

## COMMENTS ON TREE SEEDLING DESCRIPTION CODE

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May I refer to Tree Planters' Notes Vol. 28 (3 & 4), 1977, p. 6 ("Tree seedling description code" by Frank TerBush).

The proposals are interesting and, in some cases, useful. We looked at this some years ago and met a difficulty which has not been resolved by the proposed system. We describe bare-root seedlings as 1/0, 1½/0, 2/0, etc. The 1/0 designation means that the tree has been growing in the nursery for one season—thus seed was sown in spring and the trees are plantable in the following winter. The 1½/0 designation means that the seedlings were grown for 1½ seasons—thus sown in mid-summer, overwintered, and plantable in the following winter. 2/0 trees are again spring-sown and grown for two seasons before planting. For eucalypt seedlings in containers we may need the designation ½/0. The proposed system cannot accommodate these niceties, and this difficulty led to our giving up attempts to produce a better seedling classification.

I notice also that there is no provision for cuttings which, when rooted in open ground and grown for one season, we describe as 0/1.

Our experience is that what is important, for tree performance in the forest, is not what the seedling looks like, but the conditioning treatment, spacing, and fertilizer regime, it underwent in the nursery. There is nothing in the proposed system which allows for the seedling spacing to be defined, which we know to be a major factor in seedling quality, nor for any indication of undercutting, root pruning, or wrenching. And yet these can all critically affect survival and growth after outplanting in the forest, while size (especially height) can be meaningless in regard to these desirable results.

So I can go along with the letter code (if rooted cuttings are added) but I doubt if the code numbers tell the buyer anything more useful than the old simple system. The best advice to a buyer is to find out how the seedlings were treated in the nursery, rather than simply to look at them or measure their dimensions. Very good-looking trees can prove to be vastly disappointing, while nondescript-looking trees which have been treated properly can give excellent results.