

## PLANTNAPPING

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**Abstract.** Plant thievery is rapidly being recognized as one of the horticulture industry's major nemesis. Referred to by many as the cancer of agribusiness, it spreads quietly but deals its deadly blow not only to commercial and retail growers but is now regarded by many police agencies as the number one crime in Florida, based on occurrence statistics and dollar value. Precautionary, corrective and punitive measures must be initiated, instituted and monitored, very much like the use of cobalt in the treatment of cancer in humans.

### Plant thief profile

The "Jesse James" of the plant world is predominantly male, white, age eighteen to twenty-seven, of non-foreign descent, often housed in commune-type accommodations, thus enhancing the arena of success through on going in-house planning and strategy conclaves. These headquarters are typically old homes in varying degrees of disrepair and decay, heavily overgrown with vegetation and usually located in low income neighborhoods either on the outer fringes of cities or in the hard core downtown ghetto areas.

### Merchandising the product

To operate successfully the plant pilferer must apply sound management principles to merchandise his product in a manner that insures quality, minimum cost, and safety. Further, he must be skilled in taking his merchandise to market.

To meet the criteria of getting quality material safely and with little overhead, the plant thief does his product research in disguises that take the form of a sight-seeing bicyclist, a meter reader, garbage man, lawn man, door-to-door salesman, or in the height of sophistication, air re-

connaissance. The latter usually targets in on large commercial nurseries and groves.

Another method used to insure good source of supply can be simply captioned as "plant-plant," i.e. gain employment at the nursery to be victimized thereby tabulating data on stock, operational procedure, and company security. The rest is purely academic.

Merchandising the product is another matter. The "northern mall market" was the most lucrative and often used client for specimen plants in early 1974, but in the years that followed, the most dependable buyer has become the nursery industry itself.

### Nabbing the plantnapper

In Dade County, Florida, through the efforts of a nurserymen's vigilante group, hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of stolen plants were documented from the scene of the crime on down to the sale to propagators and commercial nurserymen in the Redlands area. Other caches were traced from origin to sales to growers in Broward, Palm Beach and Collier counties as well as more distant sporadic deposits.

Constant surveillance, industry education, inter-nursery "hot-line" activities by the vigilantes, including actual apprehensions, made great strides to discourage the plant-napper. But even more successful, was the threatening and cajoling of nurserymen not to buy suspect material, thereby cutting off the plant thief's market place.

Additional activities by this watchdog group has involved, services for the often plagued residential community, the installation of security methods among nurserymen and has prosecuted fellow nurserymen who continued to aid and abet plant criminals by continuing to buy obviously stolen material after repeated warnings.

Statistics on so nebulous a subject are not readily compiled. However, estimates by industry leaders have indicated a marked decrease in plant crime activity following an all time "millions of dollars" high in 1976. Stronger legislation, greater community awareness and residue from correctional work done to date all point to a sharp decline of plantnapping in future years.

## MERCHANDISING THE HORTICULTURAL COMMODITY

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**Abstract.** "Selling your place of business" is the name of the game; not in the sense of putting a price tag on the company, but instead marketing two commodities: (1) image, and (2) authority in the community. This philosophy, coupled with the basics of good merchandising will open doors toward success. Through trial and error the author has built an inventory of programs that work.

### Image Builders

**Diagnostic services.** Send a trouble shooter to your customers' homes at least once a week. Identifying diseases and other customer problems by telephone is a mortal sin. For greatest efficiency, be sure the clerk that handles the request gets accurate information and details to the point that the trouble shooter can check the client's request even if no one is home. A simple field memorandum stuffed in the mailbox accomplishes the purpose and satisfies the homeowner.

**Continuing education.** Build programs for the public. These can take the form of evening classes with guest

lecturers, landscape design workshops, clinics, tours, and demonstrations.

*Public service activities.* Work in conjunction with local newspapers, radio and television stations. The media are committed to a designated number of hours of community service and welcome your assistance in planning demonstrations on how to prepare the home-owner for a hurricane, injecting palm trees for lethal yellowing, arranging workshops for senior citizens and other organized informational projects.

