GROWERTALKS

Columns

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That “Oh No” Moment

Paul Westervelt

I have a sign in my office that reads: “Peace. It does not mean to be in a place where there is no noise, trouble or hard work. It means to be in the midst of those things and still be calm in your heart.”

I aspire to that but often fail—especially in the heat of the season. We’re a multiple-hat kind of place and I’m both the grower and production manager for annuals and perennials. It reminds me of the (not-so-funny) joke about teaching at a land grant university being 50% teaching, 50% research and 50% extension. To stay calm in the heat of things, I need structure—rules to play within—and I take comfort in plant weeks.

Plant weeks are the little numbers on the left side of industry calendars that assign a week number to each week of the year. Each year, the calendar shifts by a day or two because 365 isn’t evenly divisible by 7. Plant weeks prevent growers from getting caught up in the small annual shifts to the calendar. It doesn’t matter to me that March 30 was a Monday this year but will be a Wednesday next year. My Week 14 planting still gets planted that week and finishes X weeks later like normal.

If I was only planting a few times a year, using the same weeks from year to year might not matter, but I’m responsible for 48 different plantings across eight different programs. That feels like plenty to me, but doesn’t even register on the scale of many growers.

I’ve been tripped up by the week calendar a few times. Every few years someone will offer a calendar with the weeks numbered incorrectly. The ISO (International Organization for Standardization) recognizes Week 1 as the first week with a Thursday in it. While I’m not aware of an official numbering system for our industry, the overwhelming majority of week calendars I come across appear to follow this rule. Any calendars in our office not following this rule are immediately purged, as standards only work if everyone follows the same ones. Misnumbered weeks were the first trip up. The other one—the biggie—is just infrequent enough to surprise me every time.

The dates of a given week moving a day or two doesn't concern me, but every five years or so, that small change results in a one-week shift to the week calendar and 2016 is that year. In 2015, Monday of Week 14 was March 30, but in 2016 it's April 4—five days later. It would have been a six-day shift, but the extra day in February due to leap year helped us out.

Mother's Day Weekend is where it crunches. The bulk of my 4.5-in. program takes four to five weeks to finish. In most years, Mother's Day is the Sunday of Week 20, so with a five-week finish, my Week 14 planting reliably ships before Mother's Day. Some shift years this still works if Mother's Day is late (it can range from May 8 to May 14), but in 2016, Mother's Day is the earliest it can be: May 8—the Sunday of Week 19. Unless I adjust my plant week, some of my prime time 4.5-in. planting won't finish until a week after the biggest retail weekend of the year. As it sometimes gets dreadfully hot only a week or two later, material destined for Mother's Day that doesn't finish in time has an uncomfortably uncertain future.

If you're a contract grower or have a hard finish date, I don't see a way around changing your plant week. If, like us, you're a spec grower with multiple plant weeks per program, then you can adjust your numbers without moving them entirely. We'll keep the fast finishers on their normal week, but plant a few more on an earlier week and we'll move the slowpokes to an earlier week, too.

How will you handle the shift? **GT**

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