As I visit greenhouses in the U.S. and Canada, I’m constantly reminded of how important all the day-to-day, seemingly minor, greenhouse jobs are to crop quality. An excellent crop is most often produced by careful attention to the smallest of details. A single mistake any time during greenhouse production will carry over to the retail display. Examples of some small details:

Finished poinsettia height is greatly affected by how the plants are pinched. A soft pinch can add several inches to the finished plant when compared to a hard pinch. When several people are pinching a crop differently within the same greenhouse, large variability in plant finish height will occur. The detail—make sure each employee is pinching correctly.

Watering is still a big issue in many greenhouses. As crops reach maturity, the details of how and when to water become important to crop quality and disease control. Watering late in the day, particularly during cold dark weather, assures the perfect environment for disease development. Using a set frequency of watering without checking plant needs often results in too-wet root medium. Plant growth and environment, as well as the specific root medium you use, affect the water needs of the plant. The detail—watering requires hourly decisions that must be carefully checked by the grower.

Monitoring greenhouse temperatures cannot be done by simply looking at computer logs from the environmental computer. Placing calibrated recording temperature sensors within the crop will assure plants are receiving the desired temperature. Teach your employees to pay attention to greenhouse temperatures and ask questions when they detect a too-high or too-low temperature. It doesn’t take much deviation from a set temperature to affect crop quality and/or timing. The detail—make sure greenhouse temperatures are correct by both “feel” and accurate recording.

The simple task of planting a liner can result in an excellent or not-so-good finished crop. Both the depth and arrangement of the liner in the container make a difference. The lack of uniformity in planting will cause variability that seems to magnify as the crop grows in the greenhouse. How the liner or liners are arranged in the container will also affect the look of the finished container. The difference in uniformity between
mechanically transplanted and hand transplanted crops is often quite visible at crop finish unless the transplanting crew has paid attention to the detail. The detail—carefully monitor how each liner is transplanted on the transplanting line.

Walk the crop, touch the plants, and look at the roots. How often do you find issues during shipping that should have been corrected during the production phase? It's easy to view the crop from the aisle and think everything is perfect yet miss what's lurking within the closed canopy. Growing plants in the greenhouse demands daily intimate contact with the plants. The detail—walk the crop and touch the plants.

Grower idea of the month!
Lou Morrison, grower at Shore Acres Nursery, Kissimmee, Florida, with a poinsettia plant showing leaf spots. He had set aside the plant for my opinion during a recent visit. Lou was pretty sure he had determined the problem; he just wanted a confirmation. The roots were good. The plants had not been sprayed with a chemical. Note that the damage is on a specific set of leaves. The new leaves shown in the hand of the grower (inset) are normal and do not show any damage. This is typical of a plant exposed to a problem at a specific time, affecting only a specific set of leaves. In this case, the plant was exposed to one night of very low temperature in late October in Florida. It's likely the damage occurred because the plant was soft and actively growing along with condensation occurring on the leaf surface.