

BULLETIN

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What's Important in a Growing Medium – Physical Properties

by Hugh A. Poole

Everybody has an idea of what the perfect growing medium should be but it is based more upon experience and/or price rather than knowledge. There are three very important criteria for a good growing medium: physical properties, chemical properties, and crop performance. The physical properties are determined by the raw materials used to manufacture the mix. The chemical properties are determined by the amendments

incorporated into the medium and they are influenced by the choice of raw materials. The third criterion is crop performance and is influenced by environmental conditions, grower practices, crop selection, and post-harvest handling. Crop performance ultimately determines the real cost of the mix and its value for the grower and end user. We will discuss the importance of physical properties in determining crop performance.

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Was It Something I Said? Strategies for Improving Customer Loyalty

by Bridget K. Behe

In his book, *Customers for Life*, Carl Sewell described the value of one customer's car purchase and how many cars they were likely to buy during their lifetime. We can calculate the lifetime value of a customer by multiplying the average purchase price by the number of purchases. Professional horticultural businesses, whether retail or wholesale, realize that a customer's single purchase is a small percentage of what they have the potential to buy over their lifetime. So, how do we get customers to come back for more? Do we simply treat them well, help them get what they want, measure how satisfied they are, and hope they return? How do we build their loyalty?

Customer loyalty has been an enduring topic of interest to both academicians and businesses. Customer loyalty is widely viewed as a key to business success. A leading market researcher defined customer loyalty as "a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, *despite* situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior." (Oliver 1999) Most firms acknowledge that keeping existing customers has a critical effect on company profitability. Nadeem (2006) indicated that a 5 percent improvement in customer retention can result in a 75 percent increase in profitability.

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OFA Mission Statement

To support and promote floriculture professionals through lifelong learning, career enhancement, and public awareness.

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ofa Forum

Why Should You Care about a Program Called IR-4?

by Lin Schmale

Do your customers enjoy receiving healthy plants? Would they like to continue to enjoy them for the foreseeable future? Do you want to put more money into pest and disease control than you already do? If the answer to these questions is "yes," "yes," and a resounding "no," – keep reading to find out what IR-4 does for the floriculture industry.

IR-4 is a government-granted program, funded primarily through the U.S. Department of Agriculture, working to ensure healthy specialty plants (including ornamentals, fruits, and vegetables) by helping to provide growers safe and effective tools to manage diseases, insects, and weeds on ornamentals and produce. These tools are reduced-risk and can be either biologically- or chemically-based.

IR-4 has also stepped up to the plate to help with emergency situations faced by growers in the ornamentals industry. For example, research money provided by IR-4, added to research money available through the Floriculture & Nursery Research Initiative, was instrumental in helping to find fast, accurate answers about which chemicals were best at controlling the new Q-Biotype whitefly, thus helping to avert a crisis which threatened the entire ornamentals industry two years ago.



What is IR-4?

As the chemicals industry develops new chemicals, other segments of agriculture often get the "first benefit" – row crops tend to get newer products, faster, than specialty crops. Federal funding is needed to help reach those specialty markets – including greenhouse and nursery growers.

The IR-4 Project works with growers, researchers, registrants, and regulatory agencies to develop research data so that new products can be registered and new crops, diseases, insects, and weeds can be added to existing product labels. The IR-4 Ornamental Horticulture Program, one of several programs under the IR-4 Project, develops information for non-edible specialty crops grown in greenhouses, nurseries, landscapes, Christmas tree farms, and forestry production nurseries.

However, over the last 5 years, IR-4's purchasing power to conduct research and registration activities has decreased almost 15 percent in terms of today's dollars. In other words, IR-4 can do less research today than 5 years ago. With the constant reduction of IR-4's research activities as a result of static or reduced federal funding, IR-4 has reached a critical point. IR-4 will no longer be able to provide U.S. growers the same quality of service by providing efficacy and crop safety information to support ornamental product registrations or by submitting high numbers of tolerance packages to the EPA to support product registrations for fruits and vegetables. Since 1964, IR-4 has worked with the EPA to register over 10,000 fruit and vegetable uses; and since 1977, IR-4 has provided efficacy and crop safety data on 274 products for 10,741 ornamental uses. Without a substantial increase in budget, you and your customers will not be able to continue to enjoy reasonably-priced and healthy ornamentals and produce.



