

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

12/1/2024

Caladium Harvest Starts Early at Classic

Chris Beytes



Classic Caladiums started harvesting their 400 miles of caladium beds in October this year—only the second time in the 24-year history of the business that they started harvesting this early in the season. Why? The bulbs were growing so well they risked becoming too large, swelling into jumbo and mammoth sizes instead of the more commercially desirable #1 and #2 size that are most popular with growers.

“We had a very strong crop this year because the stars lined up,” said co-founder Bob Hartman. He credits

good weather, not too much rain, plus the use of pivot irrigation, which helps the young “seed” tubers get their roots down to the moisture from the drip irrigation. Central Florida experienced two hurricanes this season, but neither caused any real problems.

“We had a strong crop going into [Hurricane] Milton,” Bob said. “And I think that’s the difference. They had enough growing days.”

GrowerTalks visited Classic’s caladium farm in Zolfo Springs, Florida, in early November (they also have a farm in Lake Placid) to see the process, which uses tractors and a purpose-built machine similar to a potato-harvester to lift the mature tubers out of the beds, sift off the sand and deposit them into trailers. From the trailer, they’re conveyed to a washing line, after which they’re put into plastic bulb crates for the ride to the warehouse, where they’ll “cure” for two weeks in plastic tunnels at about 85F and 50% humidity. Curing toughens the skin of the tubers so they can be graded and stored until sold.

They also burn off the “hay”—the now-dried roots—leaving a clean finished tuber. Some will be de-eyed and the top marked for easy planting and a fuller finished plant.

All told, Classic expects to harvest about 30 million caladium tubers this year. **GT**

