GROWERTALKS

Culture Notes

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Production of Red Ribbons Poinsettia

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Red Ribbons represents a major advancement in poinsettia breeding, combining visual appeal with production efficiency. At the core of this innovation is the work of Dr. Ruth Kobayashi, whose breeding efforts have led to the development of ever-branching poinsettias. Red Ribbons is the first ever-branching poinsettia brought to market, eliminating the need for manual pinching.

A close-up of the cyathia of Red Ribbons Poinsettia.

Red Ribbons produces abundant cyathia and features bold, deeply lobed, oak-shaped red bracts that create a full, textured look. With an approximate eight-week response time and naturally compact vigor, it performs reliably across a range of production schedules. Red Ribbons also excels in mixed containers, where its distinctive foliage adds contrast and structure alongside other plants. Its vibrant color, strong branching habit and versatility in combinations make Red Ribbons a highly valuable addition to seasonal programs.

Propagation

The foundation of a successful Red Ribbons crop begins with careful attention during propagation. Cuttings should be unpacked immediately upon arrival and stuck as soon as possible to maintain hydration and viability. If sticking must be delayed, store cuttings in a cooler at 50 to 55F (10 to 13C) with near 100% humidity levels. A light misting may be applied if cuttings show signs of dehydration.

Light levels should initially be kept low at no more than 1,000 f.c. (6 mols/day) for the first 24 to 48 hours to minimize stress. As callus formation begins and roots develop, light intensity can gradually increase. Misting should maintain a consistent moisture film on the foliage, but excessive misting should be avoided. Root zone temperatures should be maintained between 73 to 75F (22 to 24C). As callus begins to form and cuttings stabilize, misting frequency should be gradually reduced and overnight misting eliminated. Callus formation is typically visible by Day 7.

Fertilization can begin once roots are visible using 100 ppm N with a phosphorus-free formulation. An early application of PGRs may be beneficial to control stretch during this stage. By Day 15, roots should reach the edges of the cell. At this stage, environmental conditions should shift toward toning the crop with higher light levels, increased air movement and reduced misting.

Establishment

Whether transitioning from propagation or receiving rooted liners, the establishment phase is critical for setting long-term crop performance. Liners should be unpacked immediately and transplanted within 48 hours. If transplanting must be delayed, maintain plant health by applying 100 to 200 ppm N every other day with a phosphorus-free formulation or rinsing foliage with clear water to prevent phosphorus damage.



After transplanting, utilize constant feeding at 100 to 200 ppm N with 17-5-17, 15-0-15 or other low phosphorus feeds. Light levels should be increased to approximately 4,500 f.c. (19 mols/day) after transplant. If light intensity becomes excessive, temporary shading and/or misting may be used to prevent wilting. Once plants are actively rooting and stable, full light exposure is ideal.

A close-up of the cyathia of Red Ribbons Poinsettia.

Daytime temperatures should be maintained between 75 to 85F (24 to 30C) and nighttime temperatures between 70 to 75F (21 to 24C) after transplant. Once liners are well-rooted, temperatures can be reduced to 70F (21C) during the day and 65F (18C) at night. Cooler temperatures will slow growth, while excessively high temperatures may lead to heat delay, leaf edge burn or distorted foliage.

PGRs can be applied if no growth regulators were applied in propagation or to prevent lateral stretch. If needed, chlormequat at 500 to 1,000 ppm may be used based on program needs. Always follow label directions.

Ever-branching varieties can be produced without a pinch to achieve a unique plant habit unlike a traditional poinsettia. Lateral branching occurs naturally at the base of the plant, while the main shoot will produce a showy bract on top. Mini bracts grow along the main stem and along the lateral stems.

Although Red Ribbons naturally branches without pinching, growers can still choose to pinch based on desired plant form. If pinching is performed, it should occur once roots reach the container edge, approximately 10 to 14 days after transplant or four to five weeks after direct sticking. The number of nodes retained should correspond to container size (i.e. five to six nodes for a 6-in. pot). Leaving too many nodes can result in weak, horizontal growth.

Vegetative growth

During vegetative development, spacing plays a role in shaping plant structure. While some cultivars benefit from tight spacing to encourage a V-shaped habit, Red Ribbons often develops this form naturally. Plants should be spaced once foliage begins to overlap to ensure adequate airflow and light penetration. This will reduce disease pressure and support uniform growth.

Fertilization should continue at a constant rate of 100 to 200 ppm N using a balanced formulation that includes micronutrients. Calcium and molybdenum are particularly important in maintaining plant strength and preventing physiological disorders. Weekly foliar applications of calcium can help prevent issues such as leaf edge burn and bract damage. As with any foliar spray, test on a small group of plants before applying broadly.

Daytime temperatures should remain between 68 to 78F (20 to 26C), with nighttime temperatures between 65 to 70F (18 to 21C). Environmental manipulation can be used to manage growth. Positive DIF encourages elongation, while negative DIF helps maintain compact growth.

Height control is critical for achieving buyer specifications. Growers may use a combination of cultural techniques—such as spacing, temperature and irrigation control—along with PGR applications to manage plant size. Monitoring tools and graphical tracking systems, such as the Dümmen Orange OnTarget app, can assist in making timely decisions. When applying PGRs, proper rates and timing are essential to avoid negative effects on bract development, including size reduction or color distortion.

Flower initiation

Flowering in poinsettias is highly responsive to environmental cues, particularly temperature and photoperiod. Night temperatures below 65F (18C) in September promote flower initiation, while temperatures above 70F (21C) can delay the process.

To initiate flowering earlier, growers may use blackout shading to simulate short-day conditions. Plants should receive at least 12 hours of uninterrupted darkness daily to trigger flowering. Care must be taken to eliminate light pollution from nearby sources, as even brief interruptions can disrupt the flowering response. **GT**

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