

CapMat

Capillary matting — a method of watering that is catching on.

By Mackenzie Gaffney

The CapMat is just one of more than 32,000 products that Hummert International offers. Bill Eskes horticulturist and technical adviser of Hummert International, Springfield, Mo. explained why this capillary matting product has had such an effect on growers across the country. "The way that the CapMat works is by setting pots on the mat, and through capillary action it pulls the water from the mat up through the pot. As the roots grow to the bottom they will suck the moisture right out of the mat. It is a great way of growing crops, especially African violets and gloxinias, which shouldn't get their leaves wet."

COMPOSITION

CapMat, capillary matting system, is made of a versatile non-woven fabric that can be used to hold potted plants, allowing a watering system to keep the fabric saturated. One of the major benefits of using this type of system for watering is that it eradicates leaf spotting, often caused by watering from above. "Before we were just hand watering from the top," said Mike Biggs owner of Biggs Nursery, Greenfield, Tenn. According to Biggs, the CapMat system "keeps leaves dry and is a good system overall." CapMat is available in 4- and 6-foot-widths and has resistance to rot, mildew and chemicals. The distribution kit contains all the necessary fit-

tings, a pressure regulator and watering kit for a 100-foot bench. Hummert suggests that plastic be installed under the material to aid in the distribution of water and to help hold moisture.

THE MAT DIFFERENCE

Besides eliminating leaf spotting, the CapMat provides an opportunity to lower the water bill. By putting the water system in direct contact with the mat, it can evenly distribute the water and increase the chances of the plants growing uniformly. "We used dripstakes in four greenhouses — it gives a slow seep and wastes almost no water," Biggs said.

There are a few suggestions offered by those who have used the product that has ensured their success. "We have the mats on wire benches. They need to be level benches," said Bush. Keeping the benches level will ensure that there is no standing water. To get the mat fabric to your desired length owner, Don Sklarczyk, Sklarczyk Mini Spuds, Johannesburg, Mich., suggests using a fabric cutter to get the precise measurements that are needed.

The CapMat was used by these growers this past spring season, and they are putting the mat to use during the poinsettia season. "We only used it on one crop this spring, and 4-inch pots work great. It doesn't work so well with flats, but we have been doing a lot of 4-inch pots, and the top leaves stay dry. We called a breeder company's technical support, and they had said not to use mats on geranium cuttings because there have been so many disease problems with geraniums. But we did use it on our seedling geraniums and had the best crop we've ever had. Now we have a small portion of our poinsettias on mats. We have about 18,000 sq.ft. of greenhouse space, and 4,000 sq.ft. have mats, and we plan to add more next season," said Biggs.

ALGAE

"It all worked well except for the algae buildup," said Bessie



Bush owner of Bush Berry Farm & Greenhouse, Watsonstown, Pa. Bush brings to light one of the few concerns with the CapMat product — algae. Hummert suggests that Agribrom (Great Lakes Chemical Corp.) or ZeroTol (BioSafe Systems) be used to control the growth of algae. Bush utilized another method after she began the spring season with algae buildup under the feet of her customers. "We put a black ground cover over the mat, and it worked fine and stopped the algae growth," Bush said. Without the ground cover Bush had been washing the mat off once a month with Green Shield, and after putting the ground cover down Bush didn't wash the mat the rest of the selling season.

"The problem with mats, generally, is algae," Biggs said. "After the spring season we used Green Shield (Whitmire Micro-Gen) to clean the mats and then sterilized everything for about a month."

One of the most common concerns Eskes hears from CapMat customers is the development of algae and/or fungus. "The biggest thing that I hear is that a small amount of algae or fungus is on the mat," Eskes said. "I recommend using ZeroTol for this problem because you can run it through your injector system and irrigation lines onto the mats." ZeroTol will control the algae and eliminate the problem.

LAST NOTE

An important thing to remember is that helpful tips and troubleshooting is available with the CapMat. Hummert has "good people to deal with, we called for information because so few people are using them that we struggled to find people and information. We spoke with a Hummert employee who helped guide us through. We did exactly what he said," said Biggs, who has success with this product. The information is out there and available for those who want it. **GPN**

Mackenzie Gaffney is associate editor of GPN. She can be reached by phone at (847) 391-1013 or E-mail at mgaffney@sgcmail.com.

Write in 1432

