an Azalea in a 3 gallon container and when we pulled it out of the pot to plant it all of the soil fell away and you were left holding a one gallon plant that was just recently shifted into a 3 gallon container. But I paid the 3 gallon price! I know that's how its' done. But I want them in one gallon size at a one gallon price!

But nobody would sell them to me. The "industry" convinced itself that (again, my opinion) let the big box stores have the one gallon market. We'll rise above that and sell lots and lots of 3 gallons. A lot of people who bought into that theory are now out of business. I'm not saying that's why. I'm just sayin.

So anyway, the more plants you can offer at the \$4.97 price point the more of a service you are offering to the plant buying public in your local town. The other nurseries won't exactly love you for that, but it is a free enterprise system. When gas stations started selling groceries and the grocery stores started selling gasoline the gloves came off.

When Walmart came to town and started selling for less, it was their right to do so. You may not agree with me on that because there are a lot of Walmart haters out there, but back in the day Sam Walton did something for people in the rural areas that none of the big corporations were willing to do. He opened stores in rural areas. He found a market that wasn't being adequately served and the rest is history.

Today you have the opportunity to provide a similar service on a smaller scale. There are a lot of plant loving people that would love to buy beautiful plants from you for only \$4.97 each. Some of them will be happy to also give you \$99.00 or \$199.00 for a beautiful Laceleaf Weeping Japanese Red Maple. But it's the \$4.97 plants that will bring them to you.

Plant Guarantees

Should you guarantee the plants you sell? Do you have to guarantee the plants you sell? This is difficult question to answer. To the best of my knowledge most of the big box stores offer a pretty liberal guarantee on the plants that they sell. For years most full service, independently owned garden centers also offered a one year guarantee on the plants that they sell. So does that mean that you have to do the same?

No. You are not required to offer a guarantee on the plants that you sell. Most full service garden centers and probably all of the big box stores are marking their plants up at least 100%. So if they buy it for \$8.00 they sell it for \$16.00 or more. So if a plant dies and they have to offer up a replacement plant where do they stand? They broke even on that transaction. More importantly, they got the customer back into their store and they turned that one time customer into a life long customer.

So you can see why offering a guarantee on your plants is a good idea. If you do offer a guarantee make it for store credit, not an exact replacement because if you sell somebody a Twombly's Red Japanese maple and it dies, there's a good chance that you won't have another to replace it. But you can give the customer credit toward other plant purchases.

You can also see that by offering a full credit guarantee on the plants that you sell you can build a lot of customer good will. Truth be told, plant guarantees make good business sense if you can remove emotion from the equation. And that's where it gets difficult because if you sell somebody a \$150.00 Weeping Japanese Maple and they take it home and kill it because they planted it too deep, didn't water it, over watered it, applied two pounds of garden fertilizer to it or left it sitting on their deck for two months and forgot to water it, you will get emotional. It can't be helped. It happens to me.

But if you can remove the emotion, and know that you only paid \$75.00 for that \$150.00 tree that they killed you smile with the biggest smile that you have in you and you say; "I'm so sorry that our tree didn't make it. Please allow me to give you full credit for it."

If you can do that . . . you've made a life long friend, you've created a good will ambassador for your business and you took a great deal of stress out of that person's life. Because . . . they too are stressed. They gave up \$150.00 of their hard earned money just to watch it turn into compost. Nobody wants that to happen. If it happened to you or I we'd feel terrible. So turn the tables, put yourself in their position and consider offering a guarantee on the plants that you sell.

Will you get taken advantage of? When you have to replace an expensive plant it might feel like that, but the answer is no, you will not get taken advantage of. Because you will require the customer to return the dead plant to you, and they will have to produce the receipt that you gave them so you know when they bought it and how much they paid. When you issue the store credit which can be as simple as a note from you indicating that they have x number of dollars in store credit with you attach their original receipt to the store credit and ask them to keep them intact until the credit is used up.

Here are some things to be aware of. If you grow a plant and sell it for \$4.97 or \$19.97 you can easily afford to replace it because your actual out of pocket expense to grow the plant was quite low. But if you buy plants to mark up and resell, you absolutely must buy them at such a price that you can mark them up 100% and still sell them at a fair price. That way you can afford to guarantee them and not be out any money. Where you get in trouble is if you buy a plant for \$50 wholesale and sell it for \$65 and it dies. Now you are in a situation where you cannot afford to replace it. Don't allow yourself to get in that position.

When people ask for a discount and we already discussed that, don't budge on your prices because sure as the sun is coming up tomorrow morning, it will come back to bite you. When they ask for the discount explain the guarantee and that if you discount the price you wouldn't be able to guarantee the plant. If you have some plants that you would like to liquidate and sell at or close to your cost make it clear that they are not guaranteed at the discounted price and mark the receipt to indicate that as well.

Nurseries who don't offer guarantees.

We have two local independently owned plant retailers in this area that offer no guarantee whatsoever. I'm not sure about them both, but the one that I visit quite often has huge signs posted all over the office and the door into the office stating that they offer no guarantee whatsoever. That's fine, at least they are disclosing it up front. However, in my daily travels and people ask me where they can buy this plant or that plant, when I suggest this particular nursery because I know they have the plant the person is asking about, people immediately share with me their distaste for this nursery because **“They don't guarantee their plants!”** I've heard this more than once from retail buyers who tend to spend a lot of money on plants.

Now, in all fairness to this particular nursery, I shop there because I pay their wholesale price for most items that I buy, and when you buy wholesale the plants never come with that kind of guarantee. More about that in a second. But this nursery also sells most of their plants for a lot less money than other plant retailers and they really can't afford to offer the same guarantee that other plant retailers offer.

But this is what's important for you to understand about that. The customer doesn't care! When the plant is dead they feel no sense of satisfaction knowing that they paid less for the plant. They still paid for the plant, it is now dead, and the nursery will not replace it for them. They immediately check that nursery off their list of places to buy plants and they share their dissatisfaction of that nursery with anybody that will listen. And for that reason, you should put yourself in a position where you can afford to guarantee the plants that you sell.

Like I said, if you can remove the emotion from the equation, it makes good business sense to guarantee the plants that you sell.

Why Wholesale Growers Do Not Guarantee Their Plants

Here's the deal and everybody in the industry understands this perfectly. Wholesale growers usually, almost always, have a stellar reputation for selling high quality, healthy plants. Walk through any garden center. Those plants look great. They came from a wholesale grower. So everybody in the industry knows that when you buy a plant from a wholesale grower you are getting a healthy, high quality, properly grown plant and if you handle it properly, plant it correctly, water it as needed, and do not over fertilize it, it's going to survive. Simple as that the plants will survive and nobody in the industry doubts that. Should the plant suffer damage over the winter and die, that has absolutely nothing to do with the plant or the wholesale grower that grew the plant. That's an environmental issue and maybe you used the wrong plant in the wrong place. Maybe the plant is not salt tolerant and you planted it too close to a roadway where salt is liberally applied during the winter. You as an industry professional should have known better.

Everybody in the industry gets that. Nobody questions it. Most wholesale nursery catalogs have language similar to this inside the front cover. *“All plants are guaranteed*

to be true to name. If for any reason we sell you a plant that is improperly labeled we will replace that plant or plants with the properly labeled plant or issue a credit for the amount of purchase. All nursery stock shipped from our nursery has been inspected, has been properly grown and handled. If you receive stock that does not meet these standards you must file a claim with our sales office within 10 days of delivery."

So they are guaranteeing the plants to be properly labeled and if you think you received nursery stock that has issues or is stressed from shipping you have 10 days to say so. After that you own the plants. That's exactly how it is throughout the industry.

So why then do you have guarantee plants when you sell them retail? You're not really guaranteeing the plant to live. You can't do that. Retail plant buyers have little experience growing plants and they can invent more ways to kill a plant than you can imagine. You are selling customer assurance and customer satisfaction. So the guarantee that you are offering is more of a marketing strategy than it is a plant guarantee.

How to Minimize Your Losses When You Guarantee Your Plants

The easiest way to minimize your losses when you sell somebody a plant is to give that person a one page sheet that explains how to care for and install the plants that they bought from you. There are a lot of things that they don't know. Things that have never been explained to them. For instance,

Many people have no idea that you can actually install a plant too deep. They don't realize that the roots need to breath. Many people have no idea that a plant can be too wet. They don't get that wet soggy roots can kill a plant. Many people think they can install a plant in the wet spot in their yard to help dry up the wet spot.

Teach them to dig the hole twice as wide as the root ball, but absolutely no deeper then the root ball. Tell them that the crown of the plant should be one inch above the soil line. Then cover the top of the root ball with an inch or two of soil, then two inches of mulch.

Tell them to water the plants well as soon as they plant them, then water as needed for the remainder of the summer but explain to them about over watering. Teach them to feel the soil with their fingers before they water to see how wet the soil is around the roots. Or tell them to get a moisture meter. People like gadgets, they'll buy one.

Instruct them to **Not Fertilize the Plant!** Tell them to use bagged, rotted cow manure in the hole when they install the plant and to not apply any fertilizer at all. Explain to them that garden fertilizer can and will kill landscape plants.

Teach people who have heavy clay soil the benefit of creating raised beds with good rich topsoil. It's better that they raise the bed over the clay rather than try and amend the clay because often times when you amend clay soil you create a way for water to get in, but no way for it to get out and your plants will drown.

They know none of these things. If you simply spell it out for them on a one page sheet that they can read quickly and easily before they start planting they will have great results

and you will have fewer plants to replace.

A Customer Loyalty Program

I won't spend much time on this but you should consider some kind of a customer loyalty program. The simplest version that I can think of is the old punch card system where for each \$4.97 plant that a customer buys they earn a credit (a punch) and after ten punches or the card is full they get a free plant. Pretty simple right? But in this day of personal computers and color printers just about anybody has the ability re-create anything right in their home including U.S. Currency, I'd keep the punch cards in a file at my nursery. When they buy a plant or plants you flip through file card box, pull their card and punch or mark it some how. There are a lot of different ways you can do this. Eventually you might share a more clever version with me.

But here's the advantage to this little flip card system. Each day, first thing in the morning, you start going through the flip card file box. Pull one card at a time, hand address an envelope to that person, then stick a note in the envelope that says; “***You are only four more plants away from a free plant.***” Then also stick in the envelope your latest flier with color photos of the three or four plants that you are featuring this month.

This is powerful and I'll tell you why. First of all, the envelope is hand addressed. How many of those do you get these days? And when you do, they really stand out in the stack of mail don't they? Secondly, you are making your customer aware of the fact that they actually have credit building with your nursery. They have probably forgotten that, or worse yet, completely forgotten about you and your nursery. People have a lot going on these days, things pass by them quickly.

And of course you are mailing this letter to a proven and previously identified plant enthusiast and plant buyer. When they see your flier that's included with this little note they are going to experience what I call ***Plant Envy***. They are going to want the plant that you are featuring because you are going to include a really nice color photo of that plant in bloom.

So no matter how you do it, come up with a plant buyer customer loyalty program so your customers are compelled to come back and shop with you.

Start a Plant Buyers Continuity Program

Okay, this is advanced, but I know it can work because I've seen it work in other industries. The simple explanation goes like this. You as a customer of mine join my ***Plant Lovers Savings Club*** or some name a lot more catchier than that. You, as my customer, give me permission to charge your credit card \$X amount on the first of each month. Let's just say you agree to me charging your credit card \$17.00 each month. So each and every month, on your credit card statement you see a charge from McGroarty Enterprises Inc. for \$17.00. And you're perfectly fine with that because . . .

You know that each time I charge your card \$17.00 I am actually issuing you a credit of \$21.00 that you can spend at my nursery any time you please. If you go five months and haven't spent any of the credit that you have with me you would now have a total credit

of \$105.00. But the best part is that you only invested \$85.00 to get that \$105.00 worth of credit.

This is done on a fairly regular basis with auto repair shops. One such program that I know of is called the Car Care Club. I've also seen this done with a gourmet pizza shop. At the first of each month the pizza lover is charged a fixed amount but that gives them store credit for more than that amount.

In some ways this is like the old fashioned LayaWay plans that stores had. But in that case you had to make your selection, they put it in storage for you, then when you had it paid for you got it out of Layaway.

Now let's say that you sell a lot of \$4.97 plants, but you also always have on hand a few really, really nice Laceleaf Weeping Japanese Maples and some Lavender Twist Weeping Redbud trees and a few other "specialty" plants that are rather expensive. \$150.00 or more each.

Some of your customers would love to have one of those beautiful trees, but they just can't spend that much money at any one time. But during the winter months when they can't garden, can't buy plants, can't even visit a nursery they would happily have you charging their credit card each and every month, knowing that not only are they banking credit with your nursery, but they are also earning a discount or extra credit each and every month.

Of course you would need a merchant account, which you will eventually want to have anyway because more and more people carry little cash and buy most everything with plastic.

It's something to think about and something that I am seriously considering doing at my nursery. So what's the advantage to you since you are actually giving people a discount who use this program? One, it keeps your customers loyal to you. They are less likely to shop around because they have a credit with you. It gives you good reason to stay in touch with your customers and in a way they are actually paying you to send them your correspondence. Each month they pay you \$17.00 and in return each month you send them your little nursery newsletter. You now have the money to send out that newsletter because you have that steady monthly income.

But the best part? If you have 100 people in that program on the first day of each month you start the month out with \$1,700 in the bank. So what should you do with that \$1,700? Buy more plants for 50 or 75 cents that you can pot up and sell for \$4.97. Get things that are really pretty that you can use on your flier that you will send with the newsletter.

Do you see how this can be self perpetuating?

