

SuperCal for Fall; Early Mum Tips; 3 Disease Podcasts



HERE TO SUPPORT YOU EVERY STEP OF THE WAY
Ball Seed® Technical Services Team

- ASK AN EXPERT
- LIVE SUPPORT
- SEARCH

BallSeed.

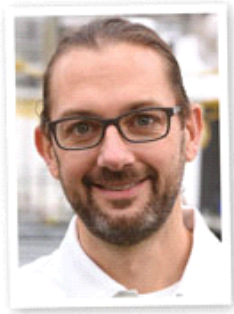


Cultural and Technical Information for Greenhouse Professionals



FRIDAY, JUNE 5, 2026

subscribe



TECH ON DEMAND

brought to you by
GROWERTALKS

COMING UP THIS WEEK:

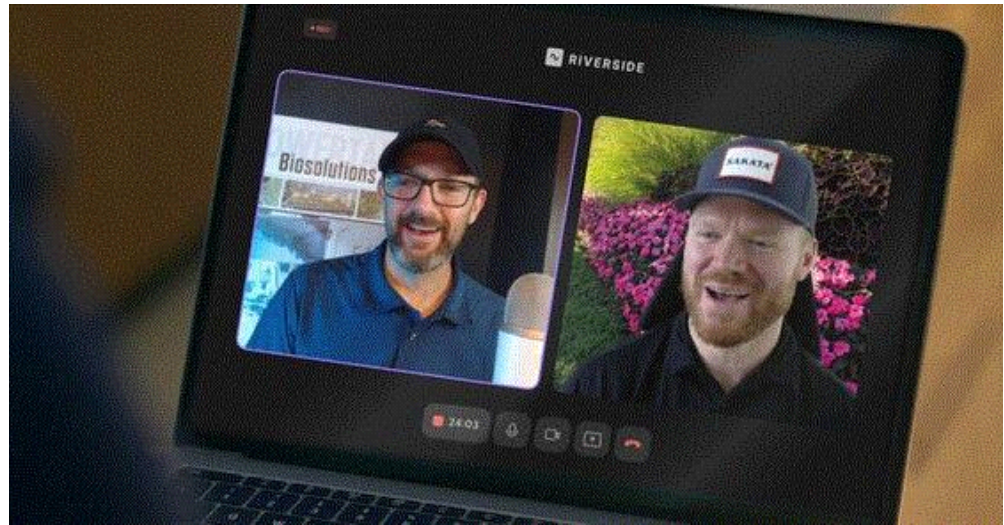
SuperCal for Fall Video
Nick's Tip: Mums Before Transplant
Plug & Cutting Conference
3 Disease Podcasts
In-House Testing
Finish Line ... Value Proposition



NEW PODCAST & VIDEO: Finishing SuperCal Crops for Fall with Sakata's Michael Wiebe

During a **RECENT CONVERSATION** with Michael Wiebe from Sakata, he and I discussed why SuperCal petunias are excellent season extenders for growers and retailers looking for tough-as-nails flowers to finish for Fall sales—knowing they will perform in gardens and landscapes throughout Autumn (and even into early winter).

Most of you already know SuperCals stand up to most environments. They've been around for at least a decade and Sakata continues to improve the series. In this video and podcast, Michael explained how Sakata has bred these intergeneric crosses (petunia x calibrachoa) to combine the attributes of both, creating excellent environmental tolerance—they bounce back after heavy rain, cold snaps down to 25F, and even snow. This resilience isn't just anecdotal; it's been proven through rigorous screening, outdoor field trials and real-world garden and landscape conditions. The ability to hold up in cool, wet and hot conditions makes them ideal for fall programs when traditional petunias often falter. Michael shows some wild photos throughout his presentation demonstrating just how long SuperCals hold up in cool temps.



Beyond durability, the SuperCal color palette can be tailored for fall with perfect seasonal colors like purples and rusts for mono pots and combos. Michael emphasized the importance of variety selection—choosing the right color and habit for specific containers or landscape uses. Thankfully, Sakata has a great **RESOURCE** to help with this. Whether it's baskets, patio pots, combos or landscape beds, the SuperCal range has options for Fall.

Our full conversation covers propagation tips, cultural nuances, PGRs and which varieties to target for fall success. If you're interested in exploring how SuperCal can fit into your fall lineup, **WATCH THE VIDEO** or **LISTEN TO THE PODCAST**.

