

Plant Promotion—What is its Value and Role?

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WHY WE SHOULD PROMOTE GARDENING

When we talk about promotion, we are actually talking about promotion of the pastime of gardening, because it is within this pastime that our products (plants) are used. So how do we go about this? We must support every aspect of gardening at all opportunities and on every occasion. We must offer encouragement and advice wherever possible. The following are some examples of how we as professionals can support and promote the pastime of gardening.

1) Encourage good amenity planting. People who are exposed to plants in their public places start to expect them as a part of everyday life. Britain in Bloom is a good example of one of the reasons why bedding plants have become popular in the last decade.

2) We must sponsor and provide information for the media whether this be local newspapers, national magazines or television. As we all know, television is incredible as a promotion medium. We are fortunate that there are so many programmes on the television, any average week will see 3 to 4 hours devoted to gardening. The following of major gardening programmes is also substantial with the BBC *Gardeners World* regularly having nearly 4 million viewers.

3) We must, as an industry, participate in events which promote gardening in the widest sense—for example garden festivals.

4) We should always encourage amateurs who belong to local flower clubs, gardening societies or even womens institutes!

5) We should promote gardening as healthy exercise and one which reduces stress.

6) Gardens are relaxing and fun for all ages

7) Gardens can be used for all sorts of enjoyable pastimes.

All of us who are professional horticulturists must be seen to be “Environment Improvers”. The product that we grow and sell is of incredible benefit to the community and the environment. It is documented that a person inhales 23,000 times each day and this absorbs 35 lb of oxygen, all of which is produced by plants. Plants act as mops—catching much of the 12 million tons of pollutants released into the atmosphere each year by industry and motor vehicles. All these attributes are promotable, and will help to sell more plants.

We are also fortunate that we have such a beautiful and desirable product. We have plants that have: big or majestic flowers; delicate scent; masses of colour such as summer bedding plants; bold and exciting foliage; autumn or winter interest; fruit; and fascinating features such as cacti and carnivorous plants.

All these plants are used in gardens and gardening. Not only is gardening the country's second most popular hobby, after watching T.V, but also the most interesting and exciting. So the first rule for us all is to be excited—then you will excite others. Excitement leads to enthusiasm, and enthusiasm is the best possible form of promotion for the pastime and the plants which we all grow to support it.

GENERIC PLANT PROMOTION

Generic plant promotion should be looked upon as an umbrella—possibly provided by Trade Associations and operated on a national basis. Two examples of recent promotions are "Autumn, Nature's Time for Planting" and "Gardening for Beginners."

SPECIFIC PLANT PROMOTION

If you are to have any form of impact on the market you must be able to answer yes to the following questions:

- 1) Can I distribute my product on a national basis?
- 2) Am I capable of producing at least 40,000 and preferably 100,000 plants of the same variety at a time when the customer wants them?
- 3) Have I got the time and resources to handle a promotion?
- 4) Have I got the personality to promote a product?

So, how do we go about it? Firstly, you will need a plant—ideally it needs to be a new plant or at the very least a plant which is currently grown in very small quantities. It needs to be able to be propagated relatively easily and in large quantities. It needs to be able to be grown easily within your nursery production system.

If your plant comes up to these criteria then you will have to put your mind to other matters. If it is a new plant it will need a name. Everything depends on a name that is simple and easily remembered. You will need good photographs of the plant. You may need market research. You will need an advertising and PR agency, a designer and a good printer.

All these are required because you now have to get your plant known both to the garden centre retailers and the ultimate consumer, the amateur gardener. You will need to produce leaflets, talk to journalists, talk to your customers, exhibit at trade shows. Support your product at the retail outlet with point of sale material by means of labels, display boards, leaflets etc. An expensive and very time consuming occupation, believe me. You as a person will need fortitude, persistence, commitment and above all vision.

How can we tell the value of marketing? Ballerina trees have sold 245,000 trees in two years. *Scabiosa* 'Butterfly Blue' has sold nearly one million plants since its introduction in 1986. Both are heavily promoted plants. There are in the order of 2.7 million motor cars sold in the U.K. each year, a heavily promoted product.

In the U.K. we eat 750,000 tons of sweets and chocolates each year—29 lb for each man, woman and child. The top selling chocolate bar, Kit Kat, has sales of £170 million per year. The total wholesale nursery stock industry is valued at between £175 and £200 million per annum. Chocolate is heavily promoted. Its consumption is increasing by up to 16% per annum despite the health warnings!

So what is the 'bottom line'? I believe that we can clearly see both within our own industry and in other non-related industries that promotion will sell more product. It is not necessary for every nursery company in the U.K. to be promoting **individual** plants, in fact it is desirable that they don't otherwise everything will be promoted. It is, however, essential that we wholeheartedly and consistently support every aspect of gardening. Above all enthusiasm for the product which we all produce is absolutely vital.