How does IR-4 Work?

The first step in selecting research projects is to determine the most pressing disease, insect, and weed problems facing growers and landscape professionals. IR-4 solicits input on these issues several ways. Growers, researchers, and extension personnel can fill out project request forms and submit them to their regional coordinator, state liaison representative, or to the ornamental horticulture program manager via a web-based form. Growers, researchers, and Extension personnel can also complete an annual survey to determine which diseases, insects, and weeds are the most problematic, meaning they may not be easily or economically managed with current products.

At the annual workshop, attendees discuss the major pest issues and assign each a priority for research within the IR-4 Program during the following year. The survey results and submitted project requests have the most influence in establishing the research direction. In general, those diseases, insects, and weeds without registered products are ranked higher than those that can be controlled with commercially available products. There may be situations where the survey and project requests point to a certain research direction, but workshop participants select other diseases, insects, or weeds as the high priority projects. For example, there may be a great need for new products to control a certain disease or pest, but at the time of the workshop there are no new, unregistered products to put into a testing program. Another example where the research direction may be different from the annual survey is a situation where IR-4 has sponsored research into a product not yet registered for ornamental horticulture uses and additional data would not greatly increase the speed of registration or breadth of the product label. Finally, sometimes there can be a lengthy gap between when research is conducted and when the resulting information is used either for Extension presentations, technical updates, or label registrations for grower-identified needs.

Attendees at the 2006 IR-4 Ornamental Horticulture Program Workshop selected several high priority projects for research in 2007. The two entomological projects were thrips and anything coleopteran (borers, beetles, white grubs, and root weevils), a continuation of the 2006 research priorities. For plant pathology, the ongoing *Phytophthora* and *Pythium* efficacy projects were continued. Workshop attendees committed to two new projects dealing with sedge control efficacy and crop safety of products for sedge control along with finishing the 2006 project on crop safety of Sedgehammer, Sulfentrazone, SureGuard, and V-10142 on select ornamental horticulture plants.

After the high priority projects have been established, the regional coordinators place trials with university researchers

and private contractors. These researchers help write the protocols so that the resulting data are meaningful for both growers and the manufacturers registering the products.

After the researchers have completed their trials they send the data to their regional coordinators who in turn send it to the ornamental horticulture program manager. The data for each high priority project are summarized into a single report which is sent to each manufacturer with products in the testing program. These reports can be submitted to federal or state registration officials. The summary report is also posted to the IR-4 web site where it is available to anyone interested in reading the results.

Why is IR-4 Important for Growers?

The IR-4 program is the only government-sponsored program which has a mission to listen to and address growers' needs by collecting data which will lead to registered products with state and federal agencies. In fact, IR-4 has worked to obtain product registrations for growers of food crops for more than 40 years and has facilitated collection of data important to ornamentals growers for almost 30 years. IR-4 can serve as a grower advocate with manufacturers so that products can be tested and then labeled for certain diseases, insects, and weeds. Finally, the IR-4 ornamental horticulture program web site is a source of comparative efficacy and crop safety information so that growers and landscape care professional can more effectively make decisions about which products to use.

What Can You Do?

If you didn't fill out the annual IR-4 grower survey this year, be sure to do so next year. SAF and all of the major trade publications run several alerts to growers, asking them for input via the IR-4 web site, <http://www.ir4.rutgers.edu/ornamental/Survey/>.

As noted above, the IR-4 budget is under constant attack. Contact your senators and representatives and let them know how important IR-4 is to your business. Tell them that IR-4 needs a 15 percent increase in the proposed 2008 funding to effectively maintain its mission to provide U.S. growers excellent tools to ensure a healthy supply of ornamentals, fruits, and vegetables. To learn more about IR-4, visit www.ir4.rutgers.edu.

