

PROPAGATION OF PLANTS FOR CONTAINERS

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We are wholesale producers of container-grown plants and our object is to produce a plant which is well-grown and well-rooted in the container, attractive to the eye and easily transportable, as we feel a plant of this kind is best suited for self-service garden centre sale. These points need not apply to material produced for landscape work where larger plants are required.

There are two methods of producing a plant in a container:—

1. *Container-grown.* Plants are grown in containers throughout their life.
2. *Field-grown then containerised.* One-year liners or older plants are lifted from the field and potted into containers.

In order to achieve our objectives we use the "container-grown" method to produce all our plants, with the exception of trees and roses which, because of their method of propagation, do not fit easily into this system.

We chose this system for the following reasons:

1. We have more control over plant growth, which in turn leads to a more uniform product.
2. The plants in their pots receive no check and, therefore, suffer less from yellowing and loss of leaf.
3. The final potting into a 7-inch polythene container is much easier when dealing with a well-established plant in a Jiffy Pot than with a large bare-rooted plant.
4. We have no existing business in bare-rooted, lined-out ornamental stock.

Our system of propagation may be summarised as follows:—

1. All the cuttings obtained from stock beds or from young stock are inserted in trays and placed under mist. A few subjects are raised from seed by direct sowing into Jiffy Pots.

Deciduous cuttings — May to September

Evergreen cuttings — September to May.

2. (a) Cuttings rooted before the end of August are potted into 3-inch Jiffy Pots and packed in wire-mesh trays, 16 pots per tray.
(b) Cuttings rooted after the end of August are left in cutting trays and overwintered in a frost-free greenhouse until spring and then potted up into 3-inch Jiffy Pots.
(c) Evergreen cuttings rooted over-winter are potted in spring and early summer into 3-inch Jiffy Pots.

3. All plants in Jiffy Pots are over-wintered in either —
 - i) hessian-covered shelters,
 - ii) cold frames with hessian covers,
 - iii) frost-free glasshouses.
4. Final potting of Jiffy-Potted plants takes place from April to June, and is carried out on a piece-work basis using female labour from our Marketing Company which conveniently has a slack period about this time of year. The Jiffy-Potted plants, having been trimmed over with a knife where necessary, are transported in their trays to our “growing-on” site, situated on an old aerodrome runway.

Compost is mixed with a hired cement mixer and consists of a peat/sand mixture (3:1) with a base dressing of Plantasan added. The compost is transported into the potting shed by means of a conveyor belt, and the conveyor is serviced by a tractor using a front-mounted bucket lift.

The potted plants in their final containers are transported out of the potting shed on trolleys and then the trolleys are towed down the runway which is laid out with a series of capillary beds. The plants are removed singly from the trolley and stood out on the beds, where they remain till they reach saleable size. Provision is made to cover certain subjects with Hessian covers over winter.

In certain cases, where propagating material is short and it is necessary to purchase from an outside source, we buy one of the following: —

- i) unrooted cuttings,
 - ii) rooted cuttings,
 - iii) young plants established in 3-inch pots,
- and by doing this we can conveniently absorb the material into our existing system.

The majority of deciduous plants are ready for sale towards the end of the summer following potting into final containers. Conifers and slow-growing evergreens usually require two growing seasons in the final pots before reaching saleable size.

This system is used for hardy nursery stock and any plant which will not fit into the system has to be discarded. Plants which require special treatment during propagation and which we wish to grow must be purchased from an outside source in an acceptable form. Alternatively, we must set up a special section in our propagating department to deal with the exceptions; we can only justify this step if the particular item is required in quantity and is difficult to obtain from a specialist producer at an economic price.