

Summer Recap; Cool-Weather Crop Tips; Fruit Shape Tags



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FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 25, 2026

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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

Summer Event Takeaways
4 Questions for Sid
Nick's Audio Tip: Cool-Weather
Tips
Trending Tags
Bulb Mites
Finish Line ... OSU Survey



What I Learned From Customer Days, Cultivate & Summer Visits

As summer winds down and most of you shift focus toward finishing fall and holiday crops and preparing for spring 2027, I wanted to call out a handful of clear themes that I gleaned from industry conversations (and Ball Pub and Tech Team reports) at Ball Seed Customer Days, Cultivate'26, and other conferences and grower visits throughout the season. While every operation is unique, the challenges and opportunities being discussed across North America are actually remarkably consistent.

For those of you who attended industry events this summer, one thing was probably obvious: industry folks remain optimistic, but just about everyone is focused (more than ever) on efficiency, predictability and profitability. As always, new genetics and even older ones with new breeding continue to generate excitement, but growers are increasingly asking practical questions about them and closely looking at trial results with product reps. Can a variety tolerate stress? Is it easier to produce? Will it perform for consumers? Those conversations have become just as important as flower color and novelty.



Me at Ball Seed Customer Days

Labor remains a top concern—surprise, surprise ... Just about everyone I talked to mentioned that staffing challenges haven't disappeared, even if the situation has improved (somewhat) compared to previous years. As a result, automation, labor-saving production techniques, high-tech environmental controls and crop-efficiency strategies continue to attract attention. Growers want systems and products that reduce touches, improve predictability and help experienced staff focus on higher-value tasks. I do think there are opportunities to leverage AI tools to help with this.

Another recurring theme was **risk management**. Whether discussing crop protection, crop nutrition, disease prevention or even purchasing decisions, most of the growers we all talked to are looking for ways to reduce surprises. I think just about every newsletter and podcast lately has included content covering proactive management strategies, disease prevention and early order planning. As you know, prevention is almost always less expensive than correction.

Sustainability also continues to evolve from a marketing concept into an operational reality. Interest in alternative substrate materials, native and native-like plants, resource efficiency, and improved environmental controls was evident throughout summer conversations. Growers are seeking practical solutions that make operational sense while helping meet customer and regulatory expectations.

Here are some bullet points to add to my thoughts above:

- Growers are prioritizing **reliability and performance** over novelty alone when evaluating new genetics.
- **Labor efficiency** remains a critical decision-making factor across production departments.
- Early **planning** continues to gain importance, particularly regarding crop protection purchases and production forecasting.
- **Disease prevention and exclusion** strategies are receiving greater attention than reactive control measures.
- Growers are increasingly interested in production systems that reduce variability and **improve consistency**.
- **Sustainable growing media** and resource-efficient production practices continue to be active topics of discussion.
- **Business management** discussions are becoming just as common as crop production

discussions.

- **Industry events** continue to provide valuable opportunities for benchmarking, networking and sharing solutions to common challenges.

Looking ahead, the conversations we've had throughout the summer suggest that successful growers will continue focusing on three areas: operational efficiency, proactive decision-making, and strategic investment in tools, genetics and people. None of these themes are new, but their importance has only increased.

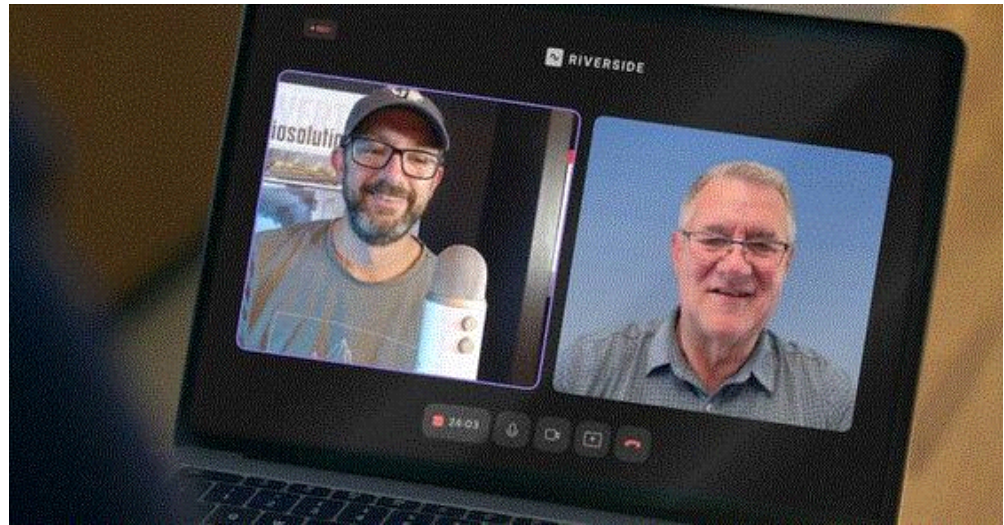
As you and your team sit down to plan for 2027, take this opportunity to apply lessons learned while they're still fresh. Whenever I talk to growers who spend time debriefing and planning ahead with their production staff to evaluate successes, identify challenges and adjust tend to be best positioned for six to 12 months down the road. Of course, the end goal is for all of us to remain as innovative, adaptable and resilient as ever.



NEW PODCAST! 4 Questions for Sid, the Swiss Army Knife!

The latest Tech on Demand episode is another “4 Questions” episode and I’ve gotten a lot of positive feedback on these—it seems many of you like hearing from folks around the industry in a casual conversation format. And that’s great because I love recording them and plan to continue the series.

