

GROWERTALKS

Paul's Pointers

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Between Seasons

Paul Pilon



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It's true how time flies when you're having fun—or perhaps time really does go faster as you get older—but I can't believe another spring is in the rear-view mirror. As fast as the season came and went, I'd say that I'm either getting older or really enjoy what I do. I reckon it's a little of both.

The time before spring approaches reminds me a little of the anticipation I felt as a little boy in the hours before Christmas morning. There's tons of anxiety, mystery and uncertainty as I waited for the moment we opened our presents. Growing plants isn't always easy and comes with its own share of anxious moments and uncertainty.

Whether you've had a great spring, a good spring or one you'd rather not remember, I'd like to remind you that although we can't change the past we can learn from it and apply what we've learned to the future. Like most growers, there are things I'm proud of from production plans and activities that went as expected and should be continued or repeated in the future, as well as a few surprises or items that didn't work so well or didn't go as anticipated and need some modifications for future production cycles.

I encourage everyone reading this to perform an assessment of every item they produced this year, taking note of which production plans worked to perfection and, more importantly, identifying any items that could use a few tweaks.

For each plant variety and container size you produced, ask yourself a series of questions. Also, involve your growing teams and managers, as they'll likely have their own ideas and suggestions for future improvements.

- Were the plants ready when they were intended to be?
- Were they placed in optimal environments or was crop placement an issue?
- Should they have been grown warmer or colder?
- Does the amount of production time need to be increased or decreased?
- Did you obtain the plant quality you were looking for?
- Were they too small or not as full as you'd prefer them to be, or were they much too large?
- Should they be planted in the late summer/fall versus in the spring or vice versa?
- Were they grown at an adequate spacing?

- Were the plants being irrigated properly? (Too much water often results in plants that get too large, not enough water often results in smaller than desirable plants.)
- Were they fertilized properly? (Similar to over watering, providing too much fertility can result in overly large and often lush [soft] plants. Not enough nutrients may result in smaller plants and potentially nutrient-deficiency symptoms.)
- Both improper irrigation and fertilization practices can lead to other problems such as root and crown diseases, as well as the need for plant growth regulators (typically when too much irrigation and fertilizers are applied).
- Were PGRs applied? If so, were they applied properly? Did you use the right PGR and the right application method using the optimal rate and application volumes?
- What diseases did you experience during production? Were your management strategies effective? Would any changes to your environmental management and cultural practices lessen the occurrence of diseases? Would preventative programs be useful in the future or does the current ones need to be modified?
- What insect and mite pressures did you experience? Were your management strategies effective? Are there any modifications to make to existing programs or would preventative programs prove useful in the future?
- Were plant maintenance activities such as pinching, trimming and spacing done in a timely manner?

These are many of the questions I ask myself this time of year. I'm sure you have other questions that are more specific to what you grow and the facilities you have. My main point is to not miss this opportunity to address both the good and the bad things from the growing season that just passed and set yourself up better for next spring's production.

While on the topic of "Between Seasons," I'd also like to quickly remind you to not lose sight of all of the important details when it comes to transitioning from spring to summer crops. All too often, I see growers relax their standards and practices when it comes to summer production. Perhaps it's mental and/or physical fatigue from the spring growing season, but I encourage you to approach summer with the same standards and expectations as you do with spring production.

Don't forget about the importance of sanitation and make a commitment to properly cleaning and disinfecting production areas before setting down new crops. These often overlooked pre-planting preparations between spring and summer crops can prevent the onset of future problems.

Summer can also be a very stressful time of year for plants—be sure to take steps to keep them healthy and to manage their daily stresses. Proper irrigation in the summer is very important to avoid drying them down too far or the consequences could be severe and possibly even fatal.

Providing shade during summer (where possible) can go a long way towards managing summer temperature stresses and to help moderate the irrigation practices. Most plants grown in containers, including full-sun plants, can be grown under 35% to 50% shade. Providing shade will help decrease the daily temperature fluctuations in the root zones and will aid with water management.

Warm summer temperatures are often very favorable for many plant diseases, not to mention various insect and mite pests. Be sure to continue your scouting programs so you don't get caught off guard. Preventative programs

can also be very helpful. You know the saying, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”

As you find yourself between seasons, I encourage you to continue your commitment to doing all the things necessary to grow healthy, high-quality plants. Use this time to also identify what practices worked and which ones didn't with your spring programs so you can make the necessary adjustments while the memory of these crops is still fresh in your mind.

Have a great summer! **GT**

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