So what's the downside? Really, really good record keeping and money management. If you use that \$1,700 each month to pay for your new Cadillac and 25 steak dinners you are going to be in serious trouble with your customers and the law.

The Pricing Cheat Sheet

Earlier in this book I alluded to our “Pricing Cheat Sheet”. For the last few years of our plant sales, after I quit selling balled trees and larger plants, all of our plants were priced at \$4.97 each. People who buy this program ask me; “Mike, why \$4.97? Why not just \$5.00 so you don't have to make all that change?”

No matter how much you charge for your plants you are going to have to make change because you are required to collect sales tax on each plant that you sell. So that usually results in an odd amount of money. Then some say; “I price my plants at \$4.68, the sales tax on each plant is 32 cents so the total comes out to a nice and easy \$5.00 per plant. That's fine, and that does make it really simple. But . . . in the customers mind, and this has been proven over and over, \$5.00 seems like a lot more money than \$4.97. Not just three cents more. When you cross into five dollar territory that's an entirely different psychological arena of price justification in a person's mind.

But more importantly than that. When you reduce your price per plant from \$4.97 to \$4.68 just to make the math easier you are giving up 29 cents per plant. So what's the big deal? It's only 29 cents. Let's see . . . two times 29 is 58. For 58 cents you can probably find some really nice rooted cuttings of a plant that you are not currently growing. So if you sell 100 plants at \$4.97 instead of your reduced price of \$4.68 you would have enough extra money to buy 50 rooted cuttings. If you grow those 50 rooted cuttings out for a year or two and sell them for \$4.97 that would bring you an additional \$248.50 which you could also reinvest into your business.

That's an additional \$248.50 on only 100 plants sold. You really have to do the math in this business or any other for that matter.

Now here's where the big math kicks in. At our last really big \$4.97 plant sale we sold about 5,000 plants at \$4.97 in about five weeks time. Will you be able to do that? I don't know and I would never promise you that you could. I know you can sell a lot of plants using many of the strategies that I've laid out in this book, but I won't promise that you can sell 5,000 plants in five weeks. But here's my point. If we had reduced our price to \$4.68 just to keep from making change we would have lost \$1,450 in revenue by selling each plant for 29 cents less. That's a lot of money.

I'm all for giving customers great value, but what you are really selling is perceived value. And in the customers mind they are perfectly happy paying \$4.97 for a nice plant in a 2 quart container, so by reducing the price by 29 cents the customer is not going to see a penny more in perceived value. At \$4.97 you are already giving them great value. The only thing that price reduction does is take money out of your pocket, and more importantly, it reduces the size of your business because if you reinvest that extra 29 cents back into your business you will grow your business.

And in the plant business, when you grow your business it grows exponentially because when you buy 100 rooted cuttings you are certain to get several hundred cuttings from those plants in the next two years then more cuttings from those plants and so on. And that's the beauty of this business.

So the pricing cheat sheet was a chart that we hung on the wall in the garage. We had

numbers down the left side of the page from one through 50. Then to the right of the number we had a dollar amount showing how much the total would be including tax for one plant, 3 plants, 7 plants, 13 plants all the way up to 50 plants. So at a glance all we had to do is look at the chart and know that a customer who had selected 27, \$4.97 plants their total including sales tax would be \$141.21.

It was simple and it worked great. At first the customers couldn't figure out how we calculated their total so quickly. But once they spotted the cheat sheet they could find their own total and have the correct amount of cash ready or the check already made out. That helped a lot because those plant sales were crazy!

Where Do I Buy 2 Quart Containers

I get this question a lot and I can't give you a definite answer because you and I, we probably don't live in the same community and sometimes the freight involved with shipping containers over a long distance make the purchase "not such a good deal".

For many years we had a nursery supply company in this little cow town because we have so many nurseries in this area. Actually, I was that companies first full time employee back in 1978 when they started up. The company was started by two guys that I knew from my very first "nursery job". That company has since been bought and sold a couple of times and reinvented and I know they have a lot less inventory than they used to have. I'm not even sure if they still sell nursery containers.

But that's why I always used 2 quart containers. They are a little smaller than a one gallon, take up a little less space, and a small plant will fill a 2 quart container more quickly than it will a one gallon. And that adds to the perceived value that we just talked about. Customers want to see the plant filling the container. They are less concerned by the size of the container, they just like to see the container nice and full.

And . . . when you are potting up plants and scooping soil into the containers, you will notice a considerable difference in the amount of soil it takes to fill a one gallon container than it does a 2 quart container. Since most of us start mixing our own potting soil by hand and hand unloading it from the truck and so on, every cubic inch of soil matters. You certainly don't want to waste any, nor do you want to use any more to grow a plant than you have to. And that's why I really, really like the 2 quart container for \$4.97 plants.

Now, I guess I need to address one gallon, two gallon and three gallon containers. This will make you crazy because some how this is where this wonderful industry of ours really got confused when container growing was first introduced. It hasn't been around as long as you think. I don't know for sure, but I'd guess that up until the late 50's for sure, maybe the 60's, almost all nursery stock was field grown and not container grown. So in the grand scheme of things, container growing and growing in a soil less mix is a relatively new thing.

But anyway, an industry "one gallon" is not one gallon. It's smaller than a gallon. And over the years I watched so called "five gallon" containers get smaller. They never did

hold five gallons, but now that line is really blurred and a so called “five gallon container” can actually range in size. Urrrrrg!

Now this really, really irks the daylight out of me because wholesale nurseries like to charge by the size of the container. Not three weeks ago I bought some Blue Girl Holly for my landscape at home. When I got to the office to pay for them we entered into the discussion of what size pot they were in. She wanted to charge me the five gallon price and I knew the container wasn't a five gallon container. Not even a “trade” five gallon container. They were in “trade” three gallon containers. Thus a lower, but fair price for the plants.

So there's your heads up. Nursery container sizes are confusing.

So in simple terms a “trade one gallon” is about 7” tall and 6” wide at the top opening. So a so called “2 quart container” is going to be smaller. But not that much smaller. A good size, and they will vary or they don't even call them 2 quart any more, would be about 5” tall and 4-1/2” across the top. Of course over time as you grow more and more plants and gain more experience with the plants that you grow, somethings can in container that is a little larger, and somethings will go into the “2 quart” or smaller.

Don't get all worked up over this. Just find some pots that are close to those sizes and get started. A.M. Leonard in Piqua, Ohio <http://amleo.com> has a fantastic catalog of nursery supplies that you will love. And they do have several different lines of nursery containers. At one time they had a line that started with a catalog number of VCB. I believe these were the less expensive “blow molded” instead of “injection molded” (trust me, I'm not sure I know what those terms mean) nursery containers.

Anyway they came shipped “a whole bunch in a box” and they were a lot less expensive than other nursery containers. I used thousands of those things and they saved me a great deal of money. They were lighter than other containers, a little more flimsy which would make it hard to stack 7,000 of them in a semi trailer, and after one season of setting in the sun sometimes the top ring would pop off when you pick them up. Didn't matter. They were still a great value and your customers really don't care about the pot. These “less expensive” containers can't be used over and over like heavier, more expensive containers. But they could probably be used two or maybe even three times, depending.

All in all they were a great deal and I would certainly use them again because of the cost savings. Contact A.M. Leonard, make a purchase from them so you get on their mailing list so they send you catalogs. They are a good company to do business with. At least that's been my experience.

In the wholesale directory that you got with this program as a pdf file, I've included other companies that you can contact. It's important to find a supplier fairly close to you because of the freight charges on things that are heavier like containers. There is also a list of nursery trade shows. Go through the list, find the closest trade show to you, find the website for that trade show, and see if you can find a list of the vendors who have had a booth at that trade show. In that list of vendors you will find companies that can sell you propagation flats, nursery containers, slow release fertilizer like Osmocote and even

potting soil and or mulches that you can use to make your own potting soil.

Why a Soil Less Growing Mix?

This is a mistake that many people make when they are first starting out. Plants grow in the ground right? They grow in my yard, in my garden, in the field. They grow in soil. They like soil! Mother Nature intended for them to grow in soil.

Yes. You are absolutely right. Unless you want to grow them in containers. Once you stick a small plant in a container and expect that plant to grow and thrive, you cannot put it in “regular soil from the garden”. But why? Primarily the soil is not light enough, not loose enough and it won't drain properly. Okay, but can't I just amend the soil that I have?

Please don't. Please do not buck the conventional wisdom of this wonderful industry. I've spent the better part of my life in and around this industry. I've worked in a number of different nurseries, I've purchased plants from dozens and dozens of some of the best wholesale growers in the country, back when I drove a truck delivering gasoline and fuel oil I delivered to and engaged in conversation with lots and lots of nurserymen and women. When I drove for Mackenzie Nursery Supply I delivered to nurseries. Lots and lots of nurseries. At times I drove trucks delivering nursery stock to other nurseries.

When I was in the Furnace Repair business, yes I had a furnace repair business for about 10 years in the eighties and nineties, I am what is known as a serial entrepreneur, I fixed furnaces in nursery greenhouses. Lots of them! And for the 14 years that I worked as a meter reader I went into many different nurseries each and every month to read the dozens of electric meters scattered throughout these nurseries. I paid a lot of attention and I asked a million questions. Maybe more.

Let's just say that I know this industry and despite the fact that I've done a lot of different things trying to find my way in life, I always had one foot in the nursery industry. I went to work in a nursery for the first time at the age of 16. But my history in the industry is deeper than that because the house that I grew up in was surrounded by wholesale nurseries so I was exposed to it all at a very young age. I didn't really know what budding meant, but I was aware of it because my friend Dave bought a really nice car with the money he made winding rubber bands around freshly inserted buds. I wanted to be a bud winder!

You've heard of Wayside Gardens? If not, look them up. Up until the early 70's Wayside Gardens had a very big presence in this part of Ohio and as a kid I rode my motorcycle on the dirt roads through their fields. We used those dirt roads as our primary method of getting around on our motorcycles. As kids we played in the huge buildings that they had and fished almost every day in their pond. At that time I couldn't have possibly known that all these years later I'd be in this stuff up to my eyeballs and teaching people around the world what I know about plants.

The house that Pam and I live in today sets on what used to be part of the Wayside Gardens and Dugan Nurseries where I rode my motorcycle as a kid.

I told you all of that to tell you this. I know this industry. So please, don't try and use regular soil in your containers. I'll give you a good potting soil recipe or two.

Mike's Big Mistake in Life

Time for a confession? Yeah, kinda. Here's the deal and I really owe it to you, my customer, to explain what I did wrong in my career path. I already explained that I've spent most of my life in and around wholesale nurseries. I know this stuff! I know it like the back of my hand. In my book ***“Easy Plant Propagation”*** I start the book explaining my history in this business and mention that I was becoming an unwilling expert. I was learning all kinds of things about plants and landscaping and growing plants, but deep down inside I didn't seem to have an interest.

As I graduated high school I had dreams and ambitions, but they did not include plants. By that time I had already done just about everything there was to do with plants and the production of plants and because as a high school kid working in a nursery, we were assigned all of the truly undesirable jobs in the place. It didn't appeal to me. I'd had enough. My other dreams and ambitions were in the way. I wanted to run heavy equipment, I wanted to go to welding school, I wanted to own my own business. A nursery? No, I had no interest in that. For one, I wasn't good at saving money so the idea of me owning a house or property wasn't even on my radar screen. I was more interested in pursuing my other dreams and ambitions so that whole idea of actually owning a home or property just wasn't in my head yet.

Boy oh boy did that ever cost me. Had I started my own nursery back then I would be one really, really financially well off person right now. I watched others, lots of others, build incredible wealth over the years, just making baby plants and selling them and doing it again and again.

It's not a decision I regret because since I wasn't mentally ready for that, it would never have worked for me. I had other things that I had to do first. Of course all of that cost me a personal, financial disaster but it's all part of my life story and who I am today. But I wanted to address that here because as I list all of the things that I've done to buy groceries over the years, you had to be wondering; “Mike, why didn't you start a nursery earlier?” It's a fair question and one that I've asked myself a few times. I felt that I owed you that explanation.

Plant Propagation

In this book I am not going to go into detail about plant propagation because along with this system I've given you a digital copy of my book ***“Easy Plant Propagation”***. However, what I would like to do here is un-confuse you, and simplify this for you. So let's start with the un-confuse you part.

In ***Easy Plant Propagation*** I teach a variety of plant propagation skills. That book is geared toward the home gardener and or the hobbyist. The person that just likes to tinker with plants and has no need to be super productive or very efficient at the process. So I teach all kinds of plant propagation techniques that you will find in my book. There are

two chapters in my book that you should be aware of and make a mental note to refer back to. They are both near the back of the book.

1. **What You Should Be Doing Now** is a month by month calendar of what plant propagation techniques are typically used at what time of the year.
2. **How to Do What** is a list of popular plants and what propagation techniques seem to work the best for those particular plants.

Now. I cannot state this strongly enough! Please don't dismiss this quickly or easily.

There is a magic formula for plant propagation. It is called Intermittent Mist. I discuss it in the book lacking some details that I intentionally left out because I really reserve this information for you, my best customer. Intermittent mist is the magic potion that makes this all come together easily. Other techniques work and in some cases other techniques are better for certain plants. But you need to get and set up an intermittent mist system.

You need to know, that in all of my years of growing and selling plants there are only two things that I did on a regular basis. One I stuck tens of thousands of softwood cuttings in coarse sand and placed them under intermittent mist. Here in zone 5 we start softwood cuttings around June 1st. No earlier. If you are in a warmer zone you can start earlier, use this rule of thumb. Once your plants start leafing out in the spring it's usually six weeks from that date when you can start doing softwood cuttings. But once you start, you can continue sticking softwood and semi-hardwood cuttings right up until the first frost.

