

# A Fairy Surprising Holiday Twist

PROMOTE OFF-SEASON SALES WITH MINIATURE PLANTS AND FLOWERS.

By Emily Sorenson

**H**ave you seen them? Do they make you cringe a little? Those pre-Halloween holiday displays that send a clear message Christmas is right around the corner striking terror in the hearts of garden center merchandisers and buyers alike. Isn't it mum season?

The truth of the matter is, you've just returned from an intense round of fall trade shows, and it really is time to prepare for Christmas trees, poinsettias, amaryllis, paper whites and, of course, Fairy Flowers. Wait... what?

## The Power of Fairy Flowers

These mini flowers are the perfect addition to your holiday plant lines. Garden centers have enjoyed great year-round success by adding fairy gardening to their product mix and now both growers and retailers can capitalize on the hottest hobby to hit the gardening industry in years.

The 33 plants in the Fairy Flowers line represent a wide variety of vegetation and have been individually selected because they naturally stay small or can be trimmed to stay tiny allowing fairy gardeners to create realistic miniature landscapes. These flowers thrive as outdoor plants in the height of the growing season and as indoor plants the remainder of the year. Each plant comes with an informative tag that introduces consumers to both the fairy and the flower he or she has selected. With custom art and unique stories on each tag, this program is unlike anything that growers and retailers have ever seen.

## Get Growing!

You may be hesitant to invest the money and energy to add something new right now, but for a very minimal



*Fairy gardening has become a way to bridge the gap between young and old gardeners.*



investment of both, you can add an entire new profit center to your business. As a grower, why not dedicate a small area of one of your greenhouses (you're already paying for heat to grow those beautiful poinsettias anyway) to testing

out these new plants?

It's easy to get started. Order plugs in strips of 25 or in trays of 96 or 196. Minimums are low and the option of the 25-count strips provides a convenient solution for testing multiple varieties.

Plus with many of the plants in the line, these larger plugs can be ready to sell in three weeks time. (Trays of 96 plugs can be turned around in four to five weeks, and 198 cells generally are ready to go in six weeks time.)

When determining exactly which plants to grow, keep the following things in mind. First, be sure to offer plants that will allow fairy gardening customers to create realistic landscapes by growing some plants that mimic trees, some that look shrub-like, some that vine and some that are groundcovers. Similar to an herb or vegetable crop, expect garden centers to take four to five flats of top sellers (think basil and tomatoes) and single flats of other varieties (think lemon grass and artichokes).

### A Perfect Fit

We grow several Fairy Flowers at our garden center and are often asked what pots work best. It has been our experience that 3-inch pots are ideal for several reasons. First, a 3-inch pot is perfect for rooting in a plug and establishing a healthy plant. Second, the 3-inch pot is seen as a good value by the customer because she is purchasing a plant that provides instant gratification. Plus, if she wants to, with several of the groundcovers, she can divide them into halves or thirds and place them in multiple spots in her garden. Finally, a 3-inch pot is well suited for setting a profitable price point for both growers and retailers. Selling 3-inch pots in 12-count trays makes it easy for retailers to stock a nice variety of Fairy Flowers without being too deep in any one kind. Be sure to have fun with the color of the pots!

### To Growth Regulate or Not?

In our experience, growth regulators are not necessary for Fairy Flowers. The plants have been selected because they naturally stay small or can be easily trimmed to stay small and we see growth regulators as an unnecessary investment and one that cuts into your ROI. Ideally, you'd time all of your Fairy Flowers to sell immediately and not spend time on your benches. However, in the real world, this isn't always possible. In this case, some

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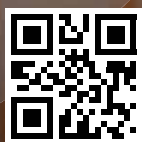
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### CROP CULTIVATION



**Above:** Armeria on greenhouse bench.



**Left:** Mini bistro set available with Fairy Flowers.

pruning may be required. Fortunately, most of the plants in the Fairy Flowers line recover quickly. If necessary, simply cut back up to one third of the total height and the flowers should be salable again within two weeks.

### Use What You've Got

Fairy Flowers will do well in the general potting soil mix you most likely already have. The same is true of fertilizers. You can use the same mix you currently use on your annuals, but unlike annuals, which tend to be heavy feeders, Fairy Flowers will require 60 to 70 percent less fertilizer. Simply fertilize every seven to 10 days with your favorite formulation. Heat is easy for Fairy Flowers as well. Plugs will root in at 65 to 70° F and established plants hold nicely at 50 to 55° F. Much to the surprise of many consumers (and to the delight of growers), many of the Fairy Flowers are day-length neutral providing beautiful miniature blooms in the dead of winter.

### A Little Pinch

Fairy Flowers as a whole are a low maintenance crop. In fact, nearly half of the plants in the line require little to no trimming. That said a few of the plants will appreciate being pinched back about two weeks into the growing cycle (after the plugs have been planted). These are flowers such as Bernard's Elfin Herb, Luciana's Baby's Breath, Ruby's Burgundy Shamrock and Viola's Cigar Plant. Pinching helps these shrub-like plants stay more compact. [E]

**Interested in Purchasing Fairy Flowers?** Commercial Growers can purchase pre-finished plants (plugs) exclusively through Henry F. Michell Co. Contact Michell's at 800.422.4678 or [www.michells.com](http://www.michells.com). Contact Fairy Gardening, Inc. at 970.701.1127 or [www.fairygardening.com](http://www.fairygardening.com).

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