

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

8/29/2025

It Begins All Over Again

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On the Pollen to Plug Tour during the Perennial Plant Symposium, one of our stops was Swift Greenhouses, a multi-generation greenhouse operation in Gilman, Iowa, that produces perennials. Third-generation owner Scott Swift said that about 60% of their business is growing perennial plugs for small- and medium-sized growers, and what you see here is the first of that for the 2026 season. In late July we were already seeing the beginnings of next spring's production.

Scott's grandfather Earl bought the business in 1952 to produce vegetables for the local community (as many of these older family businesses have started) and it slowly evolved into a bedding plant operation as Scott's father and mother, Larry and Carol, grew the business. When Grandpa Earl bought it, the operation was 15,000 sq. ft. where everything was grown in homemade wooden trays and sold by the dozen; now it's 6.2 acres of strictly perennial production grown in 50-cell trays filled via a flat-filling machine with their own custom peat-based growing media.

Scott said that during the last few years, they've increased their use of biologicals for pest control—now, more than 90% of their plug program uses bios only, mostly for aphid control. To control thrips, they use screens and apply nematodes through their irrigation booms. In the end, Scott said they don't spend any more on beneficials than they did on chemicals.

"The control is better, and it's better for our people and the plants," he said.

Swift Greenhouses does produce a smattering of houseplants and tea roses, as well as herb plugs, which Scott said are "economically priced."

The other 40% of the Swift growing pie is finished perennial plants for IGCs and hardware stores located within about a 250-mile radius of Central Iowa. All in all, Swift grows 1,000 varieties of perennials, from seed to liner to tissue culture. Scott said that his father really started producing perennials in 1970 and since then

the Swifts have become a reliable supplier of a wide range of perennial plants in the Midwest. **GT**