The ones that you stick later probably won't root until spring, but just put them under the mist, then when the weather starts to get cold you have to shut off the mist and drain the lines and the valve and put the equipment away for the winter. The unrooted cuttings just leave them in the sand and water them on the warm dry days through the fall and into the winter if it's warm. Chances are they'll be rooted by late spring the following year.

The second thing that I did was I bought a lot of rooted cuttings. Thousands of them. I'd buy things that I didn't have in stock so I could grow them on and also take cuttings from them later that year. I also bought rooted cuttings of things that I found challenging to root.

That's it. Those are the two things that I did. I didn't do layering, air layering, I didn't use bottom heat, I didn't do hardwood cuttings and I didn't graft. Well, I did graft one winter. I got great results, but because I didn't want to kill the chipmunks in my yard I didn't feel it important to use mouse bait during the winter months and the mice got under the plastic and ate and killed all of the Japanese Maples that I grafted. But that's not why I quit grafting.

But, when you cover plants with white (not clear!) plastic for the winter, you have to use weather resistant mouse bait. You can get it at the farm supply store. The mice also ate all of my cuttings one year because I covered them and didn't use mouse bait. Can you say Knucklehead?

I quit grafting because it requires a heated greenhouse. And I found that once I heated up the greenhouse, spent countless hours grafting hundreds of Japanese maples, I then spent

the rest of the winter worrying myself sick because I was afraid a storm might rip the plastic off the greenhouse or the heat might quit working when I was away for a few hours, in the middle of the night, or while I was at work. I really was concerned because I had seen it happen to other growers with a greenhouse. It was just stress that I didn't need in my life. So to this day I buy all of my grafted plants and have no intention of ever having a greenhouse again.

Okay, so make a mental and a written note of those two things that made me successful at growing and selling plants. I stick cuttings in *coarse sand* and put them under intermittent mist and I buy lots and lots of rooted cuttings to keep growing my business.

Where Do You Buy Coarse Sand

What is coarse sand. Coarse sand is a grade of sand that is more coarse than say . . . Mason's sand. Mason sand is the really fine (tiny particles) grade of sand that is use for mixing mortar for brick laying. It is very fine, the grains are very small. Think about sand in an hour glass. The sand must be fine enough seep through the opening in the hour glass. That kind of sand is *too fine and it will not drain well enough for what you need.*

Coarse sand on the other hand has much larger particles and will even contain some small stones. Some people call it sharp sand. The sand that is sold as Playbox sand is usually on the fine side, closer to that of Mason's sand. But not always, check it out. Coarse sand is usually used in the making of concrete. Not mortar for brick laying, concrete for road building.

Now don't get all worked up over this because way too many people do. In order to find coarse sand you really need to find a gravel pit in your area. There has to be a place near you where building contractors and excavators go to buy sand, washed stone, driveway stone etc. Look in the yellow pages, call landscapers and excavators and ask them where you can buy coarse sand, then before you buy any, get in the car and go see it.

Find the sand that you consider to be the most coarse and buy some. Do not buy any kind of limestone product. I can't tell you exactly what to buy because sand varies from region to region and it's way too heavy to ship anywhere.

The big box stores sell bagged playbox sand and they also sell bags of material that are called paver base and paver sand. These last two products are used to put under and between brick paver sidewalks and patios. Paver base is usually a limestone product that is absolutely no good for cuttings. Plus this product compacts and gets as hard as concrete. Just yesterday I bought some of this paver base for a walkway that I was building. But when I was loading the bags onto my cart I saw what they called paver sand and it looked to be on the coarse side. Most likely it would work for cuttings.

Basically what you need is sand that is coarse enough that when you wet it down with the garden hose the water runs through the sand and does not sit on top of the sand. Find some sand that you like, do this test, then you are good to go.

Many times customers have written "I just ordered a dump truck load of sand."

What????? You don't need a dump truck load of sand. I don't know that I've ever purchased more than two cubic yards of sand in any one growing season. And yes, you can use the sand over after you have removed the cuttings that you rooted. If the sand starts to get weedy, then it's time to change the sand. Put the old sand in your compost pile, it will be good for your potting soil mix.

Should I use Flats or a Bed of Sand for Rooting?

That's up to you and here are the pro's and cons. Flats are nice because you can put the flat on a table, in the shade, stick the cuttings and move the flat to the mist area. Once that particular flat of cuttings has fully rooted you can remove it from the mist and just place it in an area where you can water it once or twice a day pretty much like you would plants in a pot.

A flat of sand is heavy! I'll say that again. A flat of sand is heavy! Really heavy. So heavy that at my advanced age (okay, so I'm only 56) I choose to no longer lift flats of sand. Carrying a flat of sand in front of you is probably the worst possible type of lift you can do and I have a very weak back. Not only that, over the winter months, and I often, usually, almost always, leave my rooted cuttings in the sand until the following spring, flats of sand dry out much more easily than a bed of sand.

That's why I covered my flats of sand with white plastic for the winter. And because I covered them that's why the field mice got under the plastic, spent the winter and ate all of my cuttings. Except the Red Twig Dogwood. Must not like those, they left them untouched.

So flats really need to be covered for the winter. Which means you need to also use mouse bait. Because they are individual flats the dry air can surround the flat and dry the sand out easily. That doesn't happen when you use a bed of sand.

Actually I am going to do a few flats of cuttings in sand in a week or two. Because I want to test a theory that I have that maybe I can eventually pass along to you. And because the flats are so heavy I am going to make my own flats out of one by four boards and use slats of lath on the bottom of the flat. I am making my own flats so I can make them small enough that I can lift them full of sand!

I like to root my cuttings in a bed of sand. See the videos. Kneeling in the bed of sand to stick the cuttings really doesn't bother my knees or my back too much so it's actually easier for me. And if I choose to cover my cuttings for the winter that's easy enough to do as well. Again, see the video Rooted cuttings in a bed of sand will not dry out nearly as fast as they will in flats.

How Much Sand Do I Need?

If you are using flats you can just take the flats to the gravel yard and fill them by hand with a shovel and just buy the sand as you need it. If you are building a bed of sand like I prefer to use you'll have to buy the sand by the cubic yard. To figure out how much you need just multiply the width of the bed times the length of the bed times the depth of the bed and divide by 27. There are 27 cubic feet in a cubic yard. In order to use that simple

formula you have to be working feet and not inches. So in that regard 4" of depth would be .3333 feet. 8" would be .66666 feet. But this is easier.

One cubic yard of sand spread out 4" thick will cover approximately 81 square feet. So if your sand bed is 8" deep like I prefer to make mine, one cubic yard of sand will fill an area of approximately 40 square feet. A bed that is 4' by 10' would be 40 square feet and would use one cubic yard of sand.

In other words. You don't need a dump truck load. A pick up truck will hold three cubic yards of mulch, but you could never put that much sand in a pick up truck because of the weight. You would destroy the truck! Even one cubic yard of sand is a lot of weight for a ½ ton pick up truck. So be careful. Make more than one trip.

That big orange big box store might rent you a truck if you need one. They do that around here.

How and When Do I Remove the Cuttings from the Sand?

Ahhhhh! The million dollar question! When do I remove the cuttings from the sand? Most things will root in four to six weeks. Some things take longer but most are all are rooted in 6 weeks. The longer you leave them in the sand the better the root system they develop. But once they have rooted you have to stop misting them because it can cause you to lose the cuttings. Mist is the magic that keeps them alive while they are making roots, but once they are rooted they are like; "I'm rooted! Quit spraying me with water every 10 seconds! You are going to kill me! And that is true. Once they are rooted quit misting and water them once, twice or three times a day depending upon how hot and dry it is.

Can you pot them or plant them in a grow bed after eight weeks? Yes you can. However, I am not a big fan of mid summer potting because when I did it, it cost me a lot of cuttings because once I potted them they cooked. Those black pots and that dark soil attract a lot of rays from the sun and the soil can get really hot. Especially when the only thing in the pot is a little tiny rooted cutting that isn't large enough to shade the soil in the pot at all.

Here's the other problem and this is important for you to understand. When you pot up or plant a rooted cutting you really are not putting the roots very deep into the soil or the pot. You really only want about one inch of soil over the roots. Remember, the roots need to breath. So that means that the only part of the soil in the container that the rooted cutting will use or benefit from is the top 1-1/2" to 2" of the soil, until the cutting can grow and establish more roots deeper into the soil.

That's why they dry out so easily when you pot in mid summer. So if you do choose to pot in mid summer it helps a great deal to place the pots in a shaded area until the cuttings have a chance to establish themselves. Then try moving a few to the sunny area and see how they do before you move them all. They need plenty of sun to grow well, but if you are potting in mid summer they need some protection.

What about plant them in a bed? That's different because the soil in the bed is likely to be a little cooler and it won't dry out as easily. But doing so in mid summer is still very stressful for the cuttings and you are likely to lose more then if you waited until spring.

So after a while I just decided to root them during the summer. Leave them right where I rooted them until spring, then come early spring I'd pot them up like crazy. And that made everybody happy. Me and the plants.

Once they are rooted how do I get them out of the sand? Aren't the roots all tangled up since we are sticking the cuttings so close together? I should note that when I stick cuttings each cutting gets about one square inch of personal space. That's it. That's all they get and it works fine.

Getting them out of the sand and separating them is much easier than you think. I have members of the [Backyard Growers Business Center](#) that suggest to other members to use water to wash the sand away etc. Nonsense. I like for the sand to be fairly dry when I remove the cuttings but it really doesn't matter. I just start in one corner of the bed and at first I might use a trowel or something to scoop some cuttings out of the corner. Once I get a bit of a hole dug in the sand I just stick my hand in that hole, work my fingers under a group of cuttings and gently lift them out of the sand.

Once I have a handful of cuttings and sand I shake the ball of sand a little, maybe tap it against the potting bench and the sand just falls away. Once the sand has fallen away the cuttings can be easily pulled apart and separated. It's that easy. No water or fancy gizmo techno gadgets involved. Immediately after separating the cuttings I lay them in an empty flat, cover them with a piece of burlap, then wet the burlap and the cuttings really well and I place the flat in the shade as I work at getting the cuttings potted up.

I only remove a small number of cuttings from the sand at one time. Maybe 100 or 200. Because as soon as I get them out of the sand I wanted them planted in a bed or potted.

Should I Plant them in Grow Bed or Should I Pot them?

That depends and it's really up to you depending on some variables. First of all, if you are going to plant them in a grow bed, or your garden, you have to have really good soil for them. The soil has to be well drained, cannot be soggy, and it should be rich in organic matter. As much as I hate to say it, the organic matter is less important than good drainage. I've grown plants from cuttings in soil that appeared to contain very little organic matter and they did great. Poor drainage? That's a big problem.

So if you have good soil in your yard then a grow bed can simply be an area of your yard that you tilled up and you plant the cuttings. At both of my nurseries I've had well draining soil so I've never had to build a raised bed. I simply till up an area and plant.

If you have poor soil then you have to build a raised bed using good rich topsoil. The raised bed doesn't have to be fancy and it doesn't even need to be bordered with wood, bricks or timbers. Just mound up some good topsoil and plant away. Simple as that.

How far apart should I plant them? Well . . . that's really up to you. Most plants can be quite close and it really doesn't bother them. Two plants that should not touch are Dwarf

Alberta Spruce and Rheingold Arborvitae. If they touch one another they brown out where they touch. Most other things are less sensitive. Usually 10" on center is a good general rule for planting cuttings in a grow bed. Keep in mind, you're only going to leave them there for a year or two at the most. Maybe three years for slow growing evergreens.

Some things I plant as close together as 6", but 8" is probably better. Here's the deal. When you plant in a grow bed you have to keep the bed pretty much weed free. The more areas of soil that you have that are exposed to the sun the more weeds you are going to have. When you plant things closer they fill in and actually shade the entire bed, greatly reducing the amount of weeds.

The down side to putting plants in a grow bed? You have to dig them out. Digging plants out of a grow bed is hard work. The poorer your soil, the harder the work. Secondly, once planted in the grow bed you have to leave those plants there until they are dormant. **You cannot dig them out during the growing season!** That would kill them. So once you plant them in the bed they are there until Thanksgiving. In most areas of the country plants are not fully dormant until Thanksgiving. Then you only have until about mid April to dig them out of the bed. Here in zone 5 our spring digging season usually ends about the third week of April. Once the plants leaf out, the digging season is over until Thanksgiving.

The Schedule of Growing Events

In this business there is a schedule of events that takes place each year. You have to always be aware of that schedule and be prepared for it. It's pretty simple, but each and every year I hear from people who missed their window of opportunity for digging plants etc.

One big event is the spring digging season. You have to know in advance what you intend to dig, what you **need** to get dug and exactly when and how you are going to do that. Plants that are growing in the ground need to be dug while they are dormant. Plan for it! Let's say you have 500 plants in a grow bed that are ready to be potted and sold and of course you work a full time job and have a life going on and all of that. Doesn't matter. You have to find a way to get them dug, and I suggest you dig them all at one time on the same day.

Just dig them out, then you can heel them back in right from where you dug them until you can get them potted. But even then, you can't dilly dally. You have to get it done! Because if you don't the plants are going to start growing and root back into the soil and if you move them then you will shock them. If you have a large pile of potting soil, and you should, you can actually heel them in the potting soil pile for a week or two. Just cover the roots with soil and keep them watered. They'll be fine.

So early spring is digging season. Mid spring is potting season. Early summer is softwood cutting season. Summer time is still cuttings but also lots of weeding. Fall is getting ready for winter season. Be prepared for each of these seasonal events. Don't miss your windows of opportunity.

