

CONARD-PYLE COMPANY: GROWING WITH THE ROSE



Container roses are grown in covered quonset house. The plastic is removed at the sides to allow free flow of air.

An aerial view shows the 22.5 miles of quonset houses at the container production area of The Conard-Pyle Co. A few of the houses are partially covered with plastic.



The Conard-Pyle Company was incorporated in West Grove, Pa., in 1897 as the Conard & Jones Company to sell seeds and plants through a mail-order catalog. Robert Pyle was employed as a helper in 1899, and with his father, purchased a considerable part of Alfred Conard's share of the business upon his death.

Conard's partner, Morris Jones, retired in 1923 and the company name was changed to the Conard-Pyle Company.

Robert Pyle decided that the business would thrive best if it specialized. He thought the specialty should be an item for which there was a fairly steady demand and which was likely to remain popular indefinitely. He fixed upon the rose. In 1908 he trademarked "Star" and Star Roses was born, the chief prod-

It runs through the briars, it runs through the brambles and it runs through the timber where a rabbit couldn't go.

If the British had used a Klearway at the Battle of New Orleans, they could have beaten a hasty retreat and returned to face "Old Hickory" another day.

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uct of Conard-Pyle.

There was a substantial decrease in the mail-order nursery business due to the great depression in the early 1930's and a garden center for retail sales was opened. It grew and prospered and a branch was established adjacent to the rose fields for the summer months when roses were in bloom. In 1961, another branch was opened at Lancaster, 40 miles west of the nursery.

The Conard-Pyle Company owns 550 acres. Of this, 80 acres are devoted to container-grown ornamentals and about 65 acres to field-grown roses. While there is an acre of greenhouses and 1½ acres of cold frames, there are 22.5 miles of plastic-covered quonset huts.

The company employs 80 to 100 field and greenhouse workers and 23 office personnel. Forty-five of Conard-Pyle's employees have 15 or more years with the company.

About 500,000 rose bushes, 500,000 ornamental container plants, 250,000 container roses, 250,000 miniature roses, 75,000 chrysanthemums and 30,000 delphinium are produced yearly. Ninety-five thousand orders are filled yearly and 440 trailer loads of container grown plants go out each year.

Conard-Pyle distributes 400,000 catalogs and 120 million individual sales messages to sell their products. The company is a member of All-American Rose Selections, Inc., American Association of Nurserymen, American Horticultural Society, American Rose Society, Horticultural Research Institute, National Landscape Association, National Association of Plant Patent Owners, the Society of American Florists plus state organizations.

Containers are moved on wagons pulled by one of 20 International 454 tractors that the company owns. The system is palletized for shipping and pallets are placed on wagons. Five larger tractors are used for cultivating the fields and pulling the spray rigs.

Two boom sprayers with 500-gal. tanks and a 500 gal. mist blower are used to apply part of the 1,800 pounds of fungicides and three tons of herbicides the company applies yearly.

A maintenance program was started this year. Two full-time mechanics are employed to work on all of the equipment including preventative maintenance.

A soluble 15-20-24 fertilizer is applied through the computerized, automatic watering system, every



S. B. Hutton, Jr., chairman of the board of The Conard-Pyle Co. inspects stored bare root roses.

time the containers are watered. One hundred and fifty tons of fertilizer are applied yearly. The rose fields are fertilized according to soil test data which calls for about a ton of 10-10-10 per acre in the spring and are then top dressed in the fall.

Quonset huts are fertilized at a rate of 150 parts per million nitrogen, through the irrigation system. When material is spaced out the second year for further growth, a drip tube irrigation system is used. Water is supplied from four lakes on the Conard-Pyle acreage.

The roses are sprayed weekly with fungicide, mainly for mildew and black spot. The containers are sprayed every two weeks and about 150 pounds of fungicide are used per spraying throughout the spray season.

Aphids are the major insect problem in the fields and a spray program is instituted as necessary. Mites then become a problem after the plants are brought in. "We use a disease and insect program because buyers won't accept the plants unless they are disease and insect free," says Betsy Scarborough, assistant vice-president.

A soil mix of hardwood bark is composted and pasteurized, but not sterilized. It kills the weed seeds present, but does not prevent weed seeds from flying in and becoming established. "It gives us maybe a month grace period of no weeds and from then on through the next two years, we do have to combat the weed problem," says Scarborough. "We use approximately eight thousand cubic yards of this soil mix a year." About three tons of herbicides are used yearly. They are applied three times: Spring, Summer, and Fall.

Chemicals are purchased twice a year. Spring chemicals are purchased in March. "Then we'll come back again in July and pick up the rest of the summer supplies," Scarborough adds. "We purchase large quantities at a time and store them securely."

Eleven major horticultural organizations are cooperating in a nationwide campaign to make 1979 the "Year of the Rose," presenting that flower as a living symbol of love, friendship and peace. Thousands of people from throughout the world stop each year to see the Conard-Pyle rose fields blooming. Driveways are maintained through the fields for visitors and a picnic area is adjacent to the Robert Pyle Memorial Rose Garden.

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These container plants are on pallets ready to be loaded into trailers for shipment.