

GROWERTALKS

Columns

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Creativity Killed the Crop

Chris Fifo

It never ceases to amaze me the creativity of my son. Not in the artistic manner; his sister got all that. I mean creativity in making up excuses as to where he's going or what he's been doing, how that stain got on the carpet or why there's an empty pop can under the couch. But he's got a lot to learn!

Teenage boys are so much more difficult than teenage girls. My daughter never made up any of those excuses (I'm so naïve!). Even now that she's moved out on her own he thinks he can still plead ignorance. Son, it's not working!

Greenhouse managers have their own characteristic creativity. Whenever an improvement is needed or a problem solved, they're very resourceful when it comes to overcoming obstacles.

Then there are the growers. We have a unique style of creativity when it comes to our crop. We're always trying new growing media, fertilizers, chemicals ... whatever we can do to try to produce a better quality crop more efficiently. However, in the process, we occasionally come up with creative ways to kill our crops as well.

We've all lost plants due to drought or disease. That's boring. Over the years, I've come up with some very unique and creative ways to efficiently kill a crop.

My first experience (1990) was my second spring in the greenhouse and the first on my own. I had a block of pansy 1204s that were showing boron deficiency. The recommended corrective measure was to apply solubor at 0.25 to 0.5 oz./gal. What I didn't realize: that rate was per gallon of stock, applied as a drench.

Instead, I mixed up a spray and, of course, I went with the high rate because I wanted instant results. Five ounces of solubor, 10 gallons of water and a heavy spray gave me instant results! By the next morning, the margins of all the leaves were brown and within three days they were fried off and I was left with a crown. Impressive!

Another experience with corrective measures came in about 1997. It was summer and I had two benches of delphinium 288 plugs that had high pH. The standard treatment would be to apply iron sulphate. Well, by 1997, I knew it all and didn't have to double check rates and procedures.

It was a Friday. I applied 16 oz./gal. (stock!) as a drench and went home. I clearly remember getting the phone call the next morning from my assistant who was in charge that day. She told me the delphiniums were all black. Awesome!

Turns out the rate I should have used was 8 oz./gal. stock. And I forgot one small detail ... wash it off the leaves.

Another opportunity for creativity came in the spring circa 1998—I experimented with chemical compatibility.

We were dealing with both spider mites and thrips in several houses. One of the products we had for mites was Kelthane. It gave us good knock-down. We'd also been using Botanigard regularly for managing our thrips. I suggested we do a tank mix ...

The bosses double checked with me to make sure we'd trialed it and I assured them we had. I prepared my Friday night tank mix and sprayed as normal. Hanging baskets, too, because they had thrips. By Monday morning, a number of crops—including digitalis, asclepias and the New Guinea impatiens baskets—were black. But, fortunately, only half the crop. The half of each pot facing away from the spray was fine. Sweet!

Turns out we had trialed the tank mix, but with the WP formulation of Botanigard, and not the ES, which is what we used. The carrier reacted with the Kelthane and, not only did it create a compound that killed some crops, it left a very strong odor that stuck to everything and lingered, literally, for months.

Since then, my creativity has been rather subdued, but we're bringing up the next generation to come up with their own ideas.

Last year, an assistant killed \$6,000 worth of echinacea tissue culture by enclosing them in a tent of GreenShield fumes. And just a few weeks ago, my newest assistant nearly killed 20 trays of 288 lupines with a highly concentrated spray of ZeroTol.

With a little more practice, she'll get it right. She's got a lot to learn! **GT**

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