

GROWERTALKS

Paul's Pointers

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Checking All the Boxes

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There are many factors that lead to the successful production of any crop. When you really think about it, there's an incredible number of steps and decisions growers must put into each and every one they produce.

Every grower approaches the planning, growing and selling of plants slightly differently. Many growers utilize various lists to help them to successfully grow and market their plants. These lists can be mental checklists or very detailed written lists and procedures. Most growers probably don't have written checklists; they just follow steps and procedures they've learned over the years.



Pictured: Many growers begin the planning process for future crops several months to a year or more prior to when the crop is needed for sales.

Whether mental or written down, missing just one of the items on these lists can significantly affect crop outcomes. For example, forgetting to order the starting materials would not only lead to there not being a crop to produce and sell, but it could also decrease order fulfillment and customer satisfaction, which could affect future sales.

Below are several lists of essential activities to consider when planning, growing and selling crops. As I mentioned above, everyone approaches production differently and your lists may vary from mine. Use them as starting points for your own checklists and feel free to add to, subtract from or modify these as you see fit.

Pre-production considerations

Many growers begin the planning process for future crops several months to a year or more prior to when the crop is needed for sales. Some early considerations:

- Determine what to grow
- Consider what sized containers to produce them in
- Use sales histories to determine how many to produce

- Decide when they'll be sold

This information is the backbone of any production plan. The next steps involve putting these plans into action.

Inputs

There are a number of inputs needed to grow a crop:

- Starter plant materials
- Containers (pots, trays, etc.)
- Growing mix
- Care tags

Growing environments

Be sure to prepare the growing environments in advance of starting new crops:

- Pre-production cleaning and sanitation (floors, benches, walls, water lines)
- Preventative inspections and maintenance of equipment (heaters, fans, injectors)

Growing considerations

Exactly where and how are you going to produce your crop:

- Crop layout (configuration and spacing) and growing environment
- Temperatures (target day and night temperatures)
- Heating and cooling (how they're provided and managed—manually, thermostats, environmental control systems)
- Air flow
- Irrigation and fertilization
- Pest and disease management (scouting, preventative programs or fighting fires as they arise)
- Plant growth regulators
- Plant maintenance (pinching, spacing, trellising/staking)

Inventory

Many growers routinely manage their inventories to help them produce the right quantities and for creating weekly availability listings for their customers:

- After each crop is started, verify the quantity planted and its location
- Confirm that each crop has the right care tag (unless tagging is done at the time of shipment)
- Several growers assign a crop status to each crop as it progresses to help them determine what's saleable. Examples: Newly potted, full pot/shippable, budded and full color are a few of the more common ones.

Sales & Marketing

Every operation has a different customer base and how much effort is needed to maintain and increase sales also differs. There are several considerations in this area:

- Social media—Facebook, X, Instagram and others are excellent platforms for promotions and to bring awareness of your business and its products.
- Advertising—Print, billboard, radio/TV and online advertising are often highly effective.
- Up-to-date and easy-to-use website. You can post availabilities and possibly even have customers place their orders here.
- Strategic emails or newsletters to promote your business, products, offer promotions and send availabilities.
- Customer service—Everyone appreciates good customer service. Friendly service with timely and good follow through is essential.
- Events—Many businesses hold special events, such as “plant your own baskets” or “customer appreciation days” to drive traffic.

Shipping

When orders are being pulled:

- Train your crews to always pull the best quality
- Select plants that are uniform in appearance (size, flowering stage)
- Verify the varieties and quantities being pulled match the order
- Do the containers have the right care tags?
- Are the plants well-watered? (foliage should be dry before loaded on trucks)
- Are the shelves on the shipping carts appropriately spaced?
- Quality control—Is what’s being shipped acceptable/high quality?
- Order verification—Be sure to verify the right plants and their quantities match the orders
- Are reefers necessary in the shipping trailers (namely when it’s below freezing or very hot outside during transit)?

As you can see, there are really a lot of considerations when it comes to growing plants. These lists may accurately reflect how many growers approach growing plants while they may be much more comprehensive or even just the tip of the iceberg for others.

I’m not telling you that you must use these lists to be successful. My intention is to demonstrate how intensive growing can be. Please use these lists if you find them helpful. As I mentioned above, every grower approaches what and how they grow differently. Using lists such as these and checking all the boxes can greatly help keep your crops on track. Have a great spring! **GT**

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