

GROWERTALKS

Columns

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One Extra Crop: Easier and More Profitable

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Do you ever wish you had greenhouse space available for just one more crop to extend your selling season and enhance your sales? You may already have the space you need! A lot of resources are focused on production for the peak spring sales season; crops move from propagation to growing on to finish. Often, that means physically moving product from one greenhouse to another and then filling the open space you've created with your next crop. At some point, your next crop is your last crop ... or is it?

*Pictured: Kwik Kombos Plum-Tastic Mix.
Image courtesy of Syngenta Flowers, Inc.*



Whether you're focused on annuals or perennials, vegetative or seed, quick-turn options are out there! What follows here are just some of the programs worthy of consideration.

Vegetative annuals

Several liner producers have programs that allow growers to turn a crop very quickly. Such programs offer an excellent opportunity to bring liners in late, as space opens up, and still produce a premium quart, 6-in. or gallon crop for June sales. Some of the industry's most popular varieties are available through these programs—perfect for that summer impulse purchase!

In the Proven Winners line, Pleasant View Gardens, Four Star Greenhouse and EuroAmerican Propagators each offer enhanced or bulked liners "supercharged" to finish full-bodied, flowering plants in as little as five to seven weeks. Included in Pleasant View's Fast Tracks 32, Four Star's Supernova 42 and EuroAmerican's Euromazing assortments are the top-selling Supertunia Petunia, Superbells Calibrachoa and Superbena Verbena series.

Multi-liner combos are available from several liner producers in a 50-cell tray. Consider Confetti Gardens (from Dümmen Orange), Kwik Kombos (from Syngenta Flowers) or Trixi (from Selecta). Growers can deliver finished gallons to retail in five to eight weeks from an April planting for late May-June sales.

From tropical Miami, Total Growth Solutions (TGS) offers a 32-cell Ellepot liner charged by the sun to finish in four to six weeks in a quart or gallon. Liners contain multiple cuttings and are pinched once or twice to provide fast pot fill. The TGS program includes items perfectly suited for warm-weather pots and combinations, including alternanthera, cuphea, evolvulus, purslane and lantana.

Larger product forms do come, of course, at a higher price. Considering, though, that production costs are often similarly reduced thanks to shorter crop times and simplified culture, the investment warrants serious consideration. And the end result is more product to sell. For many growers, the rewards outweigh the risks.

Perennials

Faster-finish opportunities also exist among summer-flowering perennials for sales into June and beyond. For quick-turn gallon production, a number of liner producers offer 50-, 30- or even 20-cell liners that will finish in eight to 10 weeks from a spring planting. For quart production, use a 72-cell and sell in four to six weeks, green or in color.

Donahue's offers both 2.5-in. and 3.5-in. clematis that are actively growing and ready to be popped into a gallon or larger container. The 3.5-in. inputs can produce saleable gallons in roughly six to eight weeks.

Some ornamental grasses like panicum and miscanthus benefit from the warmer growing temperatures of early spring. Plant these species in March and April to finish for June sales in a gallon. Most ornamental grass liner producers use large liner sizes as part of their normal production to accommodate the larger rooting area that some grasses require.

And don't forget about the use of bare-root perennials where the newest varieties can often be found. While in the past several years there's been some trending away from this form, bareroot can provide some of the fastest finish times, especially in hemerocallis where bareroot is the preferred form. Finish a gallon in six to 10 weeks from a #1-grade transplant, depending upon genera.

Seed crops

Lastly, don't forget about seed annuals. Zinnias are very popular these days; they're even growing in the International Space Station! Zinnias are a fast finish from plugs or can even be direct sown. Choose from the Dreamland, Magellan, Profusion and Zahara series; all deliver loads of quick, out-of-this-world color in 4- to 6-in. pots.

Many plug specialists offer an assortment of varieties in 128 or larger plugs for fast finish from late-spring plantings. Consult your supplier about the best plug source to fit your unique needs. **GT**

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