Potting Up Your Plants

We discussed the advantages and disadvantages of grow beds. When you are just starting and only have small number of plants grow beds make perfect sense. Because plants in beds are much easier to care for and need less attention than plants in pots. Plants in pots need to be watered every single day unless it's raining. Plants in grow beds need to be watered every day for a few days, then usually every second or third day, then maybe once a week, then eventually not that often at all unless it's really dry. Plants in pots need watered everyday.

I often say it's just as much work to care for 100 plants in pots as it is 1,000 or 5,000. At least when it comes to keeping them watered.

Potting is a pretty simple process. Good potting soil that drains well, is made up of **rotted organic matter**. Fill the pot almost all the way up with potting soil, place the rooted cutting in the pot with the roots spread out over the soil you already put in the pot, then put about an inch of soil over the roots, press down on the soil to make sure the cutting is firm in the pot and there are no air pockets around the roots.

Make sure you fill you pots almost all the way to the top with soil. I've seen people try and "save a little soil" by only filling the pot half full. Not only does your plant need all of that soil, the buying public is going to be wary of anybody selling a container grown plant that is not completely full. It will leave them with a bad impression of you and your nursery.

Fertilizer

After you have the plant potted up give it a little bit of slow release fertilizer. **The wrong fertilizer will kill your plants in a matter of days.** So for the sake of simplicity and to make sure you get your nursery off to a roaring start you have to get it into your head that there is only one fertilizer you can use. And that's the slow release formula of Osmocote. Osmocote makes more than one slow release fertilizer but the one that you are looking for is 14-14-14 and it releases over a period of 3 to 4 months. It's not cheap . . . because it works! You might find small containers at the garden center or big box store. It does come in 50 lb bags and A.M. Leonard in Piqua, Ohio does sell it.

Osmocote is much more expensive than garden fertilizers because it is engineered to release very slowly. And that's why you need Osmocote. Your plants don't need a big blast of nitrogen all at one time. That will kill them for sure. They need a nice slow feeding over a period of months.

You have to fertilize container grown plants because potting soils don't contain a lot of nutrition and because of the daily watering any nutrition that might be there gets used up or leached out fairly quickly.

Now, you might be thinking, what if I just give them a little garden fertilizer once a week? Won't that do the same thing? **You will kill your plants. Garden fertilizer will kill your plant! No two ways about it, garden fertilizer will kill your plants.**

Can I use Miracle Grow? Yes you can, but it's not enough. Miracle Grow will green up your plants, but it will not give them all the nutrition they need. They need Osmocote. About one teaspoon per two quart or one gallon container.

Weed Control

Don't under estimate the amount of control weeds can have over your life if you fail to have good weed control measures in place. The smaller your operation the easier this is to manage, but if you expand your operation to encompass more space, *weeds will be an issue*. Any area that has exposed soil, whether it's in a pot or in a grow bed, or the aisles between the pots and or plants in a row, you will have weeds.

Pots. Let's start with under the pots. Weeds obviously won't grow under your pots, but they will grow between the pots. Many growers put down black plastic under the pots to prevent weeds from growing under the pots and it works. I tried it one year and I did not like it because water stood on top of the plastic and would often be out in the nursery for just a minute or two not really dressed for work, just shorts and tennis shoes. Seems that I continually stepped into my container area into a puddle of water on the plastic and soaked my tennis shoes. But . . . you have to use some kind of weed control, and many use the black plastic. So it is effective.

Weed Barrier Fabric

Don't get me started on this stuff! The short answer is, in my very experienced opinion it doesn't work! In my many years of re-landscaping homes it seems that we pulled out miles of this stuff and getting it up wasn't easy because it had so many weeds growing through it that it was "welded" to the ground. The old house that I bought, the one where my nursery is now located, has this stuff all around the house. As I am writing this book I am also in the process of getting ready to landscape that house and the weed barrier fabric is making me crazy. Oh how I wish it weren't there! I can't pull it up because it tears, so I have no choice but to leave a lot of it. That way it can haunt me until I die. And you should know, when I first got the place those beds were nothing but a major weed fest, growing through and on top of the fabric.

Now, in a nursery setting, when you put the fabric on the ground and put only containers over it and not soil or mulch, it might be okay. The big nurseries often use a similar material that is sold by big greenhouse supply companies like The Greenhouse Mega Store and Charlies Greenhouse, but it has a tighter weave and weeds don't grow through it. So if you want to try the fabric, go ahead, but I have given you my opinion. I only tried the plastic once and didn't like it. So I put nothing under my pots and I had little problems because I used pre-emergent herbicides and my pots were very close together which let very little light reach those areas between the pots.

Keeping Weeds Out of Nursery Containers

You will get weeds in your pots, no way around it. You have to stay on top of keeping the pots weed free because if you don't, getting them cleaned up after the weeds have

taken over is no easy task and it's very time consuming. However, there are ways to keep this from happening and I'll share them here.

Me? I use pre-emergent herbicides and it works pretty well. However, here are a few other tips. Mulch. Will putting a layer of mulch on the top of pots work? It will help, but it won't be all that effective. There is a company and I don't know who they are, but they make a thin, light weight disk that you can place in the container, over the soil. These disks come in different sizes and they have a small hole in the center and a slit so they can be slipped around the stem of the plant.

As far as I know these disks all come treated with a product called Spinout. Spinout contains copper hydroxide which will kill weeds and it is also used to kill the tips of plant roots. What they do is coat the inside of a pot with Spinout and as the roots reach the edge of the pots the tips are killed and that prevents the roots from circling the inside of the pot. That makes the plant create more lateral roots and the plants are less likely to become root bound and are supposed to develop a much stronger root system. To the best of my knowledge this works. Some growers of tree seedlings get a similar result by using a technique called "Air Pruning".

However, don't think you need to use Spinout in your containers or Spinout treated containers. I don't and I don't honestly know of any grower who does on a regular basis. For certain things that a grower intends to shift into a larger container before selling a plant, I think in that case it would create a nice advantage. But it adds cost to each plant that you produce, and those small costs add up to big dollars. So as I always tell my Backyard Growers. Keep it simple. Don't over complicate a simple thing.

I explained all of that to you just so you know what Spinout does, how it works, and why these weed control disks are treated with Spinout. Do they work? I've not used them myself but I know growers who have used them and report to me excellent results.

But here's the interesting part. One small grower that I used to buy some roses from used these disks. When I'd buy plants from him he'd pull the disks from the pots before I could take them. He re-used the disks and told me that even though all of the Spinout on the disks had long since been used up, he still re-used the disks because even without the Spinout, the disks still helped to control weeds in the pots. So the Spinout provides a chemical control, but the disk itself blocks the sunlight which is essential for weeds to grow.

So some people just make their own disks out of various materials. With a disk in place there's still a good chance that weeds might grow in the crack between the disk and the edge of pot, but by using the disk you greatly reduce the amount of surface area where weeds can grow. But keep in mind, if you make your own disks, the material that you use has to be water permeable so water can get through the disk and keep your plants adequately watered. I've never used any kind of disk. Will I? Maybe, but I usually get the results that I need with pre-emergent herbicides.

Pre-Emergent Herbicides

A pre-emergent herbicide is usually, but not always a granular product that you sprinkle or spread over an area of soil or a group of pots where you are trying to prevent the germination of weed seed. That's what a pre-emergent herbicide does. It prevents weed seeds from germinating. It doesn't kill any weeds that are already there, it only prevents weed seeds from germinating. An herbicide that actually kills weeds is called a post emergent herbicide and seldom would you ever use one around your plants because most of the common post emergent herbicides are non-selective which means that they kill just about any plant that they touch. It's important to know the difference.

I'd have to say that the most common pre-emergent herbicide that is sold in garden stores is a product called Preen. To the best of my knowledge the active ingredient in Preen is Treflan or Trifluralin which is the main ingredient in Treflan. Does this stuff work? Yes it does. Many people don't get the results they want with Preen because they don't get the sequence of events correct. In order for Preen or any other pre-emergent herbicide to work, you have to start with a garden that is "weed free". That means that you have to pull all of the weeds first, or cultivate the garden until it is weed free, then as soon as you are done you have to apply the pre-emergent herbicide. Any active weeds or roots of weeds that you might have missed are still going to grow. Only weed seeds are controlled, not weed roots.

When potting I do all of the potting that I am going to do for the day. As I pot I added the fertilizer (Osmocote) to the containers, then I carry the containers and place them in the nursery where they are to stay as the plants grow out. The area in which I set the containers has been weeded and raked clean. At the end of each potting day I apply a pre-emergent herbicide over top of the freshly potted containers using one of those small spreaders. The one that I use is made or sold by Scotts.

In doing this all of the containers and the area around and in between the containers receives an application of the pre-emergent herbicide, including the isles between my container areas. Then I thoroughly water the area where I applied the pre emergent making sure to wash it off the foliage of any plants that it might have stuck to. It can and will burn the foliage if not washed off.

This works really well. The pre emergent usually lasts about three months. As soon as I start seeing more than a few weeds starting to sprout I weed the area again and make another application. However, by then many of my fast growing plants like Potentilla, Forsythia, Weigela and other fast growing items have filled out so much that little sunlight can get to the soil in the pots or the soil beneath the pots and that helps considerably to control weeds.

There are a lot of pre emergent herbicides on the market and they all work. Some better than others, some control certain weeds better than others. This is a list of the ones that I have used what I think of them.

Treflan: (the product that is in Preen) Treflan works good, but there are products that I think work even better.

Ronstar: works good on everything except Chickweed. If you have Chickweed seed in

the area, I don't think the Ronstar would be a good choice. I use it in my landscape beds at home and it works great. But last year we used it in the nursery and the Chickweed grew like crazy.

Snapshot: I really like Snapshot and I use it most of the time. However, right now I'm a little frustrated because I just completely cleaned up my nursery and applied Snapshot. And I'm still getting some Sumac seedlings. Not sure if the Snapshot won't control Sumac, or maybe I just have way too much Sumac seed in the soil. I've removed a lot of Sumac trees when we were clearing the ground. But all in all it's a good product that I highly recommend.

Rout: Is by far one of the best. And last I knew it was probably the most expensive of the four. What I do is often times I'll alternate the pre emergent herbicides that I use because there is usually one or two weeds that each one doesn't control as well as it does other weeds.

It's important to understand that even though I cited certain weeds that some of these products don't seem to control well for me, all in all they control a great number of weeds in general. They work really, really well.

Organic Weed Control

Can weeds be controlled organically? Yes they can. Is it easy? Not as easy as chemical controls but here's what I know about organic weed control. Any kind of a disk in a container on top of the soil will help to control weeds. Even if it's not chemically treated. Putting an inch of mulch over that disk will also increase the success of using the disk. It's all about blocking the sunlight and still allowing the water to get to the plant. Make sure you don't use something that prevents water from seeping into the pot.

Some say that corn gluten meal works as a pre emergent weed control. I've not tried it. When I looked into it briefly the amount that you needed to apply to get good control seemed unreasonable to me, but that's just me.

If you want to grow plants in containers and not use a chemical to control the weeds I'd find some kind of material to make disks out of, or maybe there is an untreated disk on the market that I am not aware of.

Organic weed control when growing plants in the ground has to be something along the lines of regular cultivation, or using something like layers of newspaper or cardboard covered with mulch. Nurseries who grow plants in the field cultivate between the rows on a regular basis then go through a few times a year and hoe between and around the plants. This is time consuming and hard work, so make sure you know what you're in for before you tackle that kind of row planting in a field.

I should also note that harvesting plants that are field grown is also really hard work to dig them bare root. Digging a balled in burlap plant is also hard work and is really a skilled job. Anybody can learn it, but it does require learning. Large plants can be harvested with mechanical tree spades, but the spade is very expensive and they are usually mounted on a skid steer tractor with a very high price tag. Only somebody that

truly has prior experience growing, selling and harvesting trees should even consider that market. In the tree business they grub out a lot of trees deemed unsaleable or unsold trees. It's heart wrenching to see what they have to throw away.

I am quickly learning that I want to condense my nursery more, similar to how my first Backyard Nursery was when I was working with only 1/20th of an acre. By spreading out too much I am giving the weeds too much of an advantage and that has to change. And I use chemicals! So at first, keep things as tight as possible until you decide how you are going to control weeds.

The best way in the world to control weeds, and this is in my opinion, is to grow plants in small containers and sell them when they are small at \$4.97 each. Not tiny. They need to fill out a 2 quart container, but as soon as they do move them out as quickly as you can. Once they fill out the container they do a pretty good job of reducing weed growth.

Pest Control

It is essential that you grow plants that are free of insect infestation and or disease. Think about yourself as a plant buyer. You wouldn't want to go to a garden center and buy an expensive plant, bring it home and plant it, only to learn that it has spider mites, scale or some kind of borer.

That's why we all have to be licensed by our state department of agriculture. The licensing requirement is all about pest control. Many areas of the country have a large amount of Japanese Beetle larva in the soil. I happen to live in such an area. But it would be completely unfair of me to ship trees with soil into an area that doesn't have a Japanese Beetle problem. That's why we are all regulated.

Your local nursery inspector is a great resource, an incredible source of information. You will learn a great deal about pest control from your local inspector. To the best of my knowledge, in most states you do not have to get a license until you are ready to start selling plants. I usually tell people to apply for their license about six months in advance because the inspectors are super busy, and are now covering more ground than they ever have.

But getting licensed earlier is not a bad thing. The sooner you are licensed the sooner you will start talking to and learning from your local inspector. Don't worry about getting licensed or inspected. All they do is come by, look at your plants, look for pests that you might not be aware of and they leave. A few days later they mail you a report showing what they found on their visit to your nursery. All of our members report how much they enjoyed visiting with their nursery inspectors. I think they like inspecting small nurseries like ours. Can you imagine having to inspect a nursery that covers 1,000 acres and millions of plants? Doing our places is a breeze for them!

