

GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Production

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Keeping a History

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Spring 2023 ends, I save my electronic notes from the season and think back on the crumpled sticky notes and torn magazine articles I used to tuck away in a file on the shelf. Through my many years of growing, I always kept a good account of the crops I produced. Back in the day, I'd return to that dusty file on the shelf when it was time to review what went well and what didn't in past growing seasons. I kept articles torn from industry magazines, informational handouts from various lectures and seminars, as well as notes of my own learnings. It was my account of production procedures, of the dos and don'ts of growing various plants. In my realm of growing, we call this collection of documentation a "Correction of Errors" or COE.

When a crop in production finishes, it's reviewed and points of improvement are noted for the future. This account shouldn't focus only on the negative; I like to include the positive points that happened during production in the greenhouse. It helps to remember what was successful and worth repeating. My COE becomes a "greenhouse diary," detailing all the ins and outs. However, I've evolved from the days of the loose-leaf papers and spiral notebooks. Today, my COE is digital. Keeping a history of one's growing is much easier and neater these days.

I always train new growers to keep notes. I encourage them to create their own growing history of what they do to the crop. This history will become one of the most important tools in their growing resource files. Whether a large commercial wholesale grower or a smaller retail facility, this documentation is useful for all sizes of greenhouses. I have under my supervision a couple growers that are diligent on their notes from one year to the next. Many times, it's been beneficial to review a crop and to plan on how to avoid a situation we found ourselves facing before. We learn from documented experiences.

The COE also serves as a guide on how to repeat a great finish. We have a chance to mimic the success we had last time it was grown under our roof. The novice grower can benefit from such a history. Sharing what we've learned can make it easier for the business to carry on to the next grower so they also can avoid some of the pitfalls we've identified and share in the success of what we've learned to repeat.

Customers that contact me seeking advice during the growing season always have questions concerning a crop. Being a young plant supplier, our company is readily available to assist in helping them navigate through various situations. However, one statement I hear quite often is, "I remember last year this same thing happened ..." or "A year or two ago I had a similar problem ...". Documenting the growing details, whether it is good or problematic, can help decipher any situation.

It's common for us to repeat our mistakes because we can forget what may have triggered the issue originally. We tend to write it off in our minds and not give it another thought until we find ourselves in the same or similar situation later. Having access to the details of the last crop can help in reviewing the program, the good and the bad. This can

make a huge difference in the finishing of the crop.

Some genera have a variety of colors and sometimes certain colors don't perform the same on sizing and flowering. They may be similar, but sometimes, a week difference in finish time can make a program less successful if it has a target finish date. One color can be behind the others and this affects the overall vision of the program. Keeping notes makes it easier for reviewing for next year's production planning. Awareness of the season's weather and the issues that it brought can help forecast a better plan.

Other key notable points to keep track of are chemicals and their application. Notes on what worked best and what may have caused phytotoxicity are worth tracking. I would also recommend tracking your fertilizer program. Many times, getting the growth you expect all comes down to having the right fertilizer ratio and application rate. Having this formulation in the notes helps start out with the best foot forward next time.

Keeping notes can help make the next season a bit easier and more successful. You can call it a COE, a "Growing Journal," a "Guide for the Next Grower" or a "Greenhouse Diary." It can be brief with just bullet points, a detailed report, a handwritten notebook or a digital record. Whatever you call it, it's about how you want to keep track of your data.

Whether each entry begins with the salutation "Dear Growing Diary"... well, I'll leave that one up to you. **GT**

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