

Odds and Ends



By Roger C. Styer

If it's October, it must be time for odds and ends! This is my time to talk about a few things that don't take up enough space for an entire column. Let me know what you think, or if you have some other odds and ends you think I should consider.

RETHINKING PANSY PLUGS

Over the last couple of years, I have been noticing that when fall pansy plugs are transplanted younger, they do not bud up or flower too fast, and they seem to grow out of it fine. Regardless of when you transplant, you definitely don't want to let your plugs get root-bound. Plugs that are root-bound tend to take longer to root out and may have more problems with root rots.

Growers in the Southeast and Texas have been complaining about pansy plugs flowering too quickly after transplanting or even coming from plug suppliers with buds and flowers. With the newer varieties that flower faster, it is not unusual to expect this to happen. Add to this that many growers do not use as much NH_4 fertilizer on pansies as they used to, and you get faster flowering.

You can get vegetative growth in the first two weeks or so by transplanting a 4-week-old 288 plug. No Florel needed! Ask your plug supplier about their pansy crop times before you order for next fall. As for plug trays and sizes, growing in ventilated plug trays is far better than solid trays. Getting tray manufacturers and transplanter companies to

incorporate ventilation into their trays is slowly happening. If you are growing plugs in a 512 tray, make sure the soil volume is close to a 392 or 406. You will get a better root system and better take-off after transplanting.

POINSETTIA VIGOR

One thing I am trying to get my clients to understand is the differences in vigor among poinsettia varieties. This point is important for controlling growth, whether using graphical tracking or not. I covered this topic extensively in October 2003 *GPN*, but it bears repeating again.

The main problem is many of the newer varieties are less vigorous than Freedom. If you use the same growth regulator program on these newer varieties, you will get too much height control, resulting in a battle through October to get up to height specs. If Freedom is a medium-vigor variety, it is easy to see that we are losing many of the more vigorous varieties. If you are growing 'Snowcap', 'Monet Twilight' or Santa Claus, you still have a tough task to keep them under control. But if you are growing Premium, 'Strawberries n' Cream', 'Holly Point' or even 'Prestige', you have to watch out to not over-grow regulate.

I recommend less B-Nine plus Cycocel, or lower rates, and mostly Cycocel for early control of these varieties. In some cases, you may not even need a growth regulator. So, be careful about using chemical growth regulators on these newer varieties, and be aware of their vigor or lack thereof.

PAINT AND GLITTER

While we are on the subject of poinsettias, I think anything we can do to make poinsettias attractive to other segments of the buying public, we should do. That means if we can sell more poinsettias by painting them a different color or adding glitter, go for it! By doing these things, we should be able to get a higher price and attract a different buyer. That buyer wants something different and glamorous. I don't think these techniques will go over big in box stores, as these places do not display poinsettias very well. But if you sell to upscale retail florists, get them to try some.

This may sound crazy, but have you

thought about selling poinsettias in stores such as Claire's? My teenage daughter loves this store and loves glitter. She would probably buy a small, decorated poinsettia in that store if it had glitter on it. You can set up stores with plants on saucers to make it easy for store personnel to water and have attractive sleeves at the counter. What about Harry and David, Hollister, Abercrombie & Fitch or other upscale stores that cater to the younger crowd or to women? The possibilities are endless, but you need to make it easy for the stores to sell them. Incorporate the painted and glittered poinsettias into window displays. Make it easy and clean for store personnel to water them, and get them to use decorative sleeves. I'll bet they take better care of those poinsettias than any box store.

FALL PANSIES IN THE MIDWEST

Why can't we sell more fall pansies in the Midwest? There are a few programs in box stores and garden centers that try to emphasize the winter-hardiness of pansies, but it is still a struggle! Why?

I think the average consumer does not understand that pansies can over-winter, even in Chicago. By planting them before the ground freezes, they will bloom until it snows and again as spring starts. But if consumers put pansies in the wrong spot, they can lose them and be turned off on fall pansies forever. If you have a retail garden center, are you putting in pansies now to show consumers what they can expect for next year? Or are you just decorating with mums and maybe flowering kale and cabbage?

To get more consumers in the Midwest excited about fall pansies, we need to get towns and cities to incorporate them into their landscapes. Many areas are doing a great job with spring plantings but do nothing in the fall. Work with your local community to get fall pansies established. Show by doing. Let them see what they can enjoy in fall and even at times during the winter. [GPN](#)

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