



# Liner Pioneers

## Oglesby Plants International

Oglesby Plants International is taking its tissue culture and young plant production beyond foliage and tropicals.

by JOLI A. HOHENSTEIN

**O**GLESBY Plants International is far from one dimensional. In fact, you might say it's three dimensional, with successful business arms including lab technology, plant development and young plant production.

Best known as tissue culture pioneers, Oglesby was the first to offer contract tissue culture to nurseries. And the operation has stayed at the forefront of the plant world to this day. "Oglesby has always been on the cutting edge," says Dave Dagen, director of marketing and sales.

Since Raymond Oglesby founded the company in 1947, the Altha, Fla.-based business has evolved into a premier breeder and young plant producer, in addition to being a tissue culture leader. Oglesby isn't stopping there, though.

### Young Plant Possibilities

"The young plant division is built around the idea that not everyone wants to wean plants from tissue culture," Oglesby President Gary Hennen says. "We offer plants already grown, already

greenhouse hardened and it makes customers' lives much easier."

Since Oglesby started selling liners in 1978, the young plant division has leaped ahead, becoming the company's largest component. More than 150,000 square feet of greenhouse space is dedicated to converting microcuttings to stage IV young plants.

To help meet their uncompromising quality standards, Oglesby's facilities employ a mix of advanced technology. Poly and polycarbonate greenhouses are computer climate-controlled and equipped with rolling European-style benches, cooling pads and Nexus shade and heat-retention systems.

"Oglesby has maintained a very high bar on quality through the long history of the company," Dagen says. "People rely on us to deliver the highest quality possible on our young plant liners."

### Tissue Culture Technology

That unwavering commitment to quality transcends all aspects of Oglesby, none more so than the company's tissue culture laboratory. It's enabled them to take a small experimental laboratory to a world-leading production and research facility serving

**Owners** Gary Hennen, David Oglesby and Mary Oglesby McKenzie

**Location** Altha, Fla.

**Size** 150,000 square feet of greenhouses

**Crops** Tropical and foliage, woody and perennial liners

**Markets** Wholesale growers

**Website** [OglesbyTC.com](http://OglesbyTC.com)

customers in every corner of the globe.

"Our plants are exceptionally clean, and we're constantly fine-tuning and developing new products," Dagen says. "With more than 30 years of experience in plant tissue culture, we've touched and worked with many plant genera."

With plant importation laws ever tightening, Oglesby immediately saw the potential in commercial tissue culture and capitalized on it. The operation never looked back, and it now produces more than 150 varieties.

"Plant tissue culture makes production streamlined and decreases the time to introduce new products and scale up," Hennen says. "Our own in-house laboratory and young plant facilities are a wonderful combination for us."



## Breeding Excellence

Oglesby is constantly looking ahead, too. The company's vision most recently took Oglesby into breeding. In the two decades since Oglesby's plant development program



**Oglesby's young plants nursery has grown to be the largest part of the business, with 150,000 square feet of greenhouse space.**

launched, it has become a gold standard in breeding of tropicals and foliage plants.

Renowned plantsman Jim Georgusis was instrumental in the program's formative years and recently returned as nursery production manager. Legendary breeder and researcher Marian Osiecki keeps a steady stream of innovative plant material coming.

Focusing on spathiphyllum and anthurium but also working with about 20 additional genera, the program has introduced nearly 60 varieties. The popular spathiphyllum 'Sensation,' seen in countless commercial entryways and atriums around the country, originated at Oglesby.



**Scientists in Oglesby's tissue culture and plant development labs keep the business at the forefront of the industry.**

## Rooted In Progress

Raymond P. Oglesby registered as a nurseryman in 1947 with the state of Florida and began Oglesby Nursery Inc. (ONI) on seven acres of land and \$300 in Hollywood, Fla. He later purchased land in Altha, Fla., to produce junipers and other ornamental plants for the local and national landscape markets.

In 1975, Oglesby opened an experimental laboratory to use tissue culture propagation on several popular ornamental plants. The success led to expansion in 1977 with a 2,000-square-foot laboratory in Hollywood, Fla. – the first structure built in the United States for the specific purpose of tissue culture. Soon after, rising demand for tissue-cultured plants drove him to build a young plant facility using state-of-the-art fogging and misting systems.

Facing a need to expand the propagation business, Oglesby separated the laboratory division from Oglesby Nursery in 1984, formed a new company called Oglesby Plant Laboratories (OPL) and built a much larger laboratory facility in Altha.

While the lab continued commercial nursery plant production, a mass-market novelty item called the "Test Tube Baby" thrust the company into the international spotlight as the leader in a new science. The publicity for this test tube-grown plant helped OPL establish worldwide contracts for propagation of elite plants and an international reputation as the world leader in this innovative technology.

In 1994 further expansion increased the production and research laboratory and brought a state-of-the-art greenhouse at Altha dedicated to liner production. Oglesby celebrated its 50th anniversary in 1997 and reunited the two separate companies ONI and OPL under the new name Oglesby Plants International (OPI). In 2004, OPI expanded its greenhouse space to the current 150,000 square feet.

Today, three partners oversee OPI: Gary Hennen is president and manages the company overall, in partnership with Ray Oglesby's children – David Oglesby, who is vice president and involved in the production side of the business, and Mary Oglesby McKenzie, who is secretary/treasurer and manages human resources.

Oglesby Plants International continues to live by Ray Oglesby's tenet: Quality and service are the greatest competitive advantages.

## The Key to Success

Hennen and Dagen credit Oglesby's success to a highly qualified team of managers and growers. Long-term loyalty and low turnover are hallmarks of the 110-member Oglesby team. The management group averages 14 years with the company, with the exception of Dagen, who joined the team this year.

"To bring new products in takes a strong commitment, from management to the person pulling the plant," Dagen says. "Our people are committed to quality and taking ownership of every plant."

Oglesby is so dedicated to its employees that it focused on job preservation during the recession, taking measures like reducing hours and foregoing profits to avoid layoffs. "Now the market is coming back, and we have the people in place and are ready to take on the next challenge," Hennen says.

## On the Horizon

So what is the next frontier? "We're going to be doing different plant material but not forgetting our core tropical business roots," Dagen says. "People want



## More Online

To view a slideshow of photographs from Oglesby Plants International, visit [GreenhouseGrower.com](http://GreenhouseGrower.com).

to be surrounded by plants in the office, home and outdoors."

With that in mind, diversification has come naturally to Oglesby. It is expanding its fledgling perennial and shrub programs, looking toward outdoor living for future growth.

"When you look at garden centers and box stores, you see more and more space allocated to porch and container gardening," Dagen says, "so we look to be part of that market that's more dynamic and expanding."

The addition of new markets doesn't mean Oglesby is abandoning the markets on which the company was built. Foliage will still be a strong focus.

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