

Oglesby Plants International, *Calhoun County*

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Situated in the small town of Altha, Florida, Oglesby Plants International is well known in the ornamental plant industry as a leading supplier of young plants for commercial growers around the world. The company's founder, Raymond P. Oglesby, has always been on the cutting edge of plant propagation, and in the mid 1970s he started working with plant tissue culture. As an early pioneer, Oglesby helped make plant tissue culture propagation a commercial reality as a reliable and efficient method for plant propagation. The Oglesby Family first bought property in Altha in the early 1970s. The nursery was established at the current site in the early '80s, and the tissue culture lab was moved to Altha in 1984. Today, the legacy of Ray Oglesby continues with a vibrant company with over 90 dedicated employees who truly enjoy working with plants. Oglesby Plants International is one of the worlds most experienced companies in plant tissue culture, offering a wide selection of grower and market tested plant varieties, shipped worldwide, and is a leader in the introduction of new and improved varieties.

Oglesby's laboratory produces millions of plants every year using a process called plant tissue culture propagation. This process also goes by the names of micropropagation,

meristem culture, or cloning. The goal of this technology is to "clone," or reproduce a large number of identical copies of, an elite plant. Plant tissue culture represents a very efficient method of plant propagation, and over the last two decades this method has become an important part of both horticulture and agriculture.

The innovative tissue culture process involves isolating a growing point or "bud" from a healthy plant and placing it on sterile tissue culture media. Once successfully established, the bud continues to grow, and in weeks it is transferred to fresh media and divided into two (or more) plants. Over time, thousands of identical plants are produced and then shipped to commercial growers around the world. Oglesby's also offers a number of tissue culture related services such as contract research and contract propagation, including large scale agricultural projects.

To ensure the continuous flow of new varieties, Oglesby has committed significant resources to their new product development department where they manage an extensive breeding program. Every year they grow thousands of seedlings of numerous genera to find that one special, and hopefully superior, plant. Plant breeders are not only looking to improve the aesthetic



quality of the plant, but also to improve disease and insect resistance. As an example, every new variety of *Anthurium* they release is screened, with the help of the University of Florida, for susceptibility to multiple strains of the bacteria *Xanthomonas*. This is a devastating disease in tropical and subtropical growing areas. With this information they can help growers pick the right plant for their growing conditions.

Once a new plant variety has been developed, Oglesby's laboratory research department develops tissue culture protocols to successfully propagate the plant. When a few hundred plants are produced, they go through an extensive testing program in diverse growing facilities and climates to gather as much information about the plant as possible. On average, it takes a minimum of five years to deliver a tested "new" variety to the market.

Improving Agriculture through Extension Involvement

Oglesby is known worldwide for its plant production techniques, but more significantly, Oglesby is known locally for its consistent and valuable community partnerships. Oglesby improves agriculture in the Northwest District by routinely supporting UF/IFAS Extension programs and local school agriculture programs. This company is also a source of employment for local citizens and young adults interested in agriculture. Oglesby has donated thousands of dollars' worth of gardening supplies and plants to Extension horticulture educational programs and to the newly created 4-H Learning Gardens. Oglesby's nurserymen collaborate with UF/IFAS Extension on plant breeding topics and pest and disease management issues. They also gladly provide educational tours of their laboratory and greenhouses for Extension and other related events. At the University of Florida, the Oglesby family created the Raymond P. and Jane F. Oglesby Scholarship. This Scholarship was established to support young people entering the plant nursery industry as well as the horticulture programs at UF.



Northwest Florida Extension District



Impacting Agriculture in Northwest Florida

Oglesby's headquarters are located in the rural town of Altha, Florida, which is also the core of traditional row-crop agriculture in Calhoun County. Oglesby's impact to agriculture in the region is an increased awareness of non-traditional agriculture, namely plant breeding techniques such as tissue culture, and the global marketing of their products. Their continuous support of local agriculture, Extension, and community programs results in a greater agricultural awareness by local citizens and regional producers. ■

Oglesby Plants International Altha, FL

