

It works for me Growing Green and Sustainable

I find that the latest buzz phrases in the nursery industry are interesting and somewhat humorous. These phrases “growing green” and “sustainable” pretty much describe what we and the cactus industry as a whole have been doing since it started many years ago and it is gratifying to, at last, be ahead of the pack. You cacti and succulent hobbyists and growers should be proud that you, like me, are in the forefront of the latest environmental effort – not to mention advertising.

Let’s take a look at how we arrived as environmental leaders.

First – “growing green”. We folks here in the Southwest are blessed with ample sunshine. Sometimes more than we really want or need. But the good side of sunshine is solar gain. When we built our first cold frame, and mistakenly called it a greenhouse, we put four inches of gravel on the floor and grew our plants in flats sitting on that gravel. The gravel allowed the water to drain off the plants, discouraged weeds and best of all, in the winter, acted as a heat sink. This virtually eliminated the necessity to heat our covered growing areas. Yes, we occasionally lost plants to cold during a particularly cold spell. However, generally the combination of the gravel to collect and retain the heat and the plastic film that we covered the houses with in the winter retained enough heat to keep the plants from suffering cold damage. In other words ‘it worked for us’ and saved energy both in the form of fuel and/or electricity that we would have otherwise needed to heat the structures.

Growing green also includes recycling. Our nursery has recycled from the beginning because it is and has been cost effective for us. Most large nurseries that recycle their growing containers send used plastic pots and flats to a central recycling facility. This facility cleans, grinds and melts the plastic down. The resulting material is used as raw material to manufacture new plastic items. The product is often more nursery growing containers. Since we are small we wash the pots then soak them in a chlorine solution for at least 24 hours. This kills any bacteria, fungus or insect eggs. We then dry and inspect the containers for signs of deterioration or damage and if they are in good condition we reuse them. This works well for us because we continually move the plants, as they grow, to larger containers.

Next is the word ‘sustainable’. Going back a few years, say about 45, I helped my father-in-law, Frank Fielding start his nursery. His primary product was seed flats. He germinated 1800 seed flats twice each year and had no problem selling them. A major problem that he encountered was obtaining seed for the more desirable plants. Keep in mind that this was before the endangered species act covered plant material. So after observing this situation for several years when we started in the business I began saving plants that I would be subsequently be using for propagation material. Each time I grew a new species I would save several of the best plants and grow them until they were mature enough to produce seed or offsets that I could use for parent plants. Obviously over the years some of the parent plants died of various maladies so we don’t have everything that

we ever grew but our inventory of stock plants is substantial. As a result the majority of products that we produce in our nursery are from our own stock plants. Like many of you, our nursery is sustainable. It works for me!

Harvey