

GROWERTALKS

Columns

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Giving Thanks

Roger McGaughey



ROGER MCGAUGHEY

It's November—the time for giving thanks. I was brought up to always say please and thank you, so in this article, I would like to thank and recognize some people.

Sometimes it's important to get away from the daily intensity of the greenhouse and take time to relax and recharge the batteries. Apart from growing, one of my other passions is golf. Unfortunately, I don't play enough, but on a recent summer family vacation in Scotland, I more than made up for some of the shortfall. My brother arranged a round on the PGA course at Gleneagles. It was an awesome day and a once-in-a-lifetime experience. A hearty vote of thanks goes to him for a wonderful day at the club. I supported the Europeans in the recent Ryder Cup competition and had every confidence that they would win. Watching the

event took on a whole new meaning having played there just a few months before the actual competition. Passion and teamwork won out again.

Having the right information gives us more confidence to perform well in our jobs. This is important and is improved by attending the educational seminars that are available to growers at the various trade shows. My next vote of thanks goes to AmericanHort for the seminars that they arrange in July at the Cultivate conference in Ohio. There's always a great range of topics available and for me it's encouraging that the interest in biologicals has increased so much over the last few years. Four years ago the attendance at these seminars was very low, but now it's almost standing room only.

The Northeast Greenhouse Conference and Expo in November this year also has a large number of biological seminars in the program, so thanks to the organizers for providing another educational event. Again, I remember that there were very few attendees at the first seminars when the biological style of growing was in its infancy. Now, I'm sure these meetings will be very well attended.

Our BCA suppliers are next in line for recognition because without their support and onsite visits we wouldn't have the knowledge that enables us to educate our employees and grow clean, quality crops with minimal use of chemicals requiring REIs. The younger members of our growing team embrace the biological approach

and, ultimately, this method of growing is better for the consumer and public in general.

Biological control has worked well for us again this year. We need to refine the growing of our aphid bankers for next season because there's always room for improvement. Our pepper/marigold/zinnia and lobularia bankers continue to harbor a good population of Orius. This, coupled with our weekly nematode applications, has more than maintained a very low thrips population in our greenhouses.

Apart from protecting roots from diseases, one of the side effects of early application of RootShield is that lots of fine white roots and root hairs are formed and can quickly help a plant recover from a near-death experience. Knowledge of this phenomenon can be very useful as a general watering aid. Try sampling one plant. Carefully wash off the root system and see what's really in the pot. Think about how often we overwater our crops. Knowing what the inner quality of our root systems is like can give us confidence to run carefully monitored, drier moisture regimes—especially now in the later months of the year and through the winter.

This year prior to planting, we dipped a significant portion of our field-grown bare root material in RootShield Plus and the results have been striking. Regular inspections throughout the growing season have shown how fibrous and healthy the root systems are and the general crop quality has improved as a result. Samples of any RootShield-grown material can be sent to the labs at BioWorks, Inc. and Trichoderma levels can be assessed. Positive results from these tests will confirm root health. Thanks to them for providing this proactive service.

There are many more people and institutions out there that could be mentioned, but anyone involved with making our business successful, consider yourselves thanked for helping us provide quality product to this wonderful growing industry. **GT**

Roger McGaughey, head grower at Pioneer Gardens in Deerfield, Massachusetts, was educated in Northern Ireland and England and has 40 years experience as a grower.