

## Plants With Commercial Promise

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### INTRODUCTION

With the word "commercial" in the title, this has become a conservative selection list of plants easy-to-propagate, relatively fast, relatively "known", and with propagation stock available. Perhaps the greatest factor in profitability of nursery stock today is speed of growth with ease of culture. The following plants are offered as examples of plants either presently expanding rapidly in usage, or projected to do so in the near future.

### HERBACEOUS PERENNIALS

*Verbena*—such perennials as 'Homestead Purple'—very easily propagated; exceptionally fast growing; long season of color; low maintenance—all are vastly superior to annual types being grown as bedding plants; U.S.D.A. Zones 7-9.

*Pachysandra terminalis* 'Green Sheen'—superior pachysandra for the south; heat tolerant; spreads quickly; glossy leaves; U.S.D.A. Zones 3-9.

*Ardisia japonica* 'Chirimen'—most cold-hardy cultivar from the North Carolina State University Arboretum (NCSU) Arboretum trials; 3 to 4 in. tall; fine texture; easy and fast growing; U.S.D.A. Zones 7-9.

*Muhlenbergia dumosa*, Bamboo Muhley—very different fine-textured grass from Arizona; fast growing from seed; U.S.D.A. Zones 7-9.

*Canna ×generalis* 'Stuttgart'—new white variegated foliage cultivar from Stuttgart, Germany via Brooklyn Botanic Garden; U.S.D.A. Zones 7-9.

*Helleborus* sp. and cvs. — see new English and German books on modern types; many colors; cultivars exciting and will be seed grown from self-pollinated plants.

*Euphorbia* sp. and cvs.—widely variable types of long-season interest; easy to propagate by cuttings and fast growing.

### VINES

*Bignonia capreolata* 'Tangerine Beauty'—selection of native "cross vine" intermediate in color between the species and 'Atrosanguinea'—reblooms; evergreen; very easy from cuttings and fast growing; U.S.D.A. Zones 6-9.

*Campsis grandiflora* 'Morning Calm'—NCSU Arboretum introduction from Korean collection; showy orange flowers in mid-summer; has juvenile/adult tissue (juvenile root easily but are slower to flower; adult are difficult to root but heavy flowering); U.S.D.A. Zones 6-9.

*Wisteria* sp. and cvs.—with new Australian book *Wisterias* by Peter Valder, the market will need a good range of known superior cultivar plants; use only cutting-grown materials.

**DECIDUOUS SHRUBS**

Strong direction in last 5 years to fast gallons—*Caryopteris*, *Buddleja*, *Spiraea*, etc.—good cheap long-season color.

***Zenobia pulverulenta* ‘Woodlander Blue’**—Ericaceous plant with white flowers; blue foliage; great gold/red fall color; easily propagated from softwood cuttings; U.S.D.A. Zones 6-9.

***Rhododendron prunifolium***—summer flowering native azalea; red flowers; fragrant and hummingbird interest tie-ins; U.S.D.A. Zones 5-9.

***Syringa oblata* var. *dilatata***, Korean lilac—huge market for south; looks and smells like a “real” lilac; tissue-culture propagation; U.S.D.A. Zones 5-9.

***Aesculus parviflora* ‘Rogers’**—with new softwood cutting pioneered by Bir, potential cultivars are an option; this selection with longer inflorescences; U.S.D.A. Zones 5-9.

***Daphne*** species are finally coming to south—with great profits for those who master them—*D. odora*, *genkwa*, *mezereum*, *caucasica*.

***Stachyurus salicifolius***—the only true rare “newcomer” to this list; evergreen; long, narrow, graceful foliage; chains of yellow flowers; U.S.D.A. Zones 7-9 (possibly).

**TREES**

***Magnolia ×kewensis* ‘Wada’s Memory’**—most emphasis in Magnolias is on the ephemeral flowers whereas foliage and overall form are more important for commercial street tree use—this in one of the best for such purpose; white flowers; superior dark green foliage; outstanding form; U.S.D.A. Zones 4-8.

***Magnolia virginiana* ‘Santa Rosa’**—over the last decade cultivars of *Magnolia grandiflora* have achieved great commercial success; there is now a great need for cultivar sweet bay magnolias in trade; much variation among seedlings; this form from Woodlanders Nursery, Aiken, GA; most evergreen in our trials; very vigorous; large flowers; U.S.D.A. Zones 6-9.

**CONIFERS**

Huge variety and worthy of a several-hour-long talk; many new references available; diverse color, texture, size, form, production speed; much more useful in south than thought—see Atlanta Botanic Garden plantings for uncommon taxa.

***Cupressus arizonica* ‘Carolina Sapphire’** [syn. *C. arizonica* var. *glabra* ‘Carolina Sapphire’]—fastest growing conifer with 5 to 6 ft per year possible when young; blue foliage; does not age well— but market will not care when they can buy them cheaply; U.S.D.A. Zones 6-9.

***Cryptomeria japonica* ‘Yoshino’ and ‘Benjamin Franklin’**—fast screening materials and good specimens—already extremely popular and growing; U.S.D.A. Zones 6-9.

***Thuja* ‘Giganteoides’**—hybrid of *T. occidentalis* × *T. plicata*; very fast with 4 to 5 ft per year; probably the next Leyland Cypress in the mass market; U.S.D.A. Zones 5-9.

*Cephalotaxus*—many species and cultivars; too slow to be truly mass market but may be so good as to overcome that; deer-proof; U.S.D.A. Zones 5-9.

*Taxus chinensis*—easy to propagate; fast growing; heat tolerant; with uses as specimen, sheared hedges, and Christmas trees; U.S.D.A. Zones 5-9.

*Taxodium distichum* and *T. distichum* var. *imbricatum*—huge need for cultivar production in south for commercial uniformity; U.S.D.A. Zones 5-9.

### **OTHER PLANT MATERIALS WITH PROMISE**

Many other plants exist which are excellent garden plants with many merits—yet may have limited “normal” commercial opportunities for a variety of reasons. Three examples of such “good but not mass commercial plants” include: *Cercis canadensis* var. *texensis* ‘Oklahoma’—outstanding leathery glossy foliage and dark maroon flowers; *C. canadensis* ‘Appalachian Red’—stunning color, closest to red of any redbud, iridescent color; and *Mahonia xintermedia* cultivars such as ‘Arthur Menzies’—dramatic foliage, showy mid-winter fragrant flowers. All three have propagation problems that limit speed and extent of commercial build-up for marketing.

### **CONCLUSION**

The future determinants of mass commercial potential will move from the plant qualities to the marketing techniques.

Advertising, color photographs, and innovative packaging will increasingly determine the mass sellers. Good ornamental characteristics, though important, won't be enough for success. New sales formats such as CD-ROM catalogs; World Wide Web marketing; computer and video choices; TV shopping by mail will increasingly dominate customer views and purchase of new plants.