FOR THIS ONE, I was joined by one of my mentors, Sid Raisch—the self-proclaimed Swiss Army knife of horticulture consultants! Sid is one of the most thoughtful and wise people in our industry, and throughout the episode the depth of his passion for coaching green industry businesses became more and more evident, as did his principled approach to continuous improvement.



I thought that one theme really weaved through this episode and that's the importance of letting people grow and how this approach by owners and managers not only sets their operation up for success, but also helps them avoid burnout and get the most from their team.

Be sure to stick around all the way to the end because the wisdom just keeps coming! And keep an eye out for a future Part 2 to this episode. Sid and I definitely have more to discuss.

Here are the four questions Sid selected:

Q: What was your first exposure to “horticulture” and how did you feel, react, respond?

Q: What’s something about professional horticulture that annoys you and how would you change it?

Q: What advice would you give to a young person considering pursuit of a career in horticulture?

Q: What advice would you give to an industry veteran currently dealing with “burnout”?

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Nick's AUDIO Tip of the Week: Cool-weather Crop Management

Just about every week in this newsletter, you read a tech tip from Nick Flax, a technical services expert at Ball Seed. He shares a concern that's come up during one of his numerous calls with growers across North America and the advice he offered to hopefully solve the problem.

BUT ... simply reading a tech tip can seem impersonal. So from here on out, every now and then, Nick is going to record his weekly tech tip so it's a bit more personal and his ideas can flow more freely!



IN THIS AUDIO TIP, he chose to talk about some of your fall greenhouse priorities. Nick breaks down the key environmental and cultural adjustments your production team should make as temperatures drop. The focus starts with dewpoint management. Warm days followed by cool nights can quickly create condensation inside the greenhouse, increasing the risk of fungal diseases like Botrytis and Pythium. Nick explains practical strategies to stay ahead of humidity, including dehumidification cycles, greenhouse "burping," temperature setpoint adjustments and controller checks.

The discussion also covers crop culture changes that often accompany fall weather. As plants use water more slowly, irrigation practices may need to be adjusted to avoid overly wet conditions. Nick shares tips on irrigation timing, crop spacing, air movement and using objective measurements such as water-by-weight to guide decisions.

Finally, the audio tip reviews some disease prevention strategies for high-risk crops (like poinsettias) and highlights the importance of maintaining a proactive fungicide program as environmental conditions become more favorable for disease development.

Now that you're transitioning from summer to fall production, this week's tech tip offers practical reminders to help protect crop quality and reduce disease pressure during the season ahead. By now, you've realized my man Nick is pretty good at that!

I'll include links to the audio recording on Apple Podcasts, Spotify and YouTube.

LISTEN TO NICK'S TIPS ON:

- [Apple Podcasts](#)
- [Spotify](#)
- [YouTube](#)

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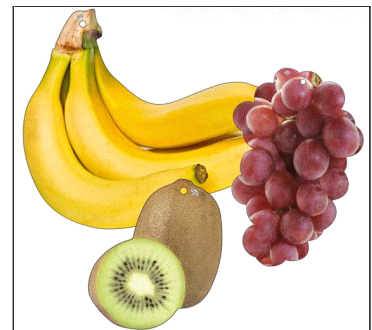


Trending Now! Fruit Shape Tags

For the latest [TRENDING NOW VIDEO](#), I had the opportunity to speak with Nikki Alford-Magers (senior manager of creative and interactive marketing at MasterTag) about the company's new Custom Fruit Shape Tags now available as Print-on-Demand and ready to order on MasterTag Online.

- 21 different common and tropical fruits
- Customizable to fit your own brand and products
- Full color printing (front and back)
- Available with or without string

I really think these [FRUIT SHAPE TAGS](#) solve a bunch of challenges when selling crops like this because they're not usually showing fruit. Having a big colorful tag reminds shoppers what they're looking at and promotes the promise of tasty treats in the future. It's a pretty standard retail tactic in most industries. Think about it ... a box of cake mix doesn't show a bag of flour, cup of water and pile of sugar.



Quick Tech Tip: Battling Bulb Mites

Bulb mites are often present on bulbs feeding on healthy and rotting scales, but only become a major issue when scale and root health is compromised due to improper culture and lack of preventative pesticides for root protection. The usual course of action is to dispose of rotting or soft bulbs that are infested with bulb mites.



The challenge is that bulb mites are resistant to pesticides in several chemical classes. Most conventional miticides and biologicals have little to no effect against bulb mites. Research at the University of Connecticut has, however, indicated limited effectiveness of *Stratiolaelaps scimitus* (*Hypoaspis miles*)—a predatory mite, which could be an option.

Note: In high populations, bulb mites commonly hitch rides to new areas on more mobile pests like whiteflies, thrips fungus gnats and shore flies.

For more on bulb mites, here are a few additional resources:

- [Managing Bulb Mites](#), *GrowerTalks* 2025
- [Bulb Mites on Flowers](#), University of Maryland Extension
- [Greenhouse IPM: Lily Basal Rot and Bulb Mites in Easter Lilies](#), Penn State Extension
- [Bulb Mites](#), The Ohio State University Extension

Finish Line ... Combo Survey Time!

THE Ohio State University is looking for input from growers (like you) with businesses that grow mixed combo hanging baskets and patio pots. This short survey—they say it'll only take you eight minutes—will help identify research and extension priorities related to production challenges and cultural practices for these crops.

According to OSU, other than the time it takes to complete the survey, there are no risks or conflicts of interest associated with participation. Participation is voluntary and all responses will remain confidential. Survey responses will be anonymous and will help guide future research and extension efforts across the United States.

If you currently grow mixed combination hanging baskets and patio pots, please consider taking a few minutes to complete the survey by clicking [HERE](#).

Have a fantastic week! I'll be back next Friday ...

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

Bill

Bill Calkins

Editor—*Tech On Demand*

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