*Over and above the call programs.* Offer services such as speakers' bureaus, plant loans and donating material for worthy causes.

*Citizens advisory board.* Establish sounding board groups in the community to help solve company decorum and other problems and establish rapport.

*S.C.O.R.E.* Involve this fine organization of retired persons for mutual public relations.

*Use your own label.* Seek out commodities that are compatible to use your own firm's label on for residual prestige benefits, i.e. fertilizer, bagged soil, and gravel.

*Be a joiner.* Play a major role in trade organizations, civic groups and local government.

*Ecology and charities.* Involve the company in paper drives, recycling, energy conservation and worthy charities.

*Authority builders.* Establish yourself and your firm as an expert in the community.

*Court and appraisal services.* Qualify as an expert witness within the court system.

*Judging competition.* Offer staff for judging flower shows, orchid and rose exhibitions, design competitions, and others.

*Certification of staff.* Educational certification programs are available through the Florida Nurserymen and Growers Association, the Agricultural Extension Service and other agencies. Encourage employees to gain accreditation for self confidence and more authoritative job execution.

*Architectural and design services.* Employ trained, knowledgeable staff to help not only the homeowners, but civic and charitable groups with planning and design.

### Conclusion

We have only scratched the surface of all the promotional possibilities that are there for the taking. Volumes have and will be written on the subject of creating a positive image and establishing a reputation of authority. This report cannot be concluded without mention of the importance of the role employers play in attaining these goals for the firm.

Image and authority within an organization are tremendously important, for the employee mirrors the company he works for. In addition to fair labor practices and intelligent administrative guidance, sound staff can be molded through employee tutoring seminars, incentive programs, in-house competition and other morale builders.

"Selling your business" through image and authority must be done within, then without.

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## CARE OF PLATYCERIUM SPORELINGS

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**Abstract. My own experience in raising *Platynerium* sporelings with a guideline for fertilization and pest control. Mounting materials and procedures are discussed.**

When one desires to own a very special *Platynerium* (staghorn) that does not pup and can only be reproduced from spores, other than to purchase a fairly mature expensive plant, one has the option to buy a collected *Platynerium* from the wilds, which is usually an older and a far more hardy plant or buy a tender young sporeling.

It is most unfortunate that so many people who so excitedly purchase a small *Platynerium* sporeling soon become disappointed in losing the plant simply because they did not follow a few common practices.

The infant sporeling usually comes in a pot and growing in a medium that is heavy and holds too much moisture. This growing medium in which the sporeling has been placed into directly from the spore box is fine but only up to this stage. With the very hot and humid weather that we have in Miami, certain precautions must be taken in order to avoid the possibility of the plant developing a fungus that will polka dot brown spots on the fronds and many times, if neglected, reach the bud, which is the

heart of the plant and destroy it. Therefore, we must carefully remove this growing medium.

The sporeling has very little root system, so that when removing the plant from the pot, which should be done once it has attained at least two to three inches in width, wash the complete sporeling in a small bucket of water to remove the growing medium. Gently handle the roots in the water so that most of the medium falls loose.

Once the sporeling has been removed from the pot and washed, it is ready for mounting. Soak sphagnum moss in a pail of water, press the excess water from the moss and pack it firmly on the mounting board. In the center of the moss, press in an indentation for the sporeling. Place the sporeling with roots directly and securely into this spot. Now you are ready to wire the sporeling on to the mounting board.

Using a wood staple gun instead of nails and either thin coated plastic wire or thick nylon fishing tackle, start at the top, crisscross the wires until you reach the sporeling in a "lacing shoe" manner. When possible, wire always under the base shield and never on top of a fresh new growth. NEVER wire over the bud and NEVER use copper wire on a *Platynerium* because copper is toxic to all plants.

The staple gun allows for greater control of pressure so that you can firmly mount the sporeling or any size *Platynerium* securely to the mounting board.

Hang the sporeling high up where the plant can get good air circulation and good filtered sun light. Remember, all *Platyneriums* are epiphytes. Think of how they are grown in the wilds. Water thoroughly and then permit the moss to dry out. Water again only after you have made a test