

GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Business

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Wrap It Up!

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With Christmas now behind us and young plant companies in full swing sticking and shipping spring liners, it's time to make sure your company has tied up all its loose ends. This means you should have been reviewing and wrapping up your poinsettia and garden mum/fall crops sales history. It's February, and you should already know what you want to reorder for the coming year's production. If you didn't take the time to reevaluate each crop right after its season ended, then you're already slightly behind the eight ball.

But don't worry—with a few easy suggestions, you can make up ground quickly! I've been in this business for a long time; I understand the January gloom of the greenhouse. Everything is empty and cold and your growers need a break to

decompress and prepare for spring crops. So, while everybody has a little downtime, it's the perfect opportunity to do those final reviews of your fall and winter crops.

First, one of my favorite things to do is get our whole group together. This includes sales, growers, production, and pulling and shipping crews. We talk about what worked for sales, growing and shipping. From there we take out anything that underperformed and jot down the reason it struggled to succeed. It's important to define why a crop didn't work. Was it because the crop was produced too early or too late? Was the season too hot for proper propagation or to finish growing? If the crop was a dog, chuck it and move on.

Second, break down your season into segments: sale flower date, response group, short days to flowering (make sure you understand the response group of a cultivar both under backcloth and natural days, as this is sometimes confusing). When short days start, what's your target pinch date? Will you direct stick or bump up? These are important questions to have answers to, and breaking it down into smaller segments sometimes helps everyone understand what's all needed to make the best decisions.

Lastly, always go with your good old staples. Who cares if a variety is 20 years old? If it works for your company and sales are good and the growers have no problem growing it, then keep it. I find so many times we put the oldies-but-goodies on the back burner because a newer, easier genetic comes along. But a lot of time your growers are so used to the older varieties, they fail at the newer ones. So make sure you have their input and don't dismiss their contributions.

With all this being said, it's time to put pen to paper and decide what makes the most economic sense in your production scheme. The decision isn't obvious and must be carefully analyzed by your team. Early ordering has become increasingly important, as our industry has reduced speculation in both cuttings and liners, so you have to

be ready to order or take the leftovers—which causes even more stress on your growers.

At our company, we always seemed to put fall crops on the back burner. Several reasons why we never got to our proper review is because we were dealing with a Midwest heat wave, we were propagating poinsettias, and we were trying to ship fall crops while our poinsettias needed to be spaced. With a heat delay it would back up every crop and its ability to move forward. With a big effort we've solved most of these issues and are able to move forward by doing our fall review on time. We've started doing an early review before any fall crops are shipped to make sure we stayed on top of things. As the season finished, we're able to make any necessary tweaks to our plan.

As for poinsettia season, that was always an easy review for our team. It does help that we host North America's largest poinsettia trial. We get the privilege to work with so many amazing breeders and sales forces. We're allotted the time to walk with each breeder and talk about their genetics and what we find works in our area and other segments of the U.S. Our growers and many growers from around the country come and get one-on-one guidance on their poinsettia offerings. This year we grew more than 17,000 plants for the trial—207 varieties that we showed to everyone and more than 300 varieties that were part of hidden trials for the breeders and their teams to evaluate. Having the ability to see 500 varieties growing at our place has made it a bit easier to choose varieties. We also ask all visitors to vote on their top three favorites, which give us another perspective of what's most-liked. With all this information, we're able to make some very solid choices for our poinsettia crop.

Finally, as the saying goes, "The early bird gets the worm." It's definitely true when it comes to ordering cuttings and plugs! Usually, the only shortages we get when we're on time is from crop failures or shipping damages due to heat.

So take the time and get your team involved in the decisions and order early. **GT**

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