And yes, cuttings and liners are available now for Fall finishing. Talk to you favorite broker or rooting station to get your hands on some.

There are now more than 250 Tech On Demand podcast episodes in the archive covering a huge range of topics related to the professional greenhouse, garden center, landscape, nursery and CEA markets. Jump back in to get caught up or take a minute to subscribe—that way you'll never miss an episode.

- **APPLE PODCASTS**
- **SPOTIFY**



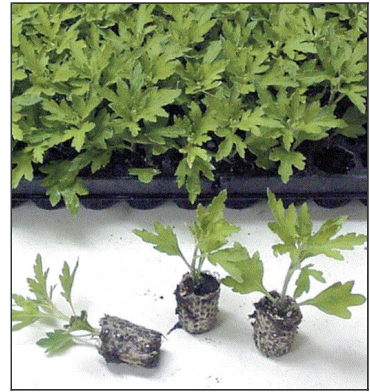
Nick's Tip of the Week (Part 1): Garden Mums (Before ...)

Each week, I'll work with my buddy Nick Flax, a technical services expert at Ball, to share a concern that's come up during one of his numerous calls with growers across North America. This week, he's beginning a quick two-parter to help you and your garden mum team

get the crop off to a strong start.

PROBLEM: It's the first week in June and lots of folks are starting to plant early varieties in their natural-season mum programs. While Bill and I have shared a great many mum tips over the past few weeks, I want to highlight a few to-dos that should be on everyone's list if mum liner transplanting is imminent.

NICK'S TIP: While mums aren't the most challenging crops to produce, small missteps early in the crop cycle can set plants back and result in less than your best possible crop. Keep these few "before-and-after" transplant BMPs in the front of your mind to get your crop started off on the right foot.



Before Transplant

Fill pots as close to transplant time as possible. Resist the urge to pre-fill your pots way ahead of time. If pots filled with growing media sit out for very long, soil can become overly dry, causing issues with rewetting when you water in your liners. If pots are sitting outside, they can accumulate weed seeds and necessitate a lot of handwork downstream to remove them.

- Ensure liners are watered before they go into finished containers.
- Ideally, water your liners the afternoon before planting. This will make it easier to pull them from trays the next morning.
- Even better—give them a shot of fertilizer like 20-10-20 at about 250–300 ppm nitrogen (N) instead of clear water. This will help “prime” the liners for rapid growth once they're potted up.
- Decide how to handle oddball liners before they hit the transplant line.
- If one or two varieties are way taller than your other mum liners, decide whether to plant them deeper or give everything a uniform pinch once they've rooted in.
- Making sure your team is on the same page with how the crop will be managed from Day 1 will help to ensure uniform plant size and consistency at finish/ship.
- Get all your “support” inputs in and have them ready before transplant.
- This includes fungicides, insecticides/miticides and even mum netting (for those of you who are in the know).

There is nothing worse than trying to react quickly to an emerging issue like disease pressure in the thick of mum production and finding out you need to wait a week to get the fungicide you needed yesterday!

Next week, I'll share the REST of the story (Garden Mums: After ...)



Why I Keep Going Back to Plug & Cutting

I've had the chance to attend [AmericanHort's Plug & Cutting Conference](#) many times in the past, and it's one of those events that I look forward to because I know it delivers significant value for attendees and loads me up with story ideas and deeper knowledge of topics that are so critical to you. It's focused, practical and packed with ideas you can actually take back to your greenhouse and put into action.

If you're considering attending in 2026, here are five reasons I think it's worth the trip:

Practical Education. This isn't a broad, catch-all conference—AmericanHort puts it together specifically for young plant producers. Sessions dig into crop production, plant health, applied research, business operations and emerging technologies. Even better, the format leans on peer discussions, academic research and grower panels, so you walk away with real solutions, not just theory.



Production Tours. The tours are always a highlight. I actually got to be a bus leader at the last conference, which was so cool. You get behind-the-scenes access to leading operations and see how top growers are producing plugs and cuttings. On-site hosts and the chance to walk and talk with peers helps connect what you're seeing directly to your own production practices. (NOTE: I took the photo above at the last conference tour, which was fantastic.)

Built-In Networking. You're literally surrounded for a few days by growers who face the same challenges you do. Whether it's during sessions, hallway conversations or evening events, the networking is easy, valuable and often turns into long-term connections.

