

Better live oaks grown with new method

A novel method of propagating the live oak tree without using seeds has been developed by horticulturists at the Texas Agricultural Experiment Station (TAES).

The technique permits live oak growers to select trees for uniformity and provide superior trees for the public, according to Dr. David L. Morgan, horticulturist with the Experiment Station at Dallas.

Desirable characteristics in live oaks which could be selected and propagated include tree shape, leaf color, leaf retention in winter, increased growth rate, drought tolerance, and possibly insect and disease resistance.

The implications of landscape design with uniform plant materials are readily obvious to growers and landscape architects, Morgan points out. Instead of growing the oaks from seed, cuttings are multiplied from selected trees. This system, called asexual propagation, gives consistently high quality, uniform trees.

At present, nurserymen grow the live oak from seed. The problem with this method is that the live oak is wind pollinated, and seed from a beautiful spreading oak may also get half of its characteristics from a nearby tree that's weak, diseased, and ugly.

In the past three years, Morgan

has successfully propagated native live oaks from tip-stem cuttings.

The cuttings are taken from young, select trees in the spring-summer growing season, treated with a chemical hormone, and kept in a high humidity chamber at the Experiment Station at Dallas.

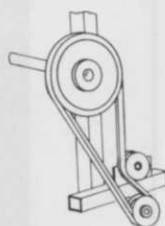
Cuttings form roots in 12 weeks and when grown should be like the parent tree.

An example of the advantage of this method is the propagation of trees resistant to the mealy-oak gall. Morgan and two Experiment Station entomologists have discovered trees with apparent gall resistance. Such trees, if propagated through stem cuttings, would retain their resistance to galls. □

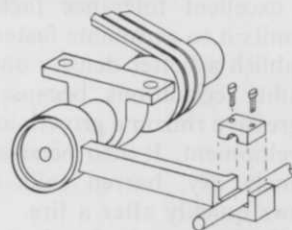
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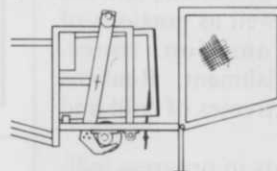
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