



NEWS FROM

# SUMMER HILL

Winter/Spring 2013

## John Nassif Receives Award

At this year's Winter Symposium the Connecticut Nurserymen's Foundation was proud to present its Distinguished Service Award to John Nassif. John has been employed at Summer Hill Nursery since 1979 and is currently the Vice President in charge of production. He is a past president of both the CNLA and the CNF. During his 34 years in the nursery industry he has served on numerous committees for both of these organizations. He was influential in the creation of several CNF fund raising events during the early years of the Foundation. All of us at Summer Hill Nursery congratulate John on this achievement.

## Custom Propagation

Sometimes things you are not looking for, find you. That is the case with our custom propagation. Although we never planned on doing this, we are now producing quite a few cuttings, grafts and liners for other nurserymen. This ranges from propagating several thousand cuttings for a large grower to producing liners from a single variegated branch of an otherwise normal plant for a landscape nursery.

I'm writing this to let you know that we have facilities to either graft or root cuttings for you – especially if you have found something unusual.

Any questions about this – give us a call.

Staff Writer, Editor, etc. -  
Mike Johnson

## Summer Hill to Host CNLA Summer Meeting

### Summer Hill Nursery is 55

It's hard to believe it's been 55 years since I built a small propagation greenhouse attached to a small chicken coop and called it Summer Hill Nursery. That greenhouse and I are still going strong, although having been partially rebuilt the greenhouse may be stronger.\*

Looking back now it's hard to believe we did all we did in those early years: landscaping, field planting, learning how to grow plants in containers (nobody knew how to overwinter them then) and propagating Rhododendrons for Clinton nursery – my past employer. After 3 years, as soon as we had some plants to sell we gave up landscaping – I was very happy to do so. In about 1970, we stopped growing in the ground as our container production took off and it was difficult to ship containers and B & B material on the same truck.

Since the 70's we've grown only slightly in area but have added many (perhaps too many) plants to our production. We continue to want to get better rather than bigger.

Over the years I've received so much good advice and information from so many nurserymen and educators I could fill this whole newsletter with their names. Summer Hill has had and continues to have so many hard working and dedicated employees, we feel blessed.

We thank all past (and future) customers for their business and friendship. You are always welcome here for a tour and some good plant talk.

This year's CT Nursery & Landscape Assoc. Summer Meeting 2013 will be at Summer Hill on Wednesday, July 17th. We can't remember for sure but this is either the fifth or sixth time Summer Hill Nursery will be hosting this event and we certainly look forward to it.

The major part of the meeting will be at our Summer Hill area – but with transportation to and from our Rockland farm. At present, we are growing over 1,100 varieties of trees, shrubs, perennials and bamboo and we will have many new ones displayed where they can be easily viewed. Also our display gardens and the garden around Mike's home will be featured. You will be able to see a display of all the plants we've introduced to the trade as well as some that hopefully we will be introducing in the next 5 years. Of course, there will also be a trade show tent with up to 50 booths along with lectures on insect and disease control and the use of native plants.

The mid-day meal will once again be 700 kinds of pizza (that's an exaggeration but there are a lot). Everyone we've talked to really enjoyed the pizza last summer so we are going to have it again.

Those of you living in Connecticut will be getting information automatically either from the association or our nursery. Those of you that are outside the state and think you would like to attend please ask for information and we will send it to you ASAP - We'd love to see you here.

\* It's unfortunate - the old greenhouse came down on February 9 - not as strong as I thought.

# As It Was

When I was writing about Summer Hill being 55 years old I started thinking of the nursery business at that time and how things have changed. In the 1950s, Taxus was king. It was the major crop for all the growers and of course everything was grown in the ground and harvested B & B.

The major growers in CT were mostly in two locations, the eastern shore and the river valley. New London and Waterford had the three Brouwer Brothers – John, Peter and Else – each with their own nursery. Henry Verkade, his sons & sons-in-law had Verkade Nursery. Dick Van Heineken had his small nursery in Deep River. These were nurserymen with Dutch ancestry and although they grew a lot of Taxus, they loved plants and grew many other species including Rhododendron. At that time, most Rhododendrons were grafted. Many were grafted in Holland and shipped to the U.S. Jim Wells was starting to root Rhododendron cuttings so he taught us all how to do it and that made Rhododendron an affordable and popular plant.