New Technology & Suppliers. The trade show isn't huge and overwhelming, but instead gives you a close look at new products, systems and services designed for plug and cutting production. It's a great way to discover tools that can improve efficiency and crop performance.

Flexible Options. In addition to on-site sessions, attendees get access to on-demand content after the event. There's also a Spanish-language track, making the education more accessible for a wider team.

REGISTER NOW! The 2026 Plug & Cutting Conference runs September 14-16 at the Sheraton Philadelphia Downtown in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. If you're planning to attend, don't wait—hotel registration closes August 24.



3 Classic Disease Podcasts

At industry events, folks frequently mention they line up my Tech On Demand podcasts during a full day in the greenhouse—letting one episode roll right into the next. If that sounds like your routine, it's the perfect time to circle back to a valuable three-part series designed to help you stay ahead of seasonal challenges—especially during that critical transition from spring into fall production. Disease control is a constant topic in greenhouse conversations, so I teamed up with Dr. Aaron Palmateer to break it down from three key angles—across three focused episodes.



PODCAST 1—FOLIAR DISEASE

Managing leaf spot diseases should be high on every grower's priority list, and Aaron explains exactly why. He puts the discussion into perspective by comparing the importance of yield for farmers with the emphasis on quality for greenhouse growers. From there, the episode builds into the importance of accurate diagnostics, followed by a deeper look at how diseases develop and a fresh take on the classic "disease triangle." Aaron also walks through the differences between fungal and bacterial pathogens before outlining practical strategies to prevent them in the first place.

PODCAST 2—ROOT, STEM & CROWN ROT DISEASES

These hidden threats often develop below the surface, making early detection absolutely critical. Aaron starts with what to look for and why catching symptoms early can make all the difference. He then provides a clear overview of the major pathogens affecting roots, stems and crowns—and how they operate. The discussion highlights the "Big Four"—*Pythium*, *Phytophthora*, *Rhizoctonia* and *Fusarium*—while also shining a light on less common pathogens and fungi that shouldn't be overlooked.

PODCAST 3—BUILDING A DISEASE MANAGEMENT PROGRAM

This episode brings everything together, starting with the fundamentals of integrated pest and disease management. Aaron then outlines the building blocks of a strong, effective program. Once the foundation is set, he shares actionable strategies to help you fine-tune your approach and better understand what's happening within your crop plan. The conversation wraps with a look at the many variables each growing season brings and the smart protocols you can follow to reduce the risk of introducing diseases, pests and weeds into your production environment.



sungro
HORTICULTURE
THE GROWING MEDIA COMPANY

Discover science-driven blends, reliable supply and expertise built for today's horticulture.

Sign up for your **FREE** grower trial today.

In-house Test Kits = Quicker Reactions

Some diseases come with clear, recognizable symptoms—especially if you've dealt with them before. But early-stage symptoms are often far less obvious and can easily be confused with abiotic issues like nutrient deficiencies or environmental stress. Unless you have a pathologist or in-house diagnostic lab (most of you probably don't), it's nearly impossible to accurately

diagnose early bacterial or viral disease beyond educated guessing.

I know I've written about this before so consider this a friendly reminder ... because this is where pathogen test kits become a practical tool and one that the Tech On Demand team recommends growers keep on hand. Here's why:

What Are Pathogen Test Kits?

Most kits include a buffer solution pouch and test strips. The process is straightforward: collect symptomatic plant tissue, mash it in the buffer, and insert the test strip. As the solution moves along the strip, a built-in indicator reacts. If the targeted pathogen is present, you'll get a positive result. This process, known as a lateral flow assay, gives you a quick read on what you may be dealing with.

Why Keep Kits on Hand?

You can't see bacteria or viruses, so these kits are often your only immediate option for narrowing down a diagnosis. Sending samples to a lab is effective, but it takes time—and while you wait, disease can spread. Having test kits ready allows you to respond sooner, manage risk more effectively and potentially limit crop loss.

