

GROWERTALKS

Culture Notes

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Real Series: A Diascia By Any Other Name ...

Ryan Hall



As people itch to get outside at the first sight of a sunny day in spring, they're also eager to get back into their gardens and convert the dreary gray of winter into a garden full of color. Growers know all too well the high demand of product during these peak selling months. However, growers generally employ a certain level of staff year-round. This feast-and-famine approach to selling garden plants has continually driven the need for more plants that can be sold on the shoulders of the season—a period that's shorter, but provides a unique opportunity to grow and sell products that thrive in those narrow seasonal windows. Shoulder-season crops also differ from the masses of core genetics crowding shelves during the spring rush.

One of the shoulder seasons that is very important is the early spring market. This market is a unique one because cold tolerance and early flowering is a key set of attributes that make plants in this market successful. Early-spring crops can be a great thing to have in the greenhouse, especially when the weather breaks earlier than normal. A typical scenario is when a region has a beautiful spring weekend and retailers are clamoring for product, but growers know all too well that cold weather can return and threaten their crops at any point. Part of managing this risk is selecting the best genetics that will survive and thrive in this situation.

One of the best genera for early markets that has both cold tolerance and early flowering paired with high-impulse bright colors is diascia. Diascia historically is a vigorous, trailing, basket plant, common in window boxes and baskets. The diascia of today are notable for their more compact habits, larger flowers and large range of brightly colored flowers. The Juliet series from Ball FloraPlant is the most compact and uniform on the market, making them the perfect option for early-season programs. Juliet comes in five colors that are perfectly matched across the series and perfect for small pot programs, such as 4 in. and 1 qt. This uniformity makes Juliet part of Ball FloraPlant's "Real Series" group of plants. Ball FloraPlant's Real Series gives growers another tool for producing predictable crops with high uniformity and ease of culture across all colors.

Growing Juliet Diascia is very straightforward, but it does prefer specific conditions and culture to maximize the potential of this series and deliver high-quality plants to market. Here are some tips to get the most out of

Juliet Diascia.

Container Size	Plants Per Pot	Crop Time
4-in. to 1-qt. Pots	1	5 to 7 Weeks
6-in. to 2.5-qt. Pots	1 to 3	7 to 9 Weeks
10- to 12-in. Pots or Baskets	3 to 6	9 to 11 Weeks

Crop time: Rooted liner to finish

Juliet Diascia are fast growers and make a great item for a quick-turn, small-container crop.

Media & pH

Like most diascia, Juliet prefers a well-drained media that doesn't stay overly saturated. Juliet should be finished on an acid pH range of 5.4 to 5.8. A standard bedding plant media, such as peat perlite or 100% peat, works well on diascia. Growers should allow the media to dry between irrigations and not let the media stay excessively wet over time.

Temperatures

The critical point to growing high-quality diascia is providing cool growing conditions. Diascia can tolerate brief windows of warm temperatures, but thrive when temperatures are cool. Ideal temperatures for production are 62 to 76F (16 to 24C) days and 35 to 52F (1 to 11C) nights.

Light levels

The other key area for growing high-quality diascia is providing high light. Cool and bright conditions are the perfect combination for maximizing the potential of Juliet Diascia. Recommended light levels are between 5,000 to 8,000 f.c.

Fertilizer

Diascia are generally moderate feeders and do well with a constant rate of feed between 175 to 225 ppm N. Growers should avoid fertilizers high in ammoniacal nitrogen, as this can encourage soft and leggy growth.

PGRs

Juliet Diascia are naturally compact and generally don't require any PGRs when grown under cool and bright conditions. If conditions aren't ideal and extra control is required, growers can apply B-Nine between 1,500 to 2,500 ppm.

Pests & disease

Having a solid IPM program and regularly scouting for pests and diseases is the best way to manage diseases and pests on diascia. Growers should regularly scout and treat for thrips, aphids and leafminers. Thrips can be especially problematic at vectoring INSV, so it's critical to keep thrips populations under control. Root rots and botrytis can also be problematic on diascia. Proper irrigation practices and avoiding long periods of cool and wet conditions are the best way to avoid these diseases.

Diascia has come a long way since its inception with vigorous, gangly habits. With its refinement of habits and the broad range of colors, Juliet Diascia is the ideal solution for early-shoulder business that can be the catalyst for a strong spring season to come. **GT**

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