

ORDER FILLING AND SHIPPING OF CONTAINER-GROWN PLANTS

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Polk Nursery Co.

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Polk Nursery Co. is a 100 acre container nursery located in central Florida. Shipping of container plants is an integral part of the program of any wholesale nursery. This year we shipped 2,000,000 containers; this included 600,000 container rose bushes in bud and bloom. We do not use cardboard boxes in our operation.

Order filling and shipping is a challenge itself. The first problem in our operation is a logistical one being divided into two locations, 5 miles apart. Order filling starts in our office which is staffed by an extremely talented group of individuals. Orders are normally phoned into our office by the customer, or by our two salesmen.

Orders are figured by hand to fill a truck with maximum number of units within a specific route or geographical area within economic reason. The next step is on to the computer for customer invoicing, extending of total plant quantity and size, and print-out pick-up sheet for our field pick-up crew. Plant tags are then assembled for plants not previously tagged on our potting machine.

The field shipping crews receive each pick-up sheet containing all pertinent information for their particular truck load. The crew is informed as to what types of shipping racks to use, quantity of each plant, location — bed number, and what color load they are assigned.

The shipping racks are designed to mechanize our operation since we deal heavily in "Quick Turn" plants. Shipping racks are divided into three categories. Two tier with 52 inch spacing between shelves, three tiers with 36 inch spacing between shelves and four tiers with 26 inch spacing between shelves. The racks are built and repaired in the nursery by our full-time welder.

The four tier rack is utilized whenever possible because it allows us to get the maximum number of units in a truck load. Plant height is the determining factor and double stacking is permissible if that particular group of plants will adhere to double stacking without breakage. So many of the tropicals and subtropical plants we grow will not withstand double stacking. Woody ornamentals are in a different class and most will withstand double or triple stacking.

The total number of 1-gal (6") containers we can ship in a trailer would range from 3600 to 6000 if we double stack and fill

our trailer aisle with wood shelves. The shipping crew is usually composed of three or four members. The crew chief in charge accepts responsibility for the quality of the load. The racks are loaded onto a tractor-drawn four-trailer train with a forklift. Field pick-up begins with random stops throughout the field to select and load the particular plants and quantities designated by the pick-up sheet.

When the racks are filled they are unloaded by forklift, and lined up by color load in our loading dock. Shipping racks are forklifted directly into the delivery trailers and are ready for delivery. The truck driver begins disseminating plants from the racks to fill the invoice of each individual customer. All delivery trailers are equipped with two side doors and rear double doors. All plants are tagged to facilitate the customer and eliminate the driver uncertainty as to plant name.

Our fleet of trucks number 13 at the present time. We have 16 field tractors (35-40 H.P., PTO rated), and 18 four trailer field trains. Our total work force fluctuates with the time of year, with spring being our busy season.

Cost of order filling is approximately 2¢ per unit on a 6" container. Delivery cost in Florida is figured at 50¢ per mile. However, we do not charge freight in Florida. Trucks leaving Florida carry a delivery cost of approximately \$1.00 per mile and freight rates are calibrated accordingly. For example, a 6" container delivered to the Atlanta, Georgia area would carry a freight rate of 10¢.

I believe our system of order filling and shipping has a great number of advantages over growers that utilize other means. However, we are constantly searching for better means of improving our system. Ours is a never ending search for better days through better ways with a touch of economic fortitude and a strong desire to service our customers.