When I grow plants in small containers pest control has never been an issue for me. I found that container grown plants that are watered on a regular basis grow well and they are vibrant and healthy. And that helps to keep them pest free. But more importantly, pest problems take time to develop. So when you grow small plants and turn them over

quickly you have far fewer pest problems. I seldom spray any kind of an insect control on my plants. I've just never had to and I like that.

When you put a plant in the field and grow it for five or six years before you can sell it, it has all kinds of time to attract pests and when we were field growing and could not water our plants, we had more pest problems with field growing plants. Not being able to water them when needed puts them under stress and research has proven that plants that are healthy and happy do a great job of repelling pests on their own.

Air Pruning

A few pages back I mentioned something about air pruning and wanted to explain more about it instead of leaving you hanging. So I'll do it here so I don't forget to include it.

This does not apply to rooted cuttings and most plants. Air pruning was invented because when trees are grown from seed they tend to put out one long tap root and very few lateral roots. That's not good because when you dig the tree you cut off a great deal of that tap root and that leaves you with very few roots in the root ball.

So what nursery growers started doing is planting their tree seedlings in a bed, then at the end of each growing season they would dig them out, trim the roots and replant them. This root pruning forced the seedlings to create more lateral roots which eventually filled the root ball. So when you look in a wholesale nursery magazine like American Nurseryman, which is by the way the magazine that members of the trade read. You can find it on line. I suggest you subscribe to the print version and have it delivered to your house. It's a great publication and the place where most wholesale buyers look when they need to buy plants. Especially rooted cuttings, liners, tree whips etc.

So when you look in American Nurseryman magazine and see an ad for small trees and this is usually evergreens like pines, spruce and firs, you'll see language that looks like this.

White Pine 1-0

Translated that means a White Pine seedling that is one year old and transplanted zero times. Not really what you want, you are certain to lose a lot of them.

White Pine 2-1

That's a White Pine seedling that is two years old and has been transplanted once. That's a much better plant than the 1-0.

White Pine 3-2

This is a really heavy and nicely rooted seedling. It's three years old and it has been transplanted twice.

So one really smart nurseryman got an idea. He knew that when the roots of a plant are exposed to the air, the roots die. So his idea was to grow tree seedlings in small, one pint cardboard milk containers with the bottom cut out. As he potted his tiny seedlings into

these bottomless containers he placed them on a bench made of wire screen (hardware cloth). So essentially the container was open on top and bottom and filled with potting soil.

Because they were sitting on the wire bench the potting soil did not escape. As the tree seedlings started to grow the tap root also started to grow, but as soon as it hit the wire screen it of course tried to keep on growing in a downward direction. But that meant that the tip of the tap root was exposed to the air, dried out and died as soon as it hit the air.

This did not adversely affect the plant. What it actually did was forced the plant to put out more lateral roots. Each time a root reaches the bottom of the bottomless container it is automatically “root pruned” and the need to keep transplanting and manually root pruning was eliminated. Today they make container that are called “Root Maker Pots” and I believe that particular name is trademarked but there are a number of different containers designed for this. The root pruning containers of today have slits in the sides and the bottom.

Do you need these root pruning containers? Only if you are growing trees from seed and want a really nice root system. I buy a lot of Japanese Red Maples that are grown from seed and they are not grown in root maker pots that I know of and they are just fine. So in some cases they provide a great advantage and with other plants they are unnecessary. It just depends on what you are growing and really how many of them you are growing. You certainly can manually root prune 50 or 100 of just about anything.

Where to Buy Rooted Cuttings

First of all, let's establish that you ***should buy rooted cuttings!*** Why? Because it's the easiest way to add a wider, more diversified selection to your growing operation. Being able to propagate your own plants is like being able to print money. But there are some that you will struggle trying to root. You might figure each and every plant out eventually, but by being too stubborn to buy rooted cuttings in the mean time will cost you a lot of time and potential sales.

And we already mentioned properly named plants and don't get me started on that because I already mentioned that when you buy rooted cuttings from professional propagators you really can trust that the plants you are getting are properly labeled.

I urge you to buy rooted cuttings so you have a really broad selection of plants. The more kinds of plants you have the more reasons you are giving potential customers to come take a look at your selection. These are the reasons that I buy rooted cuttings. There are a lot of things that I don't have. I can't propagate things that I don't have. But if I buy 100 rooted cuttings of xyz plant, I now have a place where I can get a few hundred cuttings next year. So in many cases I really only need to buy rooted cuttings of a particular plant once. From there on out I can take cuttings from my own stock.

Other plants are tricky to propagate and my operation is so small that almost all cuttings get treated the same. They all are rooted in a bed of sand, out in the sun, under mist and the misting cycle is the same for all of them. A few things I might do in the fall without

the mist.

Things that don't particularly like my method of propagation? I just buy them from somebody else. One time I bought a few hundred Sky Rocket Juniper cuttings from a local grower for about 50 cents each. When I was talking to him and placing my order he said; "I'll put you down for 350, but I'm not sure I'll have that many. Sky Rocket is slow to root, we have to do them during the winter in the greenhouse over bottom heat, and even then we only get about a 50% stand."

He was being realistic and when he told me that I immediately knew that I never wanted to try and root Sky Rocket myself. Why would I want to put myself through that? I'll let him face all of those challenges and when he has them rooted I'll just pay his price which was way too low if you ask me.

Blue Rug Juniper? That's a different story. Those rooted for me quite easily. So over time, and by talking with other members of the [Backyard Growers Business Center](#) you learn what you want to root and what you don't.

So you can buy rooted cuttings from wholesale growers who specialize in propagation. I've included those that I consider the best in the wholesale directory. Or you can buy rooted cuttings and liners from your fellow Backyard Growers at the [Backyard Growers Business Center](#). I do both. Sometimes buying from a larger grower is just too much trouble for me, so I just go to the business center, look at the ads and in a matter of minutes I can place several orders from my own customers.

It's fun and it's easy, and those folks try really hard to do a good job.

Mike's List of 21 Plants that are Easy to Grow and Sell Like Crazy

This list has become somewhat famous among our members and they are always asking me to re-post it in the business center so I will include it here for you.

21 Plants that are Easy to Grow and Sell Like Crazy

The following 21 plants are really easy to grow and they sell like hot cakes. They always have been really good sellers and they always will be really good sellers. And this list is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to plants that you can grow and sell that people want to buy.

1. Forsythia
2. Red Weigela
3. Varigated Weigela
4. Pink Flowering Weigela
5. Red Twig Dogwood
6. Fragrant Viburnums

7. All Flowering Viburnums
8. Potentilla
9. Dappled Willow
10. Pussy Willow
11. Daylillies
12. Hosta
13. Huchera
14. All kinds of Perennials
15. Armeria
16. Boxwood
17. Japanese Hollies
18. English Hollies
19. Rhododendrons
20. PJM Dwarf Rhododendron
21. Hydrangeas
22. Rose of Sharon
23. Dwarf Alberta Spruce
24. White Dogwood trees
25. Chinese Dogwoods
26. Blue Rug Juniper
27. Gold Flame Spirea
28. Gold Mound Spirea
29. Ornamental Grasses of all kinds
30. Crimson Pygmy Barberry
31. Rosy Glow Barberry

Okay, that's 31 and I could go on forever.

Here are some plants for warmer zones, 8,9, and 10

1. Fragrant Tea Olive
2. Gardenia
3. Camellia
4. Azalea

5. Jasmines
6. Palm trees
7. Tropical Hibiscus

Need more ideas? Just start hitting all of your local garden centers and see what they are selling, what they seem to have a lot of are what people really seem to be interested in. Go when they are slow and go when they are busy and just watch the people buying the plants. You'll be surprised to see how much stuff they buy and what they are willing to pay for it. This is a good exercise because you'll be somewhat amazed at how much people are spending. Especially if you go in the spring when the garden stores are slammed.

How to Make Your Own Potting Soil

What I am about to share with you is my secret potting soil recipe.

First of all, if you've done much research on this subject, you'll find that it can get pretty darn complicated. Fortunately for you, I don't like complicated. I'm a simple kinda guy, and my simple strategies have been proven to work really well.

There are only three things that you need to know about potting soil. It should be light and fluffy, it should drain well, and it should be really high in organic matter. Keep that in mind as you gather your ingredients for potting soil.

Having the ability to drain well is really, really important. Plants grown in containers can dry out easily, and therefore should be watered daily during warm weather. So your potting soil needs to drain well. Then no matter how often you water your plants, the excess water drains through quickly.

For the most part, my list of ingredients for potting soil goes something like this:

Decomposed shredded hardwood bark mulch.

Small silica stones.

Left over silica sand from my propagation beds.

Whatever comes out of my compost bin.

Skeptical already aren't ya?

Don't be. I've grown tens of thousand of plants in this mix, and they grow like weeds.

But first, we need to talk about the silica sand and silica stone. Not too far from here we have a quarry that is pure silica sand and silica stone. So silica products are plentiful for those of us around here. Sand and stone vary from one part of the state to the next, let alone across the country. In your area you might not be able to get silica sand or stone. Chances are gravel suppliers in your area may not have even heard of either if there is no silica in your area.

It's not a big deal. You should use some kind of small, neutral stone in your potting mix to make sure it drains well. Don't use limestone. Limestone is not neutral and it will

alter the PH of your soil. But any other stone that is hard and small like washed river gravel would probably be fine.

This is how I go about taking my ingredients for potting soil and turning them into potting soil.

For the decomposed shredded hardwood bark mulch what I do is buy a few yards of the oldest, finest mulch that I can find. I shop all the mulch suppliers in our area to find the finest, darkest hardwood bark mulch that's out there. As hardwood bark mulch decomposes it gets finer, and it gets darker. Hardwood bark mulch is pretty common here in northern Ohio, but if you can't find it in your area you'll have to improvise.

Do not use wood chips. Do not use mulch from a tree service! Do not use mulch that has been dyed! The dye in the mulch is probably harmless, the wood that they are dying to make the mulch is more than likely just ground up pallets. **You cannot use** a mulch that contains wood!

Hardwood bark mulch is just that. It is the bark from hardwood trees. Not ground up wood, just ground up bark. Before they saw hardwood logs they debark them at the mill. The bark contains a lot of nutrition and it's really good for plants.

Any kind of mulch that contains wood contains no nutrition and the wood will rob your soil of nitrogen as the wood decomposes and your plants will suffer. And it takes a really, really long time to decompose.

Keep this in mind as you gather your ingredients for potting soil. The only thing that Mother Nature provides for her plants is decomposed organic matter. That's it. We know it as topsoil, but all it is is decomposed organic matter, and depending on what part of the earth you are on, it's made up of different types of organic matter.

So if you can't find hardwood bark mulch, find the next best type of organic matter. More about that in a minute.

I buy the hardwood bark mulch at least a year ahead of time so it has even more time to decompose. I just put it in a low flat pile so it can get wet all the way through when it rains. This helps to speed the decomposition process. The secret is to always have two to three yards more than you need on hand, that way you've always got some decomposing.

The hardwood bark makes up the bulk of my ingredients for potting soil. Then if I have coarse silica sand that has to come out of my propagation bed I just pile that on top of the hardwood bark mulch. You don't have to have the sand, so if you don't have any don't worry about.

Then I empty one of my composting bins and put the organic material that I take out of the compost bin right on top of my potting soil pile, which is starting to look like a Dagwood sandwich. (that's from an old newspaper cartoon) Because I use my "Lazy Man's, No Turn Composting Method" some of the material coming out of the bin isn't broken down completely. But it can continue "cooking" right in the potting soil pile.

Then, just before I start using my potting soil I go to the gravel yard and get a yard or two of small silica stone, and dump that right on top of the potting soil pile, adding one more

layer to my Dagwood sandwich.

Do you really need the stone? Possibly not, but all too often we have members who have plants that are not doing well, and in many cases the soil in the bottom of the container is soggy.

Since I use a lot of potting soil, I start out with about 9 cubic yards of hardwood bark mulch, so as you can imagine, the pile is quite large by now. By now your probably wondering how you are going to mix this huge pile. You're not going to.

Keep in mind that our pile of ingredients for potting soil has been added in layers, so it looks like a sandwich. So what I do is take a pitch fork and take one little corner of the pile and spread it out a little, then I run over the material that I have spread out with my roto tiller. Then with a shovel I toss what I just roto tilled back up on the middle of the potting soil pile.

Then I take the pitch fork again and knock down some more material from the place I did the first time. By now I'm getting a little deeper into the pile, and I'm getting a pretty good mix of all the materials in the pile. Once again I run them over with my roto tiller. If it looks like a pretty good mix I use it for potting. If not I toss it up on top of the pile and go just a little deeper and repeat the process. By now I can surely use what I mixed up.

I have one of those little Mantis rototillers and that thing is fantastic for mixing the potting soil. Keep in mind, I don't mix the entire pile. I just mix the corner that I am working with. That little Mantis tiller will climb right up the pile and mix it's way back down. I used to mix my potting soil with a larger front tine tiller and it worked, but I'd often get the tiller stuck in the pile. The Mantis is so light that doesn't happen. And because the Mantis has a 2 cycle engine and I'm assuming direct drive gears, the speed of the tines is quite fast which is great for mixing the soil.

Sometimes, if I can find some commercially made compost I'll add a couple of yards of that to my potting soil pile. Around here the county has a composting facility where they mix dried sewage sludge with wood chips and leaves. Then they screen out any large pieces and sell the finished compost. Almost all of this compost goes to wholesale nursery growers in this area.