Use Kits Wisely

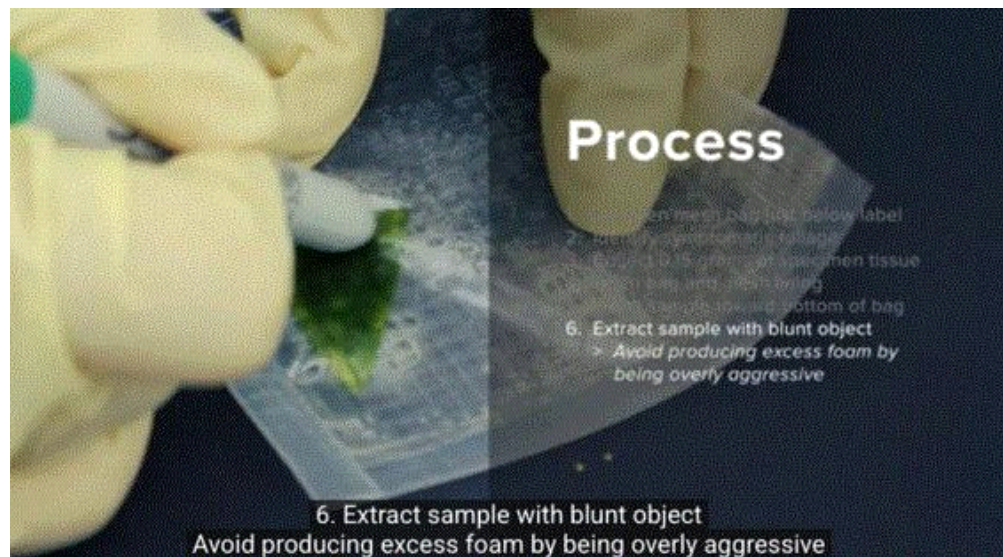
Keep a few key guidelines in mind:

- Test results are strong indicators but not final confirmation—so always follow up with lab diagnostics.
- Some kits detect multiple pathogens (e.g., TMV kits react to several tobamoviruses), so further identification may be needed.
- False positives can occur. Follow instructions closely and store kits properly to reduce risk.
- Only test symptomatic plants—testing healthy crops wastes money and leads to unnecessary action.
- Watch expiration dates and refresh inventory yearly.
- Store kits at 36 to 46F (2 to 8C) to maintain reliability.

When results are unclear, don't guess—consult your supplier or a diagnostician. A second opinion can prevent costly overreaction.

Which Kits Should You Stock?

Start with pathogens you've encountered before, especially repeat issues. Also consider known crop risks—for example, *Xanthomonas* test kits for zinnias or flowering brassicas with seedborne concerns. If insect-transmitted viruses like TSWV have been an issue, keep those kits ready—nearby plant material can serve as reservoirs, allowing pests to reintroduce disease each season.



Here's a good [HOW-TO VIDEO FROM AGDIA](#) to share with your team members who might be using test strips.

Finish Line ... Value Proposition

I think a lot about this when I'm out and about shopping with my family or visiting garden centers as part of my day job. A company's value proposition is so critical, and even if it's not out "in your face," the underlying vibe of any business is important and can make or break the shopping experience and long-term customer loyalty.

Today's consumers can get almost anything, anytime. But when they visit your garden center, they're not just shopping—they're looking for connection, confidence and a great experience. That's where a clear value proposition comes in. It keeps your team aligned and helps turn first-time visitors into loyal customers who spread the word. Here are some of my thoughts on how to workshop a value proposition:

Start with the Basics

A value proposition is a simple, written statement that explains why customers choose you. To build it, focus on three questions:

1. What makes your business different from competitors? (Ask your customers—don't assume.)
2. What problems are you solving? (Plants, pests, design challenges and more.)
3. What's your strongest advantage? (People, service, location, pricing, etc.—pick one or two.)

Once you've nailed those down, shape them into a single, clear sentence:

We help (target customer) solve (problem) by providing (solution) that delivers (key benefit).

Keep it Tight—and Use it

A concise statement is critical. If it's too long, it loses impact. Look at brands like IKEA ("Affordable solutions for a better life at home.") or Carhartt ("Outworking them all since 1889."). Clear, memorable and rooted in trust.

Put It to Work

The real challenge is living your value proposition every day. Every customer interaction—store layout, staff conversations, merchandising, follow-up and marketing—should reflect it. Your goal isn't just to sell products, it's to deliver an experience customers can't get elsewhere.

Get it right, and you'll build stronger connections, deeper trust and long-term loyalty.

I'll talk to you again next week ...

Please feel free to send your comments, constructive criticism and topic ideas to me at bcalkins@ballhort.com.



Bill Calkins
Editor—*Tech On Demand*

This email was received by you and 25,353 other fine subscribers!

If you're interested in advertising in Tech On Demand, contact **Kim Brown** ASAP and she'll hook you up.