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Pesticide Resistance Case Study

by Raymond Cloyd



The insecticide/miticide, abamectin (Avid), which was initially available in the early 1980s is still widely used by greenhouse growers to “control” twospotted spider mite (*Tetranychus urticae*). However, due to frequent use over the past 20 years, especially in California and Florida, twospotted spider mite populations are now resistant or less susceptible to this product. Spider mites appear to have developed a level of resistance to a number of other miticides as they are less effective in controlling twospotted spider mite.

It is important to understand that resistance develops at the population level, not within an individual. Greenhouse growers should realize that the genes for resistance may already be present in a twospotted spider mite population before a miticide is applied, although these genes usually occur at very low frequencies in the population. An individual does not become resistant to a miticide, but multiple applications of the same miticide across several mite generations result in the removal of susceptible individuals from the population, leading to a population of twospotted spider mite that has a high proportion of resistant individuals and is thus more difficult to control.

Continual reliance on miticides increases the probability of twospotted spider mite populations developing resistance. In fact, populations of twospotted spider mite have developed resistance to over 80 miticides. A number of these miticides are commercially available for use by greenhouse growers including fenbutatin-oxide (ProMite), clofentezine (Ovation), hexythiazox (Hexygon), chlorfenapyr (Pylon), etoxazole (TetraSan), pyridaben (Sanmite), and fenpyroximate (Akari). In addition, twospotted spider mite populations have exhibited resistance to miticides not available for use in greenhouses in the United States such as tebufenpyrad (Pyranica) and fenazaquin (Magister).

Rapid reproduction rate and dispersal behavior are factors that contribute to the ability of twospotted spider mite populations to develop resistance to miticides. Because twospotted spider mite cannot fly, greenhouses tend to have isolated populations with limited movement of susceptible individuals into the mite population to dilute resistance levels. Some long-term crops such as roses grown for cut flower production remain in place for years, along with any twospotted spider mite populations, which are continuously exposed to a variety of miticides thus increasing the potential for resistance developing in the population. In addition, the genetics and breeding system of twospotted spider mite impacts the rate of resistance. Twospotted spider mite reproduces through a combination of sexual and asexual means resulting in offspring that develop from both unfertilized and fertilized eggs. In

general, within a twospotted spider mite population, males only have one copy of a resistant gene (R) while females have two copies (RR). This oftentimes indicates that females are more tolerant to miticide applications or may develop resistance more quickly than males.

The rate of resistance development may be greater in twospotted spider mite populations since resistant genes are exposed to selection for resistance at the outset – irrespective of dominance or recessiveness. As such, resistant genes can rapidly be expressed in a twospotted spider mite population within a short period of time. It should be noted that the rate at which resistance develops within a twospotted spider mite population to a particular miticide will vary depending on the amount of selection pressure (i.e. frequency of application) placed on the mite population.

There are two terms associated with resistance that greenhouse growers should be familiar with: cross and multiple resistance. Cross resistance is when there is selection for resistance to miticides with similar modes of activity. A twospotted spider mite population resistant to pyridaben (Sanmite) and fenpyroximate (Akari) would be an example of cross resistance since both miticides are mitochondria electron transport inhibitors (METIs). Although there are a number of resistance mechanisms that may occur in insect and mite pest populations, which reduce susceptibility to either insecticides or miticides, the resistance mechanism that is common among twospotted spider mite populations, in regards to cross resistance, is referred to as metabolic detoxification. This means that the active ingredient is fragmented (broken apart) once it enters the body of the mite. Enzymes within the immune system of the mite detoxify or convert the material into a non-toxic form, which is then excreted out with other waste products. It is possible that this type of resistance mechanism is shared in twospotted spider mite populations, which appear to be less susceptible to METI miticides and pyrethroid-based insecticides/miticides.