This stuff is hot when you get it. And by that I mean way too hot to be used on plants immediately but what I do is after I am done potting for the season I add more bark mulch to my potting soil pile, then put a layer of this compost on the pile as well. The compost helps to break down the bark mulch and in the process it cools itself.

I don't mean the temperature is hot. That's probably true as well, but this stuff is so high in nitrogen when it comes from the county that you have to mix it with something to use up some of that nitrogen. For those of you that have even been lucky enough to shovel chicken manure, you know what I mean.

And that's about all there is to my potting soil mix, and as I mentioned earlier I've grown and sold tens of thousands of plants using this system. If you're potting smaller plants and have too much large material in your mix you can just sift it through a piece of heavy

duty hardware cloth (screen). Just take what doesn't pass through the screen and toss it back in your compost bin and let it break down further.

I don't do that and never have. As I am potting if I find a large piece of bark or something that has not broken down I just toss it into the compost bin.

Once you get a pile of potting soil like this going, just keep adding to it each year. Eventually you will have an ample supply of beautiful potting soil. You can use it for potting, and you can also use it in your flower beds.

I know that somebody is going to write to me and say; "Mike, how much stone, how much bark mulch, how much compost? What is the ratio?" Here's the answer to that: I don't have a clue. It's not all that important. Just make sure your potting soil contains fluffy, well composted organic matter, and that the soil drains well. I don't measure what goes into my potting soil pile.

Ingredients for potting soil options . . .

If you live in an area where rice hulls are plentiful, you can use rice hulls in your potting mix. If you live in an area where pine bark is plentiful you can use pine bark.

Just make a really nice organic potting soil that drains well and your plants will love you for it.

Protecting Your Plants from the Harsh Winter Weather

Getting your plants through the winter weather is not as difficult as you think. Just make sure you grow only plants that are hardy in your zone. If you are in the U.S.D.A. Hardiness zone 5 don't grow things that are not rated below zone 7. It's easy to know what zone a plant is hardy in, that information is shown with plant listings all over the Internet as well as in wholesale catalogs that you might be ordering from.

Winter protection of potted plants and or rooted cuttings is pretty simple. The plants don't need to be kept warm, but they do need to be kept moist and out of the wind. The easiest way to do this is to cover them with white plastic. ***Do not use Clear Plastic!*** White plastic, also known as over wintering film is designed to reflect the rays of the sun. During the winter months you want your plants to go dormant and to stay dormant all winter. Covering them with white plastic allows that to happen because even under the white plastic they will freeze and often times the soil in the pots will freeze hard as rock. That's fine. Plants are used to that and it won't harm them. Once frozen you want them to stay frozen and not continually go through the cycle of freezing, thawing, freezing, thawing.

You will not find white plastic or over wintering film at your local hardware store or big box store. You have to get it from a nursery supply company or a greenhouse supply like Charlie's Greenhouse or the Greenhouse Mega store.

To cover your plants you need to build some kind of a structure to pull the plastic over. You can build a hoop house out of steel piping or you can simply build a low wooden frame with two by fours. If you have your plants in narrow rows, say 48" wide you can

buy concrete reinforcing mesh, cut it to length and use the wire mesh to make low hoops over your plants then put the plastic over that.

When I worked in the nurseries as a kid that's what we did in November and early December. We'd carry those wire hoops, one guy on each side of the row and walk the hoop down and put it in place over the plants. Right behind us would be two more guys with the next hoop. Once we covered the entire row with hoops we'd roll the white plastic down the row over the hoops, pull the sides of the plastic down to the ground, then cover the edges of the plastic with buckets and buckets of sand to hold the plastic taught and in place. We carried bucket after bucket of that wet sand for weeks each fall!

Today most nurseries use large commercially sold hoop houses. But that doesn't mean that the larger hoop houses are better because *they are not*. They are more convenient because you can stand up inside of them and walk and they are permanently in place. They still have to be covered with white plastic in the fall and uncovered in the spring, but the structure stays in place. That's why the large growers use them. But they do have a down side.

Large hoop houses have a lot of air space between the plants and the top of the hoop house. That allows the plants to dry out more easily during the winter months and even though the plants are dormant they have to be watered because of this large amount of air space.

Just keep in mind, the lower the structure the warmer the structure and the more moist the air in the structure. When you use those little mini hoop houses made from concrete reinforcing mesh they are only about 30" high and you seldom have to be concerned about watering your plants once you covered them for the winter. Just make sure they are plenty moist before you cover them and they should be fine.

Plants in larger hoop houses have to be watered and that's not always easy because most irrigation systems have to be drained for the winter. So keep these things in mind as you plan for the winter. And keep in mind that Mike always says to; *Keep it simple*. Find the simplest, most effective way to do things and do not over complicate simple things.

Mouse Bait! Mouse bait is an absolute must when you cover plants for the winter. When you cover your plants you are creating for them a really nice, dry and warm environment for the plants. But at the same time you are creating a really nice place for mice to nest for the winter. Mice can do a lot of damage to plants. They get up in the pots and chew on the stems of the plants, often completely girdling the plants which will kill the plants. So you have to use a weather resistant mouse bait inside your hoop house or house.

What about Plants in the Ground?

Plants that are planted in the ground rarely have to be covered for the winter. Don't they freeze? Yes they do freeze, but it's okay because the roots are constantly moist. Even little tiny rooted cuttings in a bed of sand on the ground usually do just fine uncovered. Is it better to cover them? Probably, as long as you use mouse bait. But I like to keep my

rooted cuttings really close to the ground and I seldom cover them for the winter. The sand freezes as hard as a rock then come spring it's amazing to see those little cuttings start making leaves like winter never happened. But do keep in mind that sand can dry out quickly and easily over the winter, so depending on how your propagation area is set up, it's always safer to cover all of your plants.

Why Doesn't Mike Cover his Plants for the Winter?

Is it because I'm lazy? Yes. That's part of it. Secondly I subscribe to my own advice about keeping things simple and I am fortunate because the soil at my nursery is very well drained. So what I do is I dig out beds to put my container grown plants in. These beds are only about 8" deep, but the soil that I remove from the bed I use to build a mound around the outside edge. What this does is it creates a wind break for my beds and my plants and by doing so I actually create a micro environment for my plants.

They are subjected to less wind, don't dry out as easily, very little wind actually hits the plant containers, and because this area is lower than the existing grade leaves blow in and add some insulation. I don't let the leaves pile up on the plants, but I do leave a small amount of the leaves in place until spring. Just enough to add a little insulation value. It works good for me, but keep in mind, my soil is well drained. If you tried to do this in clay soil you'd have a muddy swimming pool and lots of dead plants.

Is it the perfect system? No. Some plants would be preferred to be covered, so I just opt not to grow anything that doesn't like my system of growing. I like to *keep it simple*.

What about a Greenhouse? Do I Need One?

No. You don't need one. Do not confuse a hoop house for over wintering plants with a greenhouse. They are very different structures, used for different purposes. An over wintering house is just a set of hoops with doors on the ends and probably a water line with sprinklers running down the middle of the house. That's it. Hoops, white plastic, ends and water.

A greenhouse is a complex, artificial growing environment. Greenhouses are meant for growing plants, not over wintering them. During the winter months when most plants are sleeping, greenhouse plants are actively growing. Therefore a greenhouse is covered with a double layer of *clear plastic* so the sun can shine through. A double layer of plastic is used because greenhouses are equipped with small blowers that blow a layer of air between the two layers of clear plastic. This is how a greenhouse is insulated. Greenhouses are difficult and expensive to heat so this layer of air for insulation is necessary.

A greenhouse is also equipped with fans and or louvered vents that are temperature controlled. On a warm day the vents open automatically and the fans kick on and move out the hot air. A greenhouse can quickly get really hot on a sunny day, but it will also get very cold on a winter day once the sun goes down. A greenhouse needs a source of heat, usually a gas furnace. It can get really expensive to heat a large greenhouse all winter.

Greenhouses should also have a temperature alarm in case the heat fails. If you have a greenhouse full of soft, tender plants and the heat goes out for just a few hours, you could lose everything in the greenhouse. That's way too stressful for me. You can easily do this business without a greenhouse. Most of the large nurseries have sophisticated temperature alarm systems that actually dial the phone and call you up and tell you that the heat is out. What a great way to ruin a night out! A computer calls you up and tells you that all of your plants are fixin to die.

Obviously I am not a big fan of greenhouse growing because to me it is stressful, it can really tie you down, and it can be expensive. But with all of that said, some people just have to have a greenhouse and many of those people absolutely love their greenhouse and love the fact that they can garden all winter.

So if you really, really want a greenhouse, then I say go for it. There are all kinds of sizes and options and you can go as large and sophisticated and and as small and simple as you want. In a warmer climate than my own zone 5, northern Ohio, you can grow in a greenhouse with very little extra heat. You really have to match what you want, against what your climate will allow.

My only message about this is; "You don't need a greenhouse, you can do this business without a greenhouse." But if for personal reasons you want one, then by all means treat yourself to a greenhouse!

How many pots will one yard of soil fill?

These are estimates so don't hold me to these numbers, but this should give you a rough idea of how much potting soil you will need. But first, I have to tell you that most people under estimate how many plants they are going to grow and always end up growing more. Stock up on potting soil. In this business it's like money in the bank and you don't want to run out because then you have to start over with all fresh material. It's always better to add to an existing potting soil pile than it is start one from scratch.

One cubic yard of potting soil will fill approximately 3,500 standard round 3" pots.

One cubic yard of potting soil will fill approximately 1,000 4-1/2" pots.

One cubic yard of potting soil will fill approximately 425 6" pots.

One cubic yard of potting soil will fill approximately 250 one gallon nursery containers.

One cubic yard of potting soil will fill approximately 100 2 gallon nursery containers.

As you can see, as the size of the container goes up, the amount of soil you need to fill them increases. This looks okay on paper, but once you start mixing potting soil and filling containers I'm guessing you are really going to see the advantage of growing in my favorite 2 quart size container described earlier.

Selling at Flea Markets and Swap Meets

You can sell plants at Flea Markets and Swap Meets and some people do pretty well doing so. But it's important for you to understand that the sociodemographics and or demographics of the typical flea market person are very, very different than those of the **True Plant Buyer**. Flea market folk are bargain hunters. That's the way their brains are

wired. They enjoy the hunt, the random things they find, the treasures and sometimes it's just about the “junk”. Going to these events is *their hobby*. Where as plant buyers, their hobby is **gardening**.

Gardening is what they do in their spare time, it's what they do to relax, it's what they truly enjoy doing, it's what they think about at work, at home, when they get up in the morning, they have a relationship with the plants in their gardens. No two ways about it, **they have a relationship with the plants in their gardens.** That's very, very different than the person who will buy your plants at a flea market.

Gardeners have money to spend, most own their own homes, many have really good, high paying jobs. Many are empty nester's, they have plenty of disposable income to spend on plants and things gardening related. And they do spend! Yes, they spend. You have to market to **gardeners!**

Telling Stories in Print

It's really, really important for you to understand who your market is and why any and all marketing that you do speaks directly to that person. When you create a marketing piece, you have to picture that person in your mind and write to them. Write them a story. They like that. They love to read short stories about you and your plants. Tell your plant story. How you grew the plants, why you started growing that particular plant, how well the plants did even after the late freeze this spring. Those things are all good things to weave into your stories. Like this . . .

“Yesterday when I was out in the garden weeding I picked up a Raspberry Candy Daylily and I was compelled to stop what I was doing and take just a few moments to admire the small, delicate bloom. It's amazing how intricate flowers really are. Then just as I was about to set it down a beautiful butterfly landed on the flower. Apparently I wasn't the only one that was taken in by it's beauty.”

Okay, so maybe that's laying it on a little thick. Or not. But what you are trying to do when you write these stories is to make your prospect see you out in the garden tending to your plants with tender loving care. They don't get that feeling from any of the other places where they buy plants. You have the advantage and the ability to paint that picture. Use it to your advantage, it's powerful stuff. Before long you will get really, really good at it.

That's why your customers will love you for what you do. They will be in awe of what you do. They will be envious that you get to work in your garden every day. They'd love to be you, and they want to hear about what's going on in your garden and a little of what's going on in your life. They will live through you vicariously. Sound strange? Don't believe it? It's true.

Carry a yellow legal pad with you in the garden. It will make you think about stories and they will come to you as you work. Stop working and write the mini story for your next marketing piece. Remember what you read earlier? Sell a plant get a name, sell a plant get a name. You send these stories to those “names”. They'll come back and buy more.

You have to write a newsletter. Monthly is great, but at least quarterly is a must. Don't be afraid to include photos of you and your family in the newsletter. Use a little space to mention family vacations, your grandkids etc. Your customers want to get to know you. They want to know who you are as a person. Give them that. Give them a peek into your daily life. It will endear them to you. It will make you their first stop each and every time they want or need plants. They will bring others!

One of my customers from Texas I think it was wrote and said this; "Two years ago I wouldn't have believed you if you told me that perfect strangers would be bringing people to my "nursery" and giving personal guided tours of my nursery. But it's happening. As I worked nearby it was surreal to hear somebody saying; 'This is where she has her hydrangeas, last year they were over there. But this year she has more varieties. Oh look at the roses!'"

You are about to embark on a true adventure. Enjoy the ride!

Don't get all worked up about the newsletter. The more hokey it appears to you, the more your customers are going to love it. Don't try and make it all professional. The world has enough of that. Make it seem like a letter from a friend. You remember those right? Letters? Nobody does that anymore ya know. When you write one to your customers it will be the most unique thing that they receive in the mail all year.

Not a text. Not a stupid tweet. Not a "hit me up on Facebook", not another Email while I am hovering over the "delete" button deleting Emails as quick as they come in, but a real live, hold in your hand letter. Nobody does that! That alone will make them your hero. I promise.

