

Increase Production with Hanging Basket Systems

Is that money hanging up there? If so, how much?

By Andrew Van Geest

Hanging baskets have long been a major revenue stream for the greenhouse industry. Baskets growing above another crop allows you to spread out your input cost per square foot and maximize your profit potential.

Traditionally hanging baskets are suspended from the trusses in the greenhouse on rail pipe, and a dripper system supplies irrigation to each basket. Drip irrigation has been the way to water baskets for many years and although the quality of drippers has improved immensely making the growing part easy, one problem still remains — labor.

When using a stationary basket system, you need to carry the baskets into the greenhouse and hang the baskets in spot and come back when they are ready to harvest and carry them back out. The amount of labor to hang baskets in a short greenhouse with no crop below it is not bad at all. However, if your greenhouse is 100 feet long or even as much as 400 feet long you get introduced to some serious exercise (this will prove more costly than a gym membership!). The amount of labor to perform these tasks is costly in today's market. A national average suggests growers account for \$0.50 in labor to hang a basket and \$0.50 in labor to harvest it again. Not to speak of the small army they need to get the job accomplished.

But that's only half the story. Although there is a huge labor cost component per basket, there is also a potential to add a second or perhaps even a third production turn in the spring for a larger sales potential in the same square footage. The challenge

is to accomplish this opportunity for more sales in a time of year where there is no labor to spare.

Cable Systems

Moving basket systems have been in existence for more than 20 years. Typically they have a drum on each end of the greenhouse with a cable stretched tightly between them similar to a ski lift.

This system allows baskets to travel suspended by a hook fixed to the cable along the length of the greenhouse. The basket moves around a long oval bringing baskets to a central point for irrigation and harvesting. These systems have proven themselves beneficial for many growers to reduce labor costs and to achieve larger production numbers in spring sales.



The design of the track layout of a hanging basket system can be adapted to almost any configuration.

However, there are still drawbacks. The movement of these cable systems can be jerky and create stress on the structure. If you don't believe it just put your hand on a support post next time you're in a greenhouse with one of these systems when it is running and feel the vibrations. That is your greenhouse vibrating from the cable drive basket system. Furthermore, with greenhouses being built taller than they used to be you need someone on a lift or ladder passing it down to someone on the ground to load and harvest.

Upgrading to a Chain System

There is another hanging basket system on the market that offers more options and opportunity. The MTZ basket system is driven by a chain in a track providing smooth operation and no vibrations on your structure. A hook is suspended through a chain link, and the basket is suspended from the hook. With this type of system, production personnel can lower the track down to a manageable height while it's running, requiring only one person to load and harvest safely

No more climbing up and down ladders, standing on mono rail systems or reaching up with basket pickers!



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The MTZ hanging basket system is adaptable to various pot sizes and allows the maximum number of plants in the system.

system. The ability to have inside corners and to be able to go up or down with the tracks means less drive motors and options when there are obstacles overhead. If your customer requires a different basket size next year, it is no problem. Simply move the hooks into a different link and grow baskets at an ideal spacing allowing you to provide a quality product and to freely move with your market still making money.

There are many products on the market aimed at lowering input costs. For many greenhouse operations labor is the No. 1 cost. Anything you can do to lower this cost only puts you in a better position in a competitive marketplace! 

from the system. Plant trimming, spraying and visual inspections can all be done at a convenient working location and height, thus reducing labor costs dramatically while providing a safe work

environment.

The MTZ basket system also provides flexibility for the grower. Different crops and sizes can be grown and irrigated differently on the same

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