“Mum’s” the Word

Bill Swanekamp

The fall hardy mum season is wrapping up in the Northeast and for many, it’s not a year to remember fondly. The month of June was not kind to us. We had 22 straight days of cloudy, cool and rainy weather. For those who put their mums outside during this period, they had to watch them bud prematurely. This resulted in mums that flowered weeks or even a month too early and did not grow to a full size. With plants coming into flower too early, prices started to drop before the season even began.

Numerous magazines, journalists and growers commented on how to counteract this problem. The mantra was “Feed, feed, feed!” The idea was to put enough 20-10-20 feed on the plants to cause them to stop flower production and revert to vegetative production again. Our past experience shows that this approach has limited success. One danger of pushing so much feed to a mum at this time is that the root system can be damaged from excess salts. Once this happens, not only does the plant not grow vegetatively, but the roots can die and the entire plant along with it.

Is there nothing that can be done? There is a solution, but as the saying goes, “mum’s the word.” It appears no one is talking about the real solution that has been around for more than 15 years. I’m talking about Florel. Yes, that very inexpensive chemical used to prevent premature budding and stimulate vegetative growth.

Now, I cannot take any credit for this information. Dr. Peter Konjoian did all the research on how to use Florel and has been presenting this information at OFA for the past 15 years. We started using Florel on our mums more than 15 years ago and have not experienced any problems with premature budding, including this year.

I know you are dying to know how to use this wonder chemical, but I felt it would be best for you to hear it from the horse’s mouth. So, Dr. K, tell us: How can you effectively use Florel to prevent premature budding on hardy mums?

“Bill, since conducting this research years ago, various regions of the country have experienced premature budding from time to time. Then, after a normal season, the old ‘out-of-sight, out-of-mind’ adage rears up, lulling us back to sleep.

The key to using Florel successfully on garden mums is to think of it as an insurance policy against premature
budding. As with any type of insurance, regular premium payments are sometimes viewed as unnecessary … but … when the policy’s benefits are needed, the premium payments are worth their weight in gold.

The Florel prescription is easy to use. It’s critical to treat the crop before flowering conditions set in. This will override the natural flowering response as long as the crop remains under the influence of ethylene.

We use a 500 ppm concentration of Florel. Treatment begins as soon after transplant as possible. This is usually during the first week, depending on how quickly the grower is able to re-establish active, visible growth. Repeat applications are made at 2- to 3-week intervals up to the week before flower initiation is desired. For natural flowering, which is initiated in early July, the last Florel application should be made at the end of June.

Let’s not forget that these Florel treatments are also going to stimulate lateral branching and control stem elongation while they are maintaining vegetative growth. Both are valuable benefits that increase the quality and value of the crop.”

Alas, the secret is out! Florel works to prevent pre-mature budding on hardy mums. There are numerous growers throughout the country who have been using Florel successfully for many years. Contact OFA (www.ofa.org) for a CD of previous talks that detail its usage.

*Bill Swanekamp is president of Kube-Pak Corp., Allentown, New Jersey.*