

## Monrovia Nursery: A Passion for Plants

by William Clattenburg

SINCE THE 1920s, when **Harry Rosedale** founded Monrovia Nursery, the wholesale company headquartered in Azusa, California, has distinguished itself by its commitment to nurturing healthy plants and developing innovative techniques for producing and marketing them. A plant industry leader, Monrovia virtually invented the containerized plant, pioneered the shipment of plants, created state-of-the-art soil mixes, practiced water recycling, and led the way in coding its plants with both USDA hardiness zones and AHS heat zones.

### IT'S ALL ABOUT THE PLANTS

Monrovia is best known internationally for its woody ornamentals, but the company also grows herbaceous perennials, grasses, bamboos, and vines. Its six nurseries nationwide produce 22 million plants a year that are sold exclusively through some 5,000 independent garden centers in the United States and Canada.

The decision to sell plants only to independent garden centers is one example of the company's values. Another is not rushing plants through the development process. "We don't want to introduce new plants just to say that they're new," says **Gilbert Resendez**, president of sales and marketing. "Our focus is on plants that are superior to what's in the market currently."

Monrovia anticipates demand by paying attention to what its customers want. "One trend we're seeing is a higher demand for regional native plants," says Resendez. In southern California, he notes, the pre-existing demand for drought-tol-



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erant plants is converging with the newer demand for natives. "We're augmenting the native plants we grow by adding complementary plants—in particular, those that are water-conserving," he says.

### COMMITMENT TO QUALITY

Over the years, Monrovia has introduced nearly 300 "exclusive plants." According to **Nicholas Staddon**, Monrovia's director of new plants, finding such plants requires the combined efforts of "breeders, hybridizers, plant hunters, great gardeners, and our own craftsmen."

As in other facets of the industry, Monrovia has taken the initiative in perfecting tests for new plants. "Once a new plant has been identified, we take it to one of our six locations and put it in what we call our 'bullpens,'" Staddon explains. "There, we look for the right soil, fertilizer, pruning method, dependability as a container plant, attractiveness, and—most importantly—if the plant will hold up in the home garden."

One new plant Staddon is particularly excited about is a just released magnolia cultivar called Black Tulip™ (*Magnolia x soulangiana* 'JURmag1'). "Black Tulip blooms at an early age, and has an extraordinary shape to the flowers, which are almost like tulips and wine-red in color," says Staddon.

### SHARED VALUES

As Monrovia approaches its 80th anniversary, the company continues to expand its role as a major source of high quality plants that enhance the environment.

Becoming an AHS Corporate Partner, says Resendez, illustrates Monrovia's commitment to the AHS mission. "We value our partnership with AHS, because both of our organizations want to get the message out about the benefits of using plants in their proper locations in the American garden," says Resendez.

*William Clattenburg is an editorial intern for The American Gardener.*

For more information about Monrovia, visit [www.monrovia.com](http://www.monrovia.com). For information on the AHS's Corporate Partnership program, contact Eva Monheim at [emonheim@ahs.org](mailto:emonheim@ahs.org).