More about Selling to Wholesale Buyers

Somebody asked me; "How do you break in to the wholesale market?" I think the comment I made at the time was that it's difficult to find wholesale buyers if you only have one or two plants to offer them. For the most part that's true, it really depends on the item you have to sell.

But . . . I think it really has to do with what kind of a relationship you already have with these potential wholesale buyers. In example, if I currently had 500 Rhododendrons and 300 White Dogwoods in the field I could quickly find a couple of wholesale buyers. Providing my plants were really nice, my price was competitive, and the wholesale buyers I have in mind don't already have their own inventory of these items. But I'm thinking mostly of a couple of re-wholesalers I know because that market is fairly easy providing I meet the above criteria.

Re-wholesalers move a lot of plants, that means they need a lot of plants. They have plenty of sources to obtain most of the plants they need, so if you want to sell to them you have to do one or more of these things. You have to make it easier for them to get the plants, you have to offer them plants that are either higher quality than what they are buying, or equal quality at a better price. Just make their life easier and or better and they will be interested in talking to you. It's a great conversation to have because they know

more about what the market needs than anybody else you can talk to.

But what about the landscape trade. Somebody mentioned contacting landscapers and finding out what they are having a difficult time buying. Great idea. But the best way to break into the landscaping market is to find out what they really need, then going out and finding those items, marking them up just a little, don't get greedy, there's plenty of time for full profit later, and selling them to the landscape trade.

The more you sell them, the more you learn about what they need. The more you buy and sell, the better prices you get, the more suppliers you find, and the more relationships you establish in the trade. Then you find out what items those wholesale growers are looking for.

The more you do all of the above the more landscape contractors you can take on as customers. As long as you give them good plants, exceptional service and fair prices they will gladly buy from you because buying from a lot of different nurseries is time consuming and costly for them. Most landscapers would love to pick up the phone, tell you what they need and hang up. You see that they get what they need. The more landscape contractors you sell to, the greater your buying power.

The secret to making money in any business is buying power. Those who can buy at the lowest prices can be competitive and still make a fair profit. The more you buy and sell the more respect you command from the wholesalers, who pretty much see most of us a nuisance if we are only looking for a few items.

If you were to do this, in short time you would become an expert on a lot of plants that you know nothing about now, you would become a respected buyer in the field, and could then sell the plants you grow both to the landscapers and the wholesalers.

Business is all about establishing relationships. You can't build relationships, or start building relationships while sitting on the couch. Do you hate selling? Do you hate making cold calls, trying to find the right person to talk to, only to have them be rude and pretty much blow you off because they are busy? Yeah. Me too. I really don't like that, and I won't do it. I will not do it!

That's how and why I became a good marketer. I learned many years ago how to sell in print so my prospects call me and I don't have to call them. When they call me the entire process is reversed. They want to talk to me. They have invited me in to talk to them. Having them call you changes everything.

So how do you do that. First you find all of the landscapers and independently owned garden centers in your area. Each and every day, and you really have to do this, you call three of them on the phone and ask a simple question; "Who does the buying for your company?" They will give you the person's name. The next thing you have to say is; "Is that person available?"

Now, if you get them on the phone start out by saying I am not trying to sell you anything I'd just like to ask you what plants are you having difficulty finding. You can explain that you have a small nursery and are just trying to decide what to grow. Since you are not selling at the time, they are likely to talk to you. If they don't talk to you, or you don't get

them on the phone, it doesn't matter because you now have their name and you can start corresponding with them through the mail.

So making the phone call to get the name is important. That will really help as you start corresponding with them with letters. Yes, once again, real live letters in the mail. They are truly powerful business getting machines. Use them. Use letters in the mail.

The nursery industry revolves around availability lists. Every wholesale grower prints an availability list and they make the current list available to their customers and prospects. Most do it all wrong, and what you are learning here is light years ahead of most of the industry.

Lifetime Value of a Wholesale Customer

Wholesale customers can be worth their weight in gold! There you have it. That's the lifetime value of a wholesale customer. Years ago I had a Rhododendrons, White Dogwoods and Chinese Dogwoods in the field. I sold most of them to two customers. The one gal has her own nursery but does a lot of business with landscapers and small garden centers. Every night in the spring Larry and I would dig a truck load of Rhododendrons and Dogwoods and the next night after work I'd deliver them to her nursery and she'd write me a check. That same night we'd dig another load of plants, deliver them the next day and get paid. Customers like that are wonderful, and they are plentiful.

I gave her a fair price and I delivered the plants to her doorstep. She didn't have to call me, we didn't play phone tag, she didn't have to send a truck. None of that. Each night we'd confirm what to bring on the next trip. That's the beauty of wholesale.

We had 1,000 Chinese Dogwoods in the field. I bought them for 50 cents each. In about three or four years I was selling them in the ground for \$8.00 each. In the ground! I didn't have to dig them or haul them out of the field. One of the nurseryman that I had done business with for years would send his crew down and they'd dig the plants, haul them out of the field and back to his nursery. He call and leave a message on my answering machine; "You have 50 holes in the ground. Send me a bill."

Did I already tell you that story? Might have. I'm old. But it was worth telling twice.

That's why wholesale is what you should be thinking about long term. You can sell retail and use that cash to grow your nursery, but at some point you want to be courting the wholesale buyers in your area.

Selling One Gallons by the Truck Load

Opportunity only comes to those who have made the effort, made the commitment and have done the work. Think about that. No wholesale buyer wants to have a "what if conversation" with you. A "what if" conversation goes like this; "If I grow 1,000 Chinese dogwoods will you buy them?" They don't even want to hear that. But on the other hand, if you had 1,000 Chinese dogwoods that were four to five feet tall, balled and burlaped and you offer them for sale for \$15.00 each, they first want to see them to make

sure they are as nice as you say, and if the price is right for them, and they need them, they are likely to buy them from you.

The guy that bought all of those Chinese dogwoods from me first thought I was a little crazy when I told him that I planted out that many. He was only putting out three or four hundred a year himself. I took a chance, figuring I would be able to sell them. In the end he was short of supply and bought hundreds of them from me.

I took a chance. I knew a little about the market, but what I really did was take the chance.

A few years later it was right in the middle of our spring sale season and I was selling a lot of \$4.97 plants. Everybody around here knew what I did, it was hard to miss. One Sunday morning the phone rings and it's a guy I know, but not really a close friend. He owns a greenhouse business but tells me that he has some one gallon Junipers and other things that he wants to sell cheap. "Are you interested?" "Yeah, I'm interested and I grab my check book and jump in the truck.

Long story short he had hundreds of one gallon plants that his grower propagated but they really weren't in the hardy nursery stock business and they decided to just sell off what they had. There were hundreds of one gallons and thousands of rooted cuttings in flats. He offered me the entire lot for \$400 and I jumped on it.

I loaded up the truck with one gallons, took them back to my place and before the day was over I sold enough of them to pay for the entire lot of what I had bought. I don't remember how many things I bought from him but it took me days to get it all home. I made a lot of money on that deal.

Why? Why did he call me? Because I had put myself into a position where people knew I was serious about what I was doing, and he knew I was moving a lot of plants. Those kinds of things only happen when you make a commitment to yourself to take your business seriously and work at it like a business, not a hobby.

Remember the story I told you about my friend that had 10,000 one gallon azaleas that he wanted to move. He mentioned it to me because he knew I was selling a lot of plants. It takes some time, but the more committed you become to what you are doing, the more opportunities present themselves to you.

Another friend of mine grows a lot of plants in one gallons. I stopped by one day to pick up some plants to add to my plant sale and his pickup truck was parked there heaping with one gallon Gold Thread Cypress and Reingold Arborvitae. I mean the truck was heaping. Remember when I told you that you could fit 7,000 one gallons in a semi trailer stacked 7 high? That's how his pickup truck was loaded, stacked at least 4 or 5 one gallon pots high. He had to have at least 350 or 400 one gallons on his truck. Where was he going with them?

We have a lot of large growers in this area, several doing three million dollars a year or more in sales, probably higher than that. One of those growers was having such an incredible year that they completely sold out on a lot of items which was often the case before the economy went bonkers. So they'd buy one gallon evergreens from my friend

and immediately shift them into a 3 gallon container. The following year they can sell them at their 3 gallon price which is probably at least 3 times what they paid my friend for them.

Making Your Business Recession Proof

In the last paragraph I mentioned how busy this large wholesale grower was *before the economy went bonkers*. That suggests that the slump in the economy had a serious impact on their business. The down turn in the economy affected just about every business in the U.S. and I'm sure most around the world. How much did it hurt this big grower? I have no idea how much their sales dropped off when the economy pretty much crashed but it did affect the entire industry because people quit building new homes, new shopping malls and in general people spent less money.

This particular grower has approximately 1,000 acres of nursery stock. Even though the economy reduced their sales, and I'd have to guess reduced their sales significantly for a year or two, I happen to be really close to them and I watch what they do. They are putting small plants out in the field like crazy. I mean by the millions. So it's quite apparent that the economic crash did not catch them completely off guard and they weathered the storm just fine.

Other growers were not so lucky. Some went broke and out of business. Here's the deal. Grower A, the one that I've been telling you about, was not over extended to the bank. This is now a third generation nursery and they have always run a very tight ship. They expanded a lot, but I don't think they borrowed money to do that. If they did, they paid it back quickly. Other nurseries that I watched were second or third generation but they were just the opposite. They were deep in debt and taking money out of the business like drunken sailors. Seriously. Some weren't working as hard as they could have. In some cases they have too many family members all drawing high salaries.

Do you have any idea how many plants you have to grow and sell to support one \$80,000 per year salary? Some nurseries have 20 or 30 people working in the office. Just imagine the number of plants that have to be sold to support each and every one of those employees. That's what makes a nursery vulnerable to an economic change.

When the economy took a dive and business slowed down for all nurseries, the small growers who have always kept things really close to the chest, simply scaled back production a little and rode out the storm. They've been through it before and it will certainly happen again. They know that when things are booming they know it can't last forever and they prepare for those days.

Those who just spend and spend and spend and live lavish lifestyles and borrow money from the bank like crazy just to keep the business afloat are destined for failure and anybody with common sense can see that.

So as a really small grower and we saw this with our members in the [Backyard Growers Business Center](#), nobody really reported a significant loss of business when the economy went crazy. Because we sell small plants at lower prices gardeners were delighted to buy

our small plants and continued buying. During the recession more people stayed home, took fewer vacations, and many spent more time in their yards. Our small plants brought many comfort during these troubled times.

This whole economic thing has been played out since 2008, that's four years now, and if you are reading this many years later, you will eventually see history repeat itself. So now that this slump in business, adjustment of production of plants, scaling back a little on labor, some businesses closing their doors, the market has gone from having a surplus of nursery stock to the point that we are now seeing shortages on some plants. It will take some time for production to catch up and make up for these shortages.

Some small growers, who were just chugging along before, might see a surge in business if they have some of these plants that are in short supply. Suddenly, they might be the go to person for xyz plant.

Several months ago a large grower told me that he has scoured the country looking for small, probably one gallon size Dwarf Alberta Spruce and couldn't find any anywhere. I assume he wanted to buy them and shift them into a three gallon as described earlier. But there are none to be had at the moment because the large growers that usually produce these have cut back on production and a few really large growers went out of business for the reasons I already described.

The Arithmetic of Buying Rooted Cuttings

Dwarf Alberta Spruce is one of those plants that I'd never propagate myself. Why? I just like to do the easy stuff and buy anything that is not super easy. But because they are slow growing I thought it would be wise to buy 1,000 as an investment. This is actually the very first thing that I did when I started my Backyard Nursery. No, it was the second. The first thing that I bought was 1,000 Rhododendron rooted cuttings. Then I bought 1,000 Dwarf Alberta Spruce.

At the time I really wasn't thinking; "Hey! I think I'll start a nursery." It was more like I have a thousand dollars and if I buy 1,000 Dwarf Alberta Spruce for a buck a piece and grow them for a few years I can sell them for a lot more than I paid for them.

So that's what I did. I bought 1,000 Dwarf Alberta Spruce and 1,000 Rhododendrons. I messed up on the Dwarf Alberta Spruce and over the winter they heaved up out of the ground from the frost and I wasn't expecting that to happen so I paid no attention. I lost about 250 of them. Urrrrrrg! Not good.

So mathematically, what did that do to my investment? Well, my investment was \$1,000 and I now only had 750 plants instead of 1,000 so my investment per plant was now about \$1.35. So looking at it from that perspective I was still okay. Nobody wants to lose 250 plants that you paid for, but I still had 750 plants with an investment of \$1.35 each. I was still okay.

I grew these things for a few years and they were starting to look pretty good. A nurseryman down the road knew that I had them and this was somebody that I had been doing business with for a long time. I bought a lot of plants from him when I was

landscaping. But for whatever reason when he needed some he looked all over and couldn't find any so finally he asked me about mine. Why he didn't want to buy mine in the first place I'm not sure, but sometimes that's how people are, especially if they view you as a competitor which really wasn't the case since I was such a small grower. But there's another twist to this crazy story and how I happened to write my first book and eventually start marketing on line.

So he agrees to buy 250 of my Dwarf Alberta Spruce bare root for \$4.50 each. That's \$1,125.00. So I started with 1,000 plants, killed 250 and now I've sold 250 and I've recouped my original investment and a small profit of \$125.00. But I still had 500 plants to sell, and now that I was no longer in the red on these plants every dollar from here on out would be profit.

The next year he bought some more, I sold a few at the same price to another wholesale grower, and the remaining plants I sold at retail. Some I got \$12.00 for, some I got \$25.00 for. So all in all, even though I killed 250 right out of the gate, I still made great money on my investment. And I didn't even take cuttings from these plants. Had these been something that I wanted to propagate from I would have really cashed in on the deal. But just by buying them, growing them on, and later selling them, this was a great investment.