Warren Richard's Clinton Nursery was transitioning from retail landscape to field grown wholesale and I spent my first days in the nursery business there tying and burlapping Taxus and arbovitae.

The other major area was the Cromwell and Rocky Hill area and further up the Connecticut River Valley where several tobacco growers had started field-grown nurseries. Gardener's Nursery was preeminent along with Pierson, Leghorn, Mulnite and others including Garson Goldberg's Blue Flint Nursery, which grew the best plants of all. Garson was a perfectionist and you could tell his plants in a garden center by looking at how the root balls were burlapped and tied. Over in Bolton, Becky Treat (the only woman involved in the industry at that time) had Bolton Evergreen Nursery. Close by was Burr Nursery, which did a lot with roses – at meetings Charlie Burr would stick little fabric roses on everyone's lapels (we all wore jackets and ties at the meeting).

Meanwhile, in Tariffville, Bob Baker was starting Baker Nursery in between

# Bamboo

As you might know there have been many articles in Connecticut newspapers concerning bamboo. One person in this state has apparently made it her goal in life to get running, "invasive" bamboo banned in Connecticut. I've talked with five reporters doing bamboo articles. None knew much about plants to say nothing about bamboo. They were not very receptive to positive views of this plant. Their articles all featured the problems with bamboo, as that tends to be more newsworthy, than the proper use of this plant. So I will attempt to set the matter straight in a very simplistic way.

Bamboo is not invasive – most forms of bamboo set seed very infrequently – (every 100 years in some cases) and there is no evidence of any bamboo spread from one place to another by the seed. Therefore, Connecticut's Invasive Plant Council has deemed bamboo not even potentially invasive.

Hardy running bamboo includes several genera, some of which (Pleioblastus & Sasa) provide wonderful ground cover type plants that grow only 12" to 18" tall. Others (mostly Sasas) produce shrub types growing to perhaps 5' to 6' tall at most - great border plants that deer do not eat. The tall runners which are so useful for screening and large focal points are mostly

trips to Vermont to collect native plants. The American Sumatra Tobacco Company owned Imperial Nursery and Arie Radder, the manager, was starting a small container section. Gerry Verkade was doing the same down in New London. When we planted 1,000 Pyracantha in containers in 1958 we became one of the three pioneers in container production in New England.

How different it is now – how many of the nurseries I mentioned are still in business? Very few are still here and most are producing their plants in containers. New nurseries have come on the scene and three mentioned above have become huge, selling most of their plants to box stores. Dollars, instead of plants, seem to be the primary motivation in our industry today.

Phyllostachys. They are extremely useful to provide rapid screening that is deer proof as well as focal points, especially in oriental type gardens. However, be aware they can spread into unwanted areas if not controlled. A good method of control, if there is enough area around the planting, is mowing to remove new growth. For other situations, and along property lines, the most effective containment structure is a 36" semi-rigid sheet of polyethylene placed in the ground around the planting. Phyllostachys that has grown into unwanted areas can be eliminated with herbicides – the amount of effort required to do this depends on the size of the problem area. Herbicides can be 100% effective without expensive mechanical removal.

To avoid improper planting of bamboo, we feel education of the public and landscapers is the solution. To this end we have hard copy information (ask us for our bamboo pamphlet) or you can download a copy from our website: [www.summerhillnursery.com](http://www.summerhillnursery.com). We also supply the polyethylene barrier (at cost) to customers that buy bamboo from us. Starting this spring we will have information tags available to be attached to bamboo - free on our bamboo - at cost to others.

Have additional bamboo questions? Call Mike at 203-421-3055.

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## Guaranteed Weekly Deliveries

As usual, our box truck will be back on the road for our "After Shipping" delivery schedule. This has allowed us to reach all our sales areas each week. Therefore, we can guarantee that if we receive an order from you by Monday mid-afternoon we will be able to get that order to you by the weekend.

We will continue to update our Availability List weekly on our website during the spring months. If you do not have internet access just give us a call and we can fax you the most up to date list. If you are not already receiving our emails and would like to be added to the list just send us your email and we will happily add you.

