

## MEETING THE CHALLENGE OF INCREASED DEMAND FOR GROUND COVER PLANTS

B. MINIUS

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The magic of landscaping is definitely here to stay and we are faced with the challenge of producing exactly what customers want.

We have at least four major groups of ground cover plant users:

- (1) Suburban home owners
- (2) Suburban and city townhouse and flat owners or dwellers
- (3) Urban landscape contractors
- (4) Contractors of large scale landscape restoration, conservation and management projects.

The first two groups of customers deserve particular attention. They buy mostly exotic intensive-care ground cover plants. Plant propagators can foster business goodwill and can make a major contribution to the aesthetics of the environment in which these people live by merchandising well selected, high quality plants for the particular locality.

Sometimes these customers will need advice on how to use ground cover plants to the best advantage, how the ground cover plants can display other taller plants to advantage and how, with combination of ground cover and larger shrubs and trees, their homes, townhouses or flats can be landscaped without overcrowding or hiding their residences. A little effort in experimenting with these plants and propagating in sufficient quantities, slightly younger plants in smaller containers will mutually benefit us and our customers. Also, it is within the capacity of the average plant propagator to offer customers the most suitable ground cover plants on a pre-order basis, grown specially for home landscapers in smaller tubes or pots arranged in dozens in seedling boxes etc., thus enabling those customers to buy larger quantities of ground cover plant at prices they can afford.

The third and fourth groups of our customers — the urban and industrial landscape contractors, usually pay good prices for large volume without question. But, they have to meet specifications and therefore, if we want to supply large contractors with high quality plants, methods and management have to be extremely efficient. It is, however, a very challenging new field for most plant propagators.

Every region of Australia does have its own specifically adapted assortment of native plants with potential for large-scale ground cover projects. Landscape architects and designers feel a great need for hardy, handsome and low maintenance natives. The local environment in every locality of our great country could be enhanced more economically and more sensibly managed if we would offer for such large projects enough good native ground cover plants.

The plant propagator has an important part to play in this field. We could, in our way, contribute in the search for, discovery of, selection of, and finally the breeding of new cultivars of native species of ground cover plants.

We could be the first supporters and possibly conveners of Regional and National Centres for native plant research, from which breeding and distribution of clonal material to plant propagators could occur. We badly need such centres; centres supported by adequate funds and with continuity of set programmes that could develop major discoveries and production of good material. It is our task to be the first advocates of such a concept. All those natives:- *Hibertia*, *Pratia*, *Podocarpus*, *Myoporum*, prostrate *Grevillea*, *Petersoonia*, *Notelia*, geranium, *Parahebe*, *Scaveola* and many other, known and unknown native plants and grasses suitable for the role of ground cover plants are important enough to go Regional or National for their improvement.

## PRACTICAL HORTICULTURAL TRAINING

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I have spent many years in different branches of horticulture. Never have I seen an area that needs more attention than practical training. The trade is crying out for help in training — training for young and old; for nurserymen; and even the teaching staff themselves. Many think that the institutes are not geared to cope so they will not send their young to train there. The whole structure of training must be overhauled. There are many dedicated people working hard at it now but nowhere near enough. Training is the responsibility of all in the trade — educators, nurserymen, parks departments, botanic gardens, apprenticeship boards, students, apprentices, and nursery staff. We must all work together to get the results.