This Book Contains Information that Some Nurseryman Don't Want You to Have

I had been a landscaper for years. That's who I was and apparently to some people that's all I was “allowed” to be because when I ventured into the nursery business I wasn't exactly met with open arms. Maybe I was too aggressive, asking too many questions, seeking “inside information”. Who knows, whatever, doesn't matter.

So I've got this friend/business associate/supplier turned customer. I was a long time customer of his and when he decided to re-landscape his very old, but really, really nice home he asked me to do the job. It turned out great and I even talked him into some landscape lighting that really showed off this wonderful home at night.

So when things slowed down and it started getting dark earlier I decided to sneak over to his house one evening with my camera and tripod and I took some time exposed photos of his house with the landscape lighting. The photos turned out awesome! So as a surprise gift I decide to have one of the photos enlarged to 14” by 17” and framed for a friend and his wife. They were very proud of this old house and I knew they'd love the photo.

Several weeks earlier a reporter from the local paper contacted me and interviewed me about my Backyard Nursery (I had sent him a news release just to see what would happen). He took some photos, asked a lot of questions, then just as he was winding up he asked me; “What do you want to get out of this?” I didn't know. I really wasn't selling plants yet. So I said; “Tell them to send me one dollar and I'll send them a report about growing landscape plants from scratch.”

At that point I had not written a single word about gardening. This must have been around 1993 or 1994. I didn't even have any such report but I figured that if anybody actually sent me a dollar I could type up a report then. People did send me one dollar bills, so many actually that I realized there was an interest and that inspired me to write my first book, **“Free Landscape Plants!”** which is now out of print.

So anyway, now it's several weeks later, I've got the 14” by 17” photo of my nurseryman friend's house framed and ready to go. But by this time it was the dead of winter and he and his wife had left for Florida to spend a few months. So I called the person taking care of the nursery to get his address in Florida so I could ship them the photo as a surprise. I mailed the photo to the address in Florida which happened to be a retirement community that I assumed were mobile homes because the address was such and such lot #13.

The very next day I get a letter in the mail containing a dollar bill and a request for my report. Now this article had appeared weeks and weeks earlier so people had long since stopped sending me dollar bills. So I looked at the return address and I'll be doggone if it wasn't the same exact address that I had sent the photo to. Except this was lot #12, not lot #13. Hmmmmmm. That was curious.

My friend, the nurseryman, had seen the article in the paper. He was curious about what I was selling for one dollar, but he didn't want me to know that he was curious. So he saves the newspaper article for like two months and takes it to Florida with him and has his neighbor in Florida send me a dollar. Because I had sent him the photo just the day before I knew these two addresses were side by side.

I didn't quite know what to make of this. Why didn't he just ask me for a copy of the report? I guess because he didn't want me to know that he was interested. So I thought about it for a bit, knew what he was up to, and I finally wrote on the note inside the envelope; “Sorry, all sold out.” and I returned the dollar bill and the letter.

In our many conversations later his “secret” request for my report never came up. He and his wife loved the photo I sent them.

So armed with that information and a few other things that made me realize some growers did not like what I was up to, I did some soul searching and came to these conclusions. This is a free country. All of those nurseryman had started their nurseries with information they had learned from others. Home gardeners had every right to experience the joys of plant propagation and those that were so inclined had every right to start a small nursery at home if they were so inclined. But most importantly **I had earned the right** to write a book on the subject that I had spent the better part of my life working in and on.

I had done every low paying job imaginable from pulling weeds all day long for weeks at a time to carrying really heavy balled trees out of the field in the cold and rain, to shoveling chicken manure so the nursery I was working at could use the manure for fertilizer in the fields. I had spent 8 hour days making grape cuttings and had to crank out 5,000 cuttings each day if I was to be paid a full eight hours wages. I had gone broke

trying to find my way in the business world and I had gone on to re-landscape some 500 homes.

Not only had I earned the right to write my first book, but I had also earned the right to sell plants for \$4.97 if I chose to do so. Some growers had a problem with that.

So on the back cover of my first book I included this sentence. *“This book contains information that some nurseryman don't want you to have.”*

It was a true statement and by including it on the cover of the book I too was making a statement that I could not be silenced or told what I could or could not do.

So I told you all of that to tell you this. Not everybody is going to be supportive of your decision to grow and sell plants. Some people have incredible friends and family who fully support their dreams and ambitions. But with others that's not the case and you have to be really careful to not allow them to get you down and convince you that this is a dumb idea. It's not a dumb idea, it's a great idea and it can be life changing. But it's easy to start doubting yourself and your decision to do this. Don't let that happen.

That's one of the reasons why our members find the **Backyard Growers Business Center** so valuable. Many of the members get the support they need from the other members. Everybody in the group has the same dreams, faces the same challenges and has the same questions. To many it is more a family for them than their real family. When a member gets sick or faces other challenges the other members rally around them with all kinds of support.

Sometimes people travel miles to help other members who need the help. Several times a year members get together for meet and greet picnics or barbeque's in different parts of the country. Several times a year members get together to attend industry trade shows together and nursery tours. In short, it's a wonderful place where members help members.

And of course there's the buy/sell board where you can buy the plants you need at deeply discounted wholesale prices and you can sell plants. I don't know the exact numbers but I know for a fact that many members sell thousands and thousands of dollars worth of plants on the buy/sell board. I myself have purchased thousands of dollars worth of plants on that board. I've purchased all kinds of rare Japanese maples on the board and I always look forward to the next offering.

Free Advertising for Your Nursery

Because none of us ever know what the future holds for us, I do reserve the right to withdraw this offer at any time. However, at this point in time I have no intention of doing so. One of the things that I do for my customers is I allow you to place an advertisement for your nursery on my website. Why is that both important and valuable?

<http://mikesbackyardnursery.com> has incredible, what I call **Google Juice**, which means that it also has an equal amount of Yahoo and Bing juice as well. In other words, the search engines give it a great deal of respect and many of the listings on that site rank at the very top of the search engines. Just so you know, that's really, really, really hard to

do.

If you were to put up your own website I'm pretty sure you would struggle to get it to rank anywhere near the top of the search engines. This is something that Duston and I have been working really hard at for many years and that's why our sites rank really well.

So simply by placing an ad on our site you immediately benefit from all of our hard work. But you also benefit from other factors as well. Let's say that you live in Bellair, Virginia and somebody in your town is looking for a Harry Lauder's Walking Stick. You have an ad on my website, but since you don't grow Harry Lauder's it's not listed in your ad. But since we group all of the ads from one state on the same page, if somebody on the other side of the state is growing Harry Lauder's and has it listed in their ad, that page very well could be displayed in the number one position on Google and local people will see your ad. That's valuable.

So the more ads we have on one page, the better that page will rank. I also have a really large Email list and I often feature my Backyard Grower ads in my newsletter. Many people with ads on my website have reported a significant amount of plants sold as a result of the ads on my website. That's more exposure for you.

Of course all of this is at the mercy of Google and they change how they rank pages a lot. But we don't use any trickery to get our pages to rank. Google wants to display relevant search results so we do everything we can to make sure that's what our pages contain. Relevant information. So far this policy has served us well and we've always enjoyed good search engine rankings with all of the search engines.

So that's just a perk that you get for being one of our valued customers. When you have plants to sell, just Email the office with your ad and if we are still making this offer, your ad will be posted.

The Backyard Growers Business Center

The Backyard Growers Business Center. What is it? Who is it for?

Let's start with the history of this resource. It's been a long time now and I don't even remember when we started the Backyard Growers Business Center and it has changed and evolved over the years. This is a resource area that was created because my customers were asking for it. They had questions, things they were confused about and they wanted to ask those questions of me and other Backyard Growers.

And since there is no way in the world that I could possibly answer Email questions my customers asked me to create a special place where they could gather and share ideas. So I did. At first it was just a forum where people could ask questions and get answers. But it has evolved into a great deal more than that.

Today the Backyard Growers Business Center is a private, members only website where I and others share resources, growing strategies and ideas. It's a place where we share "how to" videos. Some created by Duston and I, some created by other members. It's a place where we constantly share ideas about how to sell more plants, how to sell to certain wholesale customers.

We have get togethers and meet ups in different parts of the country so no matter where you live you will have an opportunity to get together with others from around your area to share ideas. We have plant swap meets where you can go to buy or sell plants with other members in your area. People often travel long distances to attend these events. It's not at all unusual for me to have people from five or more states at one of my Shindigs as I call them.

We get together to attend industry trade shows or "Field Day Events". We've been doing this for years here in northern Ohio. Our local association has a "Nursery Field Day" once a year during the summer and many of our members come to attend the event. This event often includes a bus tour of several large wholesale nurseries the day before this event. All of these events are announced in the Backyard Growers Business Center.

We have a general discussion area where you can ask a question and often get an answer within minutes or an hour or so. I spend an incredible amount of time answering questions in this discussion area. I try to make it to the discussion area at least once a day unless I'm out of town or on vacation.

We have an area that we call the Buy/Sell area. This is by far one of the most valuable resources of the Backyard Growers Business Center. I can't even begin to guess how many plants have been bought and sold in that section but I know it has to be close to a million dollars worth of plants bought and sold! That to me is incredible.

In the Buy/Sell area you can get incredible deals on rooted cuttings, liners, small potted plants, even trees! The beauty of this resource is that all of the pricing is at industry wholesale prices, which can range from 50 cents to just a few dollars for beautiful plants. But unlike the real wholesale market in our Buy/Sell area you don't have to meet large minimums to place a wholesale order. And you don't have to be a plant expert.

We all know that you are just starting out, and we are happy to answer your questions about what you are interested in buying. In the outside wholesale market they are not used to that. They are accustomed to dealing with people who have been wholesale growing their entire life and they are just used to taking an order, not offering any advice. And in many cases the person taking your order can't offer advice because he or she is just a sales person who knows how to sell plants, but may have little experience in actually growing them.

I personally buy a lot of plants in the Buy/Sell area. The deals are just way too good to pass up. Often times a member might stumble on to a deal that you or I normally would never find and they actually buy up these deals and pass the savings to our members. For instance, I wanted some Harry Lauder's Walking Stick liners. But they are hard to find and I didn't know who was growing them or how to find them. One day I logged into the Buy/Sell area and one of our members near me in Ohio had them advertised for \$3.65. That's at least two dollars cheaper than I've ever seen them. I immediately ordered 300 of them. They were beautiful and are happily growing in my nursery.

One day of the members announced that he had found some rare Japanese maple varieties. \$11.00 to \$13.00 each! In just a few days time he had sold something like

\$10,000 worth of Japanese maples! All in the Buy/Sell area. Since that time he has become the go to source for Japanese maples in the Business Center. I personally have bought at least \$6,000 worth of Japanese maples from him.

But he's not the only selling Japanese Maples inside of the Buy/Sell area. We have a gal in Georgia that sells a lot, a gal in Louisiana that sells them, another guy in Georgia sold a bunch, a gal in Washington states sells a lot of Japanese Red Maple seedlings in the Buy/Sell area.

Since we have so many members out there beating the bushes everyday looking for the best deals on rooted cuttings, liners, small trees, pots, flats and other supplies that we need, few deals slip past us. Not to mention the new information and innovative ideas that get shared.

It's actually fun to go to the Backyard Business Center Buy/Sell area every day just to see what's being advertised on that day. The ads change quickly, things sell out fast, so sometimes you have to be quick like a bunny to get some of these deals. And now that the wholesale industry is really starting to pick back up after the recession, some things are sure to be in short supply so it's a huge advantage to have the other members looking out for what you need.

Is the [Backyard Growers Business Center](#) for everybody? No it is not. We actually control membership size and have to limit the number of new members at any given time. I spend a great deal of time offering advice to our members in the Business Center. Too many new members at one time and it's hard for me to keep up.

Is membership free or included with the **Small Plants Big Profits from Home** program. No, it is not free and it's not part of this program. It's an optional resource only for those that are truly interested and are serious about their backyard growing business.

When I started offering this resource I talked to members about pricing options and almost everybody agreed that they did not want to pay an on ongoing membership fee. So we've creating a pricing option that actually allows you to become a **Paid Up Member and You Can Enjoy Permanent Membership** to the Business Center. This option has been wildly popular and we now have permanent members that have been with me since the beginning and they haven't had to pay anything since they joined.

Of course the true value of the membership is being able to advertise plants for sale in the Buy/Sell area.

Okay, that's it for now.

Get started growing plants today.

Keep it simple. It really is a simple thing. Don't get all caught up in high tech gadgetry and complex infrastructure. Just grow some plants.

Make baby plants, then make more baby plants. Baby plants are your ticket to a better life!

Don't give up if your first efforts at plant propagation fail. I'm not sure why, but some

people come out of the gate and have incredible success and a few struggle a bit. When we delve into it, those who struggle I find have changed a few things. The plan that I've created for you works. Usually all you have to do is get back to the basics and you will see success.

Intermittent Mist is like magic when it comes to rooting cuttings! Other techniques work, but they can be really hit and miss. Intermittent mist has always worked so well for me that I don't even consider using other techniques, even though I teach many other things.

Invest in yourself and your business.

When you are starting a business it's not about "how little can I spend", it's about how can I best invest a little extra money to get up and running faster.

Thank you so much for getting involved in this wonderful industry! I wish you more success than you'll ever know.

Thank you and take care. Stay inspired. When you get discouraged go to the [Backyard Growers Business Center](#) and let the other members know that you are discouraged and why. They'll help you get beyond what ever it is that is troubling you.

I'll be there as well.

-Mike McGroarty

