

## LITERATURE CITED

1. Cox, Pam. 1985. Bedding plant boom. *Greenhouse Manager* 4(6): 74-76.

### **CROP FORECASTING FOR TWO TO THREE-YEAR CROPS**

RICHARD L. MARSHALL

Chesapeake Nurseries, Inc.

*Pemberton Drive*

Salisbury, Maryland 21801

What do we grow? Broadleaved evergreens primarily in raised field beds. How many do we grow? Currently over 300,000 plants of about 100 cultivars annually. What is the length of production cycle from propagation to sale?

Almost ½ of production is sold in 2 to 2½ years.

Almost ½ of production is sold in 3 to 3½ years.

(Exceptions — A few items are sold within 15 months. A few items are held for almost 4 years.)

#### HOW DO WE FORECAST FOR 2 TO 3 YEAR CROPS?

Our overall business philosophy actually sets the basic foundation for deciding what plants to grow and in what quantity. Over the years we have aimed to:

1. Build our nursery by growing the best broad-leaved evergreens available in the industry.
2. Limit production to what we can produce while maintaining the very top quality available.
3. Make a fair profit consistently.
4. Avoid the boom and bust cycles common to our industry.
5. Efficiently execute a planned production cycle.
6. Sell out every year at our preset catalog price.
7. Build business volume by supplying quality and service that holds regular customers who purchase in increasing quantities every year.

Of course, each grower has to choose the plan or philosophy that suits him and his nursery operation. There are certainly advantages and disadvantages to the plan we have chosen.

One of the advantages is that it makes deciding what and how many to grow fairly simple and effective. Our forecast now for two to three years ahead is primarily based on what we have been growing and selling in the past. These numbers

come from over 20 years of adjusting. Much adjusting during the early years was done by trial and error.

To sell out every year, we must have the proper mix. Our forecasting is enhanced by fine tuning our propagation list each year at the last opportunity in mid- to late June. By this date about  $\frac{2}{3}$  of our next year's inventory of salable plants has been booked. It is fairly easy to run down the inventory print-out of orders booked for the 100 or so items we grow. We can see what is moving or not moving and spot trends that are very current. Adjustments, usually small but important in estimating the proper mix, are made to the propagation list.

While setting the propagation figures each year is, in essence, casting in stone our two- to three-year forecasts, there are several items other than current ordering trends that influence our forecasting.

Being aware of what the customer wants is important. Telephone communication and visits with customers help. Several years ago we sent out a very comprehensive four-page questionnaire to our customers and got back a lot of good information about what they wanted, including not only cultivars but also service. Two years ago we sent a small form with each trailer shipped from the nursery. Practically every customer completed and returned the form, which gave us important feedback.

Visits with other growers help in our forecasting by making us aware of what others are growing.

Attending trade shows and meetings informs us of what is happening in our industry. This information helps in better forecasting.

Searching out new plants or plants new to us, testing them and growing the good ones helps in getting the proper mix our customers want. Selecting new additions is one of the hardest things to forecast successfully. Over the years there have been many items that we liked and tried but for various reasons, often hardiness related, they have not been right for us.

Also factored into our forecasting would be our long-range plans looking out five to 10 years or more and considering anticipated expansion or major changes in production.

I am thankful that I do not have to attempt to factor into our forecasting the fluctuations of interest rates and housing starts and the ups and downs of the economy. The more I see the experts unable to predict the economy with any degree of accuracy, the more I realize our goal of growing good plants in moderate numbers suits me just fine.

In summary, I would say the accuracy of our forecasting is

determined more by successful execution of our business plan or philosophy than by being astute in predicting the future.

## **FORECASTING FOR CROPS: 3 TO 5 YEARS**

**EARLE ROBERT MARVIN**

*Wildwood Nurseries*

*Route 4, Box 616*

*Walterboro, South Carolina 29488*

Wildwood Nurseries is a three generation nursery, which will be 50 years old in 1986. My grandparents, W.R. and Alta Marvin, started our nursery, planting plants they loved, azaleas and camellias. Today, we are not so fortunate, we have to choose plant material that will meet wide geographical conditions and also meet the need of a changing population and environment.

Our nursery is located on 480 acres, of which we use about 150. We have a very intensive field operation, extending from field to container operation. This field to container operation gives us flexibility, and we have been working on improving this system for 11 years.

My father, Robert E. Marvin, and I own Wildwood Nurseries. Dad is a landscape architect. We base our sales goals and plant material cutlivars on the needs of the landscape architect. Their certain needs are our specialty, whether it be small or large evergreens, flowering trees, large trees for sun control, large or small screening material, plant material for a certain location, leaf size or color for the purpose of depth perception or esthetic effect in the landscape. We have a mailing that goes to landscape architects throughout the country, advising what we have and asking what they want.

We then consider our choice of plant material based on its ability to sell well, its geographic range, and its freedom from maintenance problems. Due to our particular methods of growing and rotation, we like our plant material to be fast-growing and what we call reasonably transplantable. If we agree that a plant meets a number of these requirements, it goes on trial. We have approximately 25 plants on trial at this time. The plant is then observed for liveability after planting, its ability to be moved or harvested with minimum lost. For trial purposes, we usually plant 25 to 50 plants. If we receive good customer response to this new plant, then we proceed with planting based on sales demand.

We do not believe in planting a plant because it is different or because it is selling well at the moment. We do consider