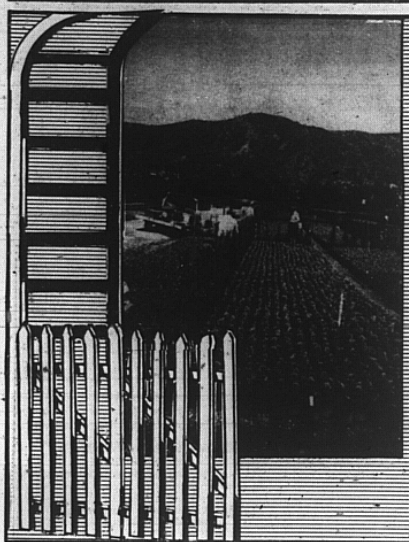


# Home/Garden



Recorder/Lucio Russom

## Monrovia Nursery: A major wholesale growing operation

When we bring a healthy young shrub or tree home from the nursery we don't give a lot of thought to how it got there, but when I was visiting my son in California recently I had a chance to meet Roger Duer who took me on a tour of the Monrovia Nursery.

This wholesale nursery sells 37 million plants every year to retailers all over the country. The names of wholesalers aren't familiar to most of us, but if you are an inveterate reader of TV show credits, you will have noticed that Monrovia is one of the companies underwriting the very popular Victory Garden on public TV.

I was particularly impressed by the thrift and efficiency of the operation. Pruning crews which keep plants in good condition, save the prunings and bring them to the propagation shed where these cuttings are rooted. Watching the propagation crew, I learned a few tricks that might be useful to anyone who'd like to propagate their own plants.

A card is created for each kind of plant, listing exactly what type of cutting should be made, leaf, stem or whatever, what medium is used, and what rooting hormone formula. A gardener at home wouldn't have to worry about so many variables, but this kind of card would make propagation very easy.

Workers in the propagation shed work with cuttings that have been washed in two solutions to insure they are clean and free of pests and diseases. Sanitation is even more vital for the professional than the hobbyist because they cannot risk an infestation that would run through the entire nursery. The whole propagation shed is scrubbed down every night with disinfectant.

After washing, the cuttings are put in a tray of wet perlite mixed with a little peat moss. When filled these trays are placed on special concrete rooting beds that are heated with thermostatically controlled hot water pipes imbedded in the cement, misted every 18 minutes or so during the day, and given a thorough watering every week. Every effort has been made to provide ideal rooting conditions. Later the rooting trays are taken to the potting shed where the newly rooted plants are placed in two-inch pots.

Fifteen million plants annually are sold in two-inch pots as liners, and are tended in a shaded 21-acre area. Other plants are grown on and later are potted in one-, or even five-gallon containers.

Several canning machines dot the nursery. The largest and fastest machine, staffed by an 11-person crew, can pot 40,000 plants in a single 9-hour workday, a rate that makes my head spin.

All of these plants need water and soil, and I was impressed with the careful use of resources. The nursery uses perlite and peat moss for cuttings, but for older plants, a variety of soil mixes made from redwood sawdust, sand, perlite and peat moss. There was a veritable mountain of redwood sawdust and horse manure that was being composted for use in the large pots. Duer smiled ruefully and said these waste products of local industry and business used to be free for the hauling, but now even waste products are big business.

All the run-off from the watering of these millions of plants is collected, cleaned and reused. Again, there is an automatic monitoring system to check the level of fertilizer salts in the water, so that only the appropriate amounts will be added before the water is used again.

Monrovia sells over 1000 different types of plants, including many maples, junipers, rhododendrons and ornamental grasses. They always have new varieties in development that they then introduce to the trade.

## Ask the Gardeners

By DOC and KATY ABRAHAM  
The Christian Science Monitor

Q — Are there any varieties of camellias hardy enough to grow in northern Ohio? From advertisements, I have ordered varieties that are supposed to tolerate temperatures as low as minus 15 degrees F., but none have survived.

Having lived in Georgia, I miss the beautiful shrub. I have taken proper care of the ones I've planted, so that could not be the problem. I planted them in a sheltered spot where they would not get wind in winter and could have partial shade in summer.

I made the soil acidic, with plenty of humus, and watered the camellias during dry spells. I fed them with cottonseed meal and used oak-leaf mulch from December through summer. Do you know of any dependable nursery where I could order truly hardy camellias?

L.S.  
Kent, Ohio

A. — While visiting Longwood Gardens in Kennett Square, Pa., last year we learned of a breeding program in which specialists researching camellia hardiness have developed some varieties that are hardy to minus 5 degrees F. Others have been proven to be hardy to minus 12 degrees F. We understand that these varieties have been released for sale. Some others, expected to be hardy to minus 15 degrees F., are still being tested. We were told to contact the American Camellia Society for information. The address is Box 1217, Fort Valley, GA 31030.

Q — Last spring I was given a potted hibiscus with a beautiful red bloom. It continued blooming for about three weeks. When the weather warmed, I set it outdoors on our patio, which gets early morning sun and bright light at other times. The hibiscus has stayed bright and glossy, and it had some blooms in midsummer.

I moved it onto my sun porch when nights began to get cooler and reported it, since it had outgrown its pot. Is it hardy enough to be planted outdoors? If not, can I prune it to accommodate my limited space indoors? Can I expect it to bloom repeatedly?

E.S.  
Rockford, Ill.

A. — Some strains of potted Hibiscus rosa-sinensis can be expected to bloom more consistently than others, if they receive bright light and night temperature above 55 degrees F. Plant breeders are making great strides with this relatively new introduction into the potted plant market. We recently visited Yoder Brothers, Barberton, Ohio, one of the largest producers of potted hibiscus. They have developed a strain called "Everblooming Hibiscus," which will bloom almost continuously, with short rests in between, if treated properly.

Seven vivid colors are now available. Plants cannot go dry, or they lose blooms and buds. The best way to water them is to pour water through the soil until it comes out the bottom; then repeat when the soil is no longer wet on top. Never let the plants sit in the water.

During spring and summer feed them monthly, half as often during winter. They can be pruned and shaped in the spring to keep them a manageable size. Plants are not hardy in areas where there is frost.

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## Pat Leuchtman Between The Rows

Japanese maples are beautiful small trees that are ideally suited for the small garden. The foliage is deep red from spring through the summer and in the fall changes to brilliant shades.

Bloodgood is a fairly tall Japanese maple, reaching a height of about 15 feet. It is a vigorous grower with deep red to black-red foliage until it turns brilliant crimson in the fall.

Crimson Queen is a graceful Japanese maple with a cascading form. The finely cut leaves are doubly lobed on all edges and retain their deep red color through the summer. Fall color is bright scarlet.

Other Japanese maples introduced by Monrovia include Burgundy Lace and Oshio Beni.

I asked Roger what it was like to garden in California and he laughed. "Gardeners have it too easy in California. They can have a garden installed and they never have to do any work. It'll thrive no matter what."

He added this was not too good for nurserymen because plants never die and have to be replaced, so they are encouraging gardeners to "Review and renew."

In New England, old Father Winter forces us to review and renew, but with nurseries like Monrovia, we can look forward to adding new plants as well as replacing old favorites.

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