



Who's Driving Who

New ideas, mass merchandisers and the upcoming fall crop.

By Roger C. Styer

I was talking the other day with a client in the Southeast, when the subject came up about growing pansies for a certain chain store. This particular chain store wanted the grower to provide pansies starting in July and continuing through the fall. My client had never provided them that early or in that quantity before, so he was reluctant to agree. His ultimate decision was not to provide pansies until early September. I told him that was a

wise move, if he could get the chain store to agree to it instead of going to another grower.

After the meeting, I found myself wondering why our growers are not working more closely with the big box stores to help them sell color year-round that is appropriate for the season and market. Every year, the big boxes want color starting in July and August, well before the weather says it is fall. Growers are being forced to produce pansies during the worst possible weather for that crop, put them in stores where they

only get worse and create customers not yet thinking about fall. The same situation is happening with fall mums. Growers are having to black-cloth mums for sale in July and August, when customers are not even thinking of mums

yet. Even if the customer does buy a mum that time of year, the flowers will only last a week or so.

This situation presents a no-win scenario for growers. On one hand, you can grow pansies and mums early for the market by jumping through all sorts of hoops to produce a half-decent crop, ship them to the stores and watch them sit there for a week or longer until you get asked for credit. Under these conditions, you lose! On the other hand, if you decide not to grow pansies and mums for sale until closer to September, then the chain stores may go to another grower; again you lose.

TAKING THE WHEEL


I don't blame this situation on either the box stores or the growers. It just illustrates the classic supply-and-demand curve, but the question is with which products do you satisfy the demand. The box stores want some color in July and August to get more people into the stores. Spring sales are long over, and the fall season doesn't really start until late September. Meanwhile, the stores sit empty. So the buyers want to get a jump on fall by filling up the stores with fall color, not really realizing that the weather doesn't allow quality plants to be produced or held, and customers are not really interested in fall color yet.

Growers, however, are not really working with the box stores to provide alternative crops that will tolerate the heat and humidity of this time of year or in the larger container sizes that the

stores can hold and that the customer can quickly utilize.

Some growers are extending the spring season with 6- and 8-inch pots of annuals, some of them heat-tolerant. And many growers are supplying the late market with combos and large hanging baskets. But these programs are really not marketed as heat- and humidity-tolerant to the stores or to the consumers. They just appear to be an extension of spring.

I would suggest to growers that they work with stores to install a separate "Beat The Heat" program from mid-June to late August. This program could consist of 6- and 8-inch pots, combos and other large containers (no flats, please!) filled with certain plants, some of which were not really sold in spring. Crops could include *Amaranthus*, *Cuphea*, *Coleus*, *Evolvulus*, *Gomphrena*, *Melampodium*, pentas, lantana, purslane, *salvia coccinea* and verbena species, just to name a few.

I would suggest that growers in the hot parts of the United States work with their stores to save pansies and mums for sale in early September, even later if you can. Instead, promote a true summer program with different colors, so the stores have something to attract customers. If you don't want to be told to have pansies and mums ready in July, then provide a good alternative for them. Otherwise, who's driving the car? 

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