

Beyond Spring Deliveries

SHIPPING TREES YEAR ROUND



Photo courtesy of Plantivity

Katy Hiatt calls it the “grocery store” mentality –

a mindset that expects products to be available to purchase at any time, just like you find on the shelves of local markets. Hiatt, the President of Plantivity in Eagle, Colo., is an enthusiastic promoter of satisfying this mindset when it comes to her tree customers. She’ll be teaching methods for year-round shipping at ProGreen EXPO in February.

“More and more customers would rather order material across the season, instead of receiving all of their inventory in the spring,” she said. “Plant brokers can deliver any time of year when they have growers in several different regions growing several different types of trees, including container-grown, grow-bag and B&B trees with root structures that can be dug any time of year (as long as the ground is not frozen).”

For nurseries in areas with seasonal freezes, they can grow at least a portion of their trees in containers to make them readily available year round, she added.

Martin Hanni, General Manager of Northwest Shade Trees in Salem, Ore., agrees with the concept of shipping trees “on-demand” when customers prefer to get some inventory at times other than the main shipping season in spring. But, Hanni said, “Due to the continuing tree shortage, many of our bigger customers place a large order at the beginning of the season to increase their chances of finding the trees they are looking for.”

“The choice of available material for summer harvest is limited,” he said. Plus, for B&B “shade trees to be successfully harvested in the summer, the trees need to be root-pruned before they break dormancy in the spring.”

In fact, root pruning, fertilization, watering, and other growing practices are all very specific for summer harvested trees to ensure their survival. If done correctly, though, a tree dug in summer will look fresher than a dormant dug tree at planting time, especially in the second half of the summer, he acknowledged.

When suppliers are able to deliver trees as customers need them, customers require less storage space and spend less on labor and overhead expenses for tree care, compared with storing a large order delivered all at once in the spring.

“Just-in-time inventory management is easier on the cash flow,” he noted, and for the supplier, “It provides an income stream throughout the summer months.”

For those reasons, Hiatt said, shipping year round is a huge benefit to everyone’s bottom line, that works well for all types of customers. Customers require less use of loans and lines of credit, plus accounts payables and receivables are settled more closely together.

“With Plantivity, we can even ship the entire load directly to your customer so you don’t have to touch it, saving you all kinds of unloading, loading, and storage costs,” she added.

Most of the motivation for suppliers to ship year round is to break out of the short window of digging between the spring thaw and when trees break dormancy, she believes.

If suppliers find ways to harvest and ship trees year round either by growing in containers and grow bags or in areas where field digging is not limited by freezes, they are no longer held hostage by the weather.

“Now you can dig any tree out of your field at any time. You can see how this is not only more efficient for the grower, but also for the grower’s customer as well,” she said.

Suppliers don’t have to dig on speculation, guessing what customers may need later in the summer, because they can dig based on orders. Customers don’t have to order on speculation because they can order as they need to restock (that grocery store mentality!).

“Customers also avoid the problem of being left with a lot of unsold material that they have to sell at a discounted price right before winter or hold over the winter. If they hold it over, they spend

continues “



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– Katy Hiatt



Photos courtesy of Plantivity



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- **Martin Hanni**



Photo courtesy of Northwest Shade Trees

money on upkeep and care for a tree that will not look as good next season because it has been above ground all winter,” she said.

She believes less substitutions are necessary when suppliers are able to harvest and ship smaller, on-demand orders throughout the season. By not relying on trees dug just in two short digging periods in the spring and fall, and digging year round instead, they will have the tree in stock as long as they have grown that variety to the right size.

However, she and Hanni both caution that customers should be aware of the times of year that shipping costs are higher and trucks are more challenging to hire, and avoid asking for deliveries during those times.

“During produce season in the Northwest and California, freight prices skyrocket. July to September is very busy for produce shipments like berries and apples. Then, in mid-November to mid-

December, Christmas trees are shipping so the freight costs are high at that time as well,” Hiatt said. “Companies should choose a broker that is an expert in logistics and can help strategize ordering to get the most for their money, based on the best times to ship throughout each season.”

Another way shipping costs can increase is if a small order can't fill a truck. “Shipping costs for partial trucks are higher than full loads,” said Hanni, adding that his company works with several truck brokers to ship trees at the best possible rate.

“Regardless of when the trees need to ship, to avoid disappointment we advise our customers to put in their orders as early as possible and think about acceptable substitutions should the item be in short supply,” he concluded. “Plan ahead, way ahead! And contact us as early as possible to discuss the available options.”

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