

Improving Efficiencies with Direct Sticking

Since starting at ColorPoint in 2008, I have had a strong focus on two areas, keeping in mind the goal of improving growing efficiencies on a continual basis. First is implementing full-sun propagation for faster, more uniform rooting and improved

quality in young-plant production. This, along with automated boom irrigation systems, has allowed ColorPoint to use the entire greenhouse as a propagation area. The second is developing a direct-stick propagation program which has enabled us to increase overall efficiency. Our direct stick (DS) program is currently 40 acres of production in Kentucky.

Labor saver. Direct sticking allows us to save labor, as we are eliminating the transplant step in the production process. At the beginning and end of the spring season, where space is not an issue, we save greenhouse labor by placing the direct stick/no pinch plants in finished containers, never touching again until shipping. Some crop examples include: garden mums, poinsettias, geraniums, ipomeas, New Guinea impatiens and lysmachia.

Time saver. Direct sticking allows us to save time, which was typically allocated to transplanting liners. This has been beneficial when there is a large number of liners needing to be transplanted within a few weeks. We've also been able to take finish time off most products, resulting in one to two fewer grow weeks from stick. Branching agents allow us to grow without pinch on many plants and the additional space available to the plants immediately upon sticking allows them to branch out and grow. As an added benefit, we use less PGRs in direct sticking than in traditional liner propagation because plants do not need to stay compact, as they would be in a liner.

Labor shifting. Direct sticking not only reduces labor but also shifts labor to weeks when less labor is needed. Every spring one reaches a time where cuttings are being stuck, liners are being transplanted, plugs are being transplanted, plants need spacing and shipping begins. By direct sticking, labor that would have been needed to transplant liners is no longer needed as plants are already in the finish pot.

Choosing the right plants. Selecting the right plants is key, not only to ensure product success, but to deliver the best quality product to our customers. We started off with easy to root plants that generally would not need a pinch, such as New Guinea impatiens, coleus, ipomea and callused geraniums. Through growth and gained confidence, we added dahlia, osteospermum, pericallis, and plectranthus. Additionally, all 40 acres of mums were converted to direct stick at our Kentucky location in 2018.

Drawbacks. With every growth opportunity comes challenges. While we've saved time in transplanting, pinching and spacing, we've had to slow down the production lines to efficiently stick the cuttings in the pots. Additionally, those working the production line need to be educated on how to properly stick, and the team responsible for placement in the greenhouse needs to be vigilant

in reviewing and fixing any cuttings that may have been jostled in transport. There is a learning curve for the section growers when you direct stick; you turn finish growers into propagation growers.

Pull the plug (or liner). Why not try something new? If you haven't tried direct sticking plants, start small, build your confidence and get your growers excited about a different way of propagation. Just as we did at ColorPoint, my suggestion would be to start with a variety that is easier to root. I think you'll find the possibilities are endless. [gpn](http://gpn.com)



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