

GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Production

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Another Season, Another Turn

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(Editor's note: We're very happy to welcome Michael to our columnist rotation and look forward to reading his insights from the greenhouse!—JZ)

Transitioning from outdoor to indoor growing is an annual turn here at Mast Young Plants that finds the growers who cared for the outdoor mum field reassigned to an indoor sea of green that in several weeks will transform to a wave of red. The outdoor-to-indoor annual turn changes our focus towards the environment more than the genera of the crop and it's often a welcome change for the crew to grow under a more stable environment where temperature, watering and chemical applications all become more predictable. Turning our focus to a more controlled environment does require growers to make some adjustments to the nature and scope of their work.

Outdoor Growing Season: Nature vs. Nurture: I joke with my crew that I can't find the setting on the computer system that adjusts temperature, wind and water supply components in their outdoor areas. If only there were a manual switch that allowed us to adjust temperature and rain! Because of the constant fluctuation of the natural outdoor growing environment, the growing staff's daily regimen is always a focus during outdoor growing season. Many a time, it's Mother Nature that's directing our daily routine instead of the head grower. This controlling factor significantly impacts daily decisions regarding spraying, watering and managing the progression of flower development.

Indoor Growing Season: Adjusting Schedule, Space and Safety: It's true that our indoor environment, controlled by a computer system, makes it easier to reach our targets for production crop needs. The roof over our heads resolves a number of complexities specific to outdoor growing, but we still have to adjust to this different atmosphere in several key areas.

Schedule: Adjusting plans to current weather conditions and anticipating the impact of the immediate and long-range forecast shapes our daily schedule and rhythm during the outdoor growing season. Transitioning to the indoor growing season always disrupts what's become a pretty comfortable cadence to our work. The roof over our heads resolves a number of complexities that impact our daily decision-making, but it's still an adjustment that affects how we organize and prioritize our days. Recognizing this shift helps us to pay attention to important details and decisions in our new environment we might otherwise overlook.

Space: One of the benefits of outdoor growing is that growers can see and quickly assess large areas of space. Interior walls can represent unexpected blinders when moving indoors, and it's easy to assume all is clear when quickly assessing smaller areas where there's less employee traffic. Whereas weather was a top concern during outdoor growing season, determining where the production crew will be working is our top concern now on the daily

growing area assessment.

Safety: One of the most important aspects of our work is diligently maintaining our safety protocols for frequent chemical applications, daily watering and any needed crop maintenance. Indoor and enclosed environments involve different protocols for chemical application, water frequency, fertilization rates and concerns with other rounds of pests.

For example, we adjust the watering for outdoor crops based on weather, but we continue watering regardless of rainfall to maintain proper fertilization levels. When moving indoors, computer-controlled watering can actually be a misused tool. While there's no rainfall to calculate into watering decisions, growers must frequently and diligently walk the crops to determine the right watering regimen. Nutrition levels are critically observed through this process to determine if the frequency is sufficient.

It's worth noting that junior or less-experienced growers may find this annual turn more challenging than senior experienced growers. Senior growers can help their newer colleagues identify and then better anticipate growing priorities by directing their attention to the environmental differences in the annual turns.

As I prepare to have a meeting to discuss our return to the inside with the growing staff and to go over the many concerns that can and most likely will develop, I reflect on this last outdoor program. I'm making notes for our corrections that need to be done for better success next year. And as I lead the crew into another season's turn (this time indoors), I still contemplate where those darn outdoor environmental control switches are kept. **GT**

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