# Plants

Here are a few short notes on some really good plants we grow that are not usually available elsewhere, although I think most of them should be.

**Acer palmatum 'Harriet Waldman'** is a seedling of *Acer palmatum* 'Oridono Nishiki' discovered by Phil Waldman of Roslyn Nursery. It has variegated foliage, but its most noticeable attribute is the pink foliage produced on its second growth in late summer. From a distance it looks as if it is covered with pink flowers.

**Azalea Ruth May** from Oliver's Nursery is my favorite pink azalea. The plant habit is good and its flower is a shade of pink different than any other.

**Boxwood** Although we have cut back quantities somewhat, we are still growing eleven varieties of boxwood despite the news of boxwood blight. We have not brought in any boxwood liners from other nurseries for over 5 years (could be 10 years, we don't remember) so we are clean and since we are "in the woods" we should stay that way.

**Calocedrus decurrens** Incense cedar makes a great, rough textured focal point tree, or a screening hedge, since deer seem to leave it alone. I don't know why we sell so few – do people think it's not hardy? Ours survived 18 below zero with no damage. A good substitution for *Thuja plicata* where deer are a problem.

**Cornus florida** After several years we are growing native dogwoods again. We have the type plant from seed collected here as well as 'Rubra', 'Appalachian Spring', 'Eternal', and 'Pendula' and we are experimenting with a few others. We stopped growing *Cornus florida* because of the Dogwood blight (*Discula destructiva*) that was such a problem a few years ago. Hopefully, it won't be so bad in the future and this wonderful tree will become popular again.

**Cornus kousa 'Morning Sunshine'** Many years ago while removing understock I noticed an understock on one of our *C. kousa* grafts that had some variegation, so at the last second I did not cut it off. What a good thing since it has turned out to be a tree with very good yellow edged

leaves, and an upright somewhat open habit. We plan to release some plants this summer – it's a real beauty.

**Cornus mas 'Spring Glow'** has many more flowers than any other *Cornus mas* I've seen.

Our **Cotoneaster grafted on standards** are also very interesting – apiculata for a big show in fall with large berries. 'Tom Thumb' & 'Hessei' for smaller globes and 'Repandens' for an entirely different effect. These are great plants for the homeowner that wants something different.

We're starting to grow **Cryptomeria 'Yoshino' and 'Black Dragon'** and we will have a few available in fall '13 & spring '14. If you want to see 'Yoshino' at its best visit Acer Gardens in Winthrop, CT. Seeing the plants there made me want to grow some.

**Decumaria barbara 'Barbara Ann'** is a shiny leafed vine. Nurserymen who visit us are surprised they have never heard of it before, as it is a very handsome plant native in Virginia and south. However, it is perfectly hardy, at least to -20 degrees. Its common names are Wood Vamp & Wild Hydrangea Vine. It has white fertile flowers (similar to fertile *Hydrangea* flowers) held perpendicular to the vine going up a tree or post.

**Euonymus carnosus** is a really great, almost unknown tree. It has oblong shiny leaves that turn rich purple in the fall and hold on with that color for quite a long time. Interesting seed capsules add to its interest.

**Franklinia alatamaha** Enough customers asked us about *Franklinia* that we started growing it again. Although Dirr says it is hardy in zone 5, I feel it's much more tender than that. In warmer climates of New England and south it makes a beautiful tree – lustrous dark green leaves in summer and very good fall color with a white flower in late summer.

**Hamamelis** At present we are growing 11 varieties of Witch Hazel – all a bit different. They include a red flowered virginiana (Vincent's Red) found here at the nursery and some new varieties such as 'Birget'. We have 'Birget' planted where the afternoon setting sun shines through it - a fantastic sight of light purple-pink flowers. We urge our customers to get these early spring flowering plants in the fall so

they can display them at their garden centers in the early spring since the flowers are usually about over by shipping season. The 'Arnold Promise' behind my home has to be 30' tall at this point – spectacular in the month of March.

**Heptacodium miconioides** We are now growing Seven Sons Flowers from cuttings taken from our very red sepalled plants to make sure you get a good show in the fall. This is a hard plant for us to grow but is well worthwhile for its white exfoliating bark and flower/sepal show in the fall.

