



Green Leaf





By Paul Pilon

This evergreen groundcover lends itself well to a variety of commercial applications, including production in pots, baskets and topiaries.

Hedera helix 'Duck Foot'

sport of Hedera 'Merion helix Beauty' isolated in New Jersey in 1976, **'Duck** Foot' gets its name from its small, 1-inch, three-lobed leaves that resemble the foot of a duck. Its free-branching habit allows it to fill in quickly, whether grown in containers or for the landscape. Like many cultivars of Hedera helix, Duck Foot is hardy to USDA Zone 5 and performs well in anything from deep shade through full sun conditions. Due to its distinguishing characteristics, ease of production and marketability, the American Ivy Society has named *Hedera helix* Duck Foot the 2004 Ivy of the Year.

PROPAGATION

Duck Foot is vegetatively propagated by tip or node cuttings. Node cuttings are most commonly used and are created by cutting the vine into small pieces with either one leaf (for single-node cuttings) or two to three leaves (for two- or three-node cuttings) on each propagule. I recommend using two- or three-node propagules by cutting just above the leaf at the top node, leaving a small piece of



stem just above this node (about ¼ inch). Make a second cut about ½-1 inch below the bottom node. Then stick the basal ends into the propagation flat or finished container. One-node cuttings can be propagated successfully but will take slightly longer to develop roots.

Using rooting hormone is optional, as Duck Foot roots easily on its own. Dipping the base of the cuttings in 1,000 ppm IBA rooting hormone will accelerate rooting by a couple of days. Many growers provide bottom heat, maintaining soil temperatures at 70° F. Providing uniform rooting temperatures will decrease overall rooting time and increase uniformity and overall rooting percentage. Place cuttings under a light misting program, and they will be rooted in about 3-4 weeks.

Most growers stick multiple cuttings into the same cell or pot, which will fill out the finished container quicker. For example, growers will often place two cuttings into a 128-cell flat, three cuttings into a 72-cell flat, six cuttings per 1-quart pot or 10-12 cuttings per 1-gal. container. Growers propagating into 3-inch or smaller containers almost always direct stick, whereas growers of 4-inch or larger containers usually propagate in smaller cells and then transplant into the final container.



Photos courtesy of McCoy Family Nursery, Inc.

PRODUCTION *Hedera helix* should be planted

90 GPN October 2003



in a potting media with both good water-holding capacity and drainage characteristics. Depending on the season, it is beneficial to provide shade beginning in approximately mid-April. Although ivies can be produced under high light levels, production at lower light levels, such as 1,500-2,500 foot-candles, will keep them cooler and actively growing. Ideal plant development occurs at temperatures of 65-80° F. High light levels combined with temperatures greater than 85° F will dramatically decrease plant growth and lengthen total production time.

Duck Foot does not like overly wet or dry soil conditions. Allow the media to dry slightly between



each watering. When irrigation is needed, I recommend watering early in the day to allow the leaves to dry before nightfall. Using drip emitters, especially for larger container sizes, will eliminate wet foliage and allow watering to occur anytime. Water stress from overly dry conditions will cause older leaves to turn yellow, and under severe conditions, they may senesce or die. Over-watering will most likely cause the roots to become infected by root rot plant pathogens such as Phythium and Phytopthora.

Duck Foot is considered a medium feeder and should be fertilized using a balanced fertilizer. The pH of the growing medium should be slightly acidic and maintained around 6.0. Growers using water-soluble fertilizers should feed using 100 ppm nitrogen when irrigation is necessary. If controlled-release fertilizers are incorporated into the growing media, use the equivalent of 1 lb. of elemental nitrogen per yard of potting substrate. Pick a release pattern that is similar to the length of time you intend to grow the crop. For example, if you are transplanting Duck Foot in March for May sales, pick a fertilizer with a 3- to 4-month release pattern.

INSECTS AND DISEASES

Insects such as aphids, mealybugs, scales, slugs, spider mites and thrips will occasionally feed

on ivies. Under normal conditions, these pests rarely pose any serious threat. Diseases, on the other hand, can be very problematic for growers of *Hedera helix*. Some of the numerous plant pathogens that may hinder carefree crop production include Anthracnose, blight, stem gall, bacterial leaf spot (Xanthomonas), fungal leaf spot (Colletotrichum), stem canker and root rot.

92 GPN October 2003



Splashing water is the primary mechanism for the spread of these diseases. Control of both bacterial and fungal leaf spots is dependent on choosing disease-free stock, limiting overhead irrigation, providing adequate ventilation and rouging out infected plants.

Xanthomonas leaf spot is the most common disease of ivies. It is first observed as small, circular, dark green, water-soaked (oily) lesions on the leaves. The lesions develop into circular or angular areas, whose margins often become surrounded by a yellow or reddish halo. As the lesion becomes older, the centers eventually become dry and cracked. Preventative control of Xanthomonas is essential. Regular applications, at least every two weeks, of fungicides effective for bacterial diseases (Kocide, Phyton 27 or Zerotol) should be applied. Tank mixing fungicides such as Protect T&O or Chipco 26019 with your bacterial controls will also reduce the likelihood of fungal diseases from appearing.

SCHEDULING

There are a couple of factors to consider when scheduling Hedera helix. First, finish times will vary depending on the size of the container and whether cuttings are direct stuck or if liners are transplanted into the finished container. Generally, direct stuck containers will take slightly longer than transplanted liners. Another variable that affects the scheduled time would be the number of cuttings used in the liner or the finished container (more cuttings will fill out faster). A 1-gal. container that is direct stuck with 10 cuttings will take approximately 16 weeks to reach shippable size, whereas, a 1gal. container with five rooted multiple stem liners could be shippable in about 10 weeks.

Duck Foot may be somewhat difficult to locate, as it is not widely produced. Liners can be purchased from McCoy Family Nursery, Inc., North Plains, Ore. For sources and cultural information of Duck Foot and other Hedera cultivars, visit the American Ivy Society at www.ivy.org. GPN

Paul Pilon is head grower at Sawyer Nursery, Hudsonville, Mich. He can be reached by E-mail at pjpex-



LearnMore

For more information related to this article, go to www.gpnmag.com/ LM.CFM/gp100309

AVAILABILITY

October 2003 GPN 93