**Hydrangea serrata** is unlike the "normal" hydrangeas in the trade. When I saw it the first time at Nick Nickou's, I knew this was a plant we had to grow. It has light blue, flat flowers on a low growing wide plant. A subdued beautiful shrub that likes some shade to be at its best.

We keep finding sports on some of our hybrid Hollies. **Ilex x 'Spring Surprise'** will grow into a large plant with green leaves in the summer. The surprise comes in the spring, when its new growth comes out variegated then turns green during the summer.

**Ilex 'Tiny Prince'** is a very diminutive sport of 'Blue Prince' – a low growing deep green mound wider than tall.

**Ilex opaca** We have tried to grow many varieties of American Holly in containers but only a few do well. We now have a good unnamed female and recently have found an excellent male. We found the male by taking cuttings from several plants that volunteered – seedlings from some opacas planted elsewhere on our property. They are under the large white pines in back of our gardens at home. They have been there for years and I finally got smart enough to see what they would do in the nursery. One proved to be an excellent growing male.

**Ilex pedunculosa 'Frosty Morn'** is a variegated female variety we found as a branch sport years ago. It grows a bit slower than the type and the variegation on the edge of the leaf makes a more interesting plant – it does look frosted.

**Juniper squamata 'Blue Comet'** is a sport of 'Blue Star' that John Nassif found - very similar to 'Blue Star' but with a different texture. Those that have seen it really liked the difference.

**Larch – Larix laricina ‘Steuben’** is a low growing, many-branched plant that has produced a lot of interest – we’re trying to grow enough of them to meet the demand.

**Laurus nobilis** We have a few beautiful plants that are over 6’ +/- tall to 4-5’ wide. They would make a great show in an atrium or restaurant with a large enough area to show them off.

**Leucothoe** If you drop by or come to the summer meeting, you will be able to see the new leucothoe we’ve been working with. It is variegated with colors that are different from any other we’ve seen. We haven’t been able to come up with a good name yet but we’ll find one before we release it to the trade.

**Magnolias with yellow flowers** We are now growing eleven varieties – all a little different from the others. ‘Elizabeth’ continues to be the best grower so it is my favorite, although others have darker yellow flowers.

**Microbiota decussata ‘Jacobsen’** grows taller than the type, forming a

low mound, and is more for individual planting rather than massing, as so often is done with Microbiota.

It will be a few years before we have enough to sell but we’ve found an **Alberta Spruce** that is all **blue**. Not with green blotches but TRUE BLUE.

We can thank Nick Nickou for two varieties of **Pieris japonica** we are growing. **‘Bert Chandler’** has fantastic multi colored new growth. One drawback is that it has to be growing in the shade, but it is still well worth it – has to be seen to be believed.

**‘St. Nick’** is a seedling that Nick selected with deep pink flowers. It also makes a nice full plant.

**Pieris jap. ‘Katsura’** has deep red maroon new growth unlike any other Andromeda. It is patented but one of the few plants we feel are worth the royalty.

**Pinus strobus ‘Lily Pond’** is one of Sid Waxman’s discoveries that he never named. I like it so much that I named it ‘Lily Pond’ because our original plant is behind a lily pond in our

yard. It is low growing, approximately 5’ to 6’ tall and 8’ to 10’ wide after 30+ years, a very nice plant. A larger plant than *Pinus strobus* ‘Soft Touch’ but slower growing and much more compact than ‘Blue Jay’

**Potentilla tridentata** is a wonderful native groundcover with white flowers in late spring. It can tolerate terrible conditions. I’ve seen it growing between a rock outcropping in Acadia National Park in Maine – a tough spot for any plant.

I still think **Spiraea ‘Mini-Gold’** is one of my best finds. It grows similar to *Spiraea* ‘Alpina’ but with golden foliage – much tighter and lower than other yellow forms. It is a cross between ‘Alpina’ and ‘Gold Mound’ found across from our office.

**Pink Styrax japonicus** For years now we have collected seedlings of a cross of *Styrax* ‘Pink Chimes’ and our ‘Blush Pink’ to get a dark pink flower on a tree that grows better than ‘Pink Chimes’. I hope we find it when they flower this year.

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