Multiple resistance occurs when there is selection for resistance to miticides with dis-similar modes of action. In this case, a twospotted spider mite population resistant to both abamectin (Avid) and chlorfenapyr (Pylon) would be an example of multiple resistance because these miticides have different modes of action. Abamectin (Avid) is a GABA (gamma-amino butyric acid) chloride channel activator whereas chlorfenapyr (Pylon) is oxidative phosphorylation uncoupler. As you can imagine, a twospotted spider mite population demonstrating multiple resistance is very difficult to control. Remember that

selection for resistance occurs within each generation. This is why rotating miticides with different modes of activity is essential in preserving currently-available miticides since it is assumed that the frequency of resistant individuals in a generation will decline after the application of a miticide with a different mode of action.

Many of the miticides currently available have resistance management information on the label. This may include the number of applications per crop cycle, number of sequential applications, total amount of product that can be applied per crop cycle, or a combination of these statements. These directions are incorporated into labels in order to delay or reduce the onset of resistance.

In order to reduce the possibility of twospotted spider mite populations developing resistance it is extremely important to rotate miticides or insecticide/miticides with different modes of action. In general, greenhouse producers should only use a material once or twice within a generation (depending on the time of year) then switch to another material with a different mode of action. This will extend the longevity and effectiveness of the currently-available miticides.

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What's Important in a Growing Medium – Physical Properties

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Air-Water Relationship

The physical properties of a growing medium determine the aeration and water-holding properties of the mix. We call this the “air-water relationship” and it is critical for optimum growth of a plant. The mix is very similar to a sponge. When dry, it is made up of physical matter and large spaces of air that we call pores. As we add water to the sponge and the mix, we drive out air from the smaller pores and they both become moist. If we saturate the sponge or mix, we maximize the water content of each and we minimize the pore space filled with air. Plants obviously need water for good growth on a regular basis. However, a plant’s roots require oxygen from the air to support metabolic activities in the cells of the roots. Thus, the air-water relationship of the mix has a dramatic effect upon the growth of a plant.

This air-water relationship is impacted by another aspect of growing plants in containers. A container has a bottom that interrupts the gravitational flow of the water from the growing medium to the ground that we call drainage. We call this condition a “perched water table” and it allows the medium in the bottom of the container to be saturated while the larger pores located above this zone to contain air. The height of the saturation zone is directly related to the physical properties of the mix. A mix with a lot of small pores and a few large pores will support a taller column of water through capillarity than a more open mix. When we work with fabrics or paper towels, we call this “wicking”. Although, the growing medium is uniform throughout the container, the air-water relationship is not. The bottom of the container has more water and less air than the middle or upper portions of the containers in most situations.

The height of this saturated zone remains constant for a specific mix regardless of the container being used, assuming that there are drain holes and the container is not sitting on a surface that can wick the water away from the medium. The height of the container becomes a major factor with short containers being most significantly impacted as a result of this phenomenon. Let’s assume that for a given mix, the height of the saturated column is 1.5 inches. A plug tray at 1 inch would be totally within the saturation zone; a pot 3 inches tall would be 50 percent saturated; and a 6-inch tall pot would be only 25 percent saturated after irrigation.

Another factor that can affect the height of the column for a given mix is the degree of compaction during the container-filling process. If the container is loosely filled, then large pores may be present and reduce the capillarity movement of water upwards. Repeated irrigations will collapse the largest pores and cause shrinkage within the container as air is forced out of the mix. The soil height will be reduced, due to shrinkage, resulting in a greater percentage of saturated mix, uneven drying, and uneven growth. The converse, too much compaction, has consequences as well. Compacting the mix during the filling process compresses the mix and reduces the size of the pores and can reduce drainage significantly. If the mix is compacted severely, root growth can be restricted and the volume of aerated mix (not saturated) is greatly reduced. Both extremes may occur within the same container when filling bedding plant or plug trays.

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What's Important in a Growing Medium – Physical Properties

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Raw Materials

We control the physical properties of the mix by our selection of raw materials, the particle sizes of the raw materials, and by the ratios of these materials used for the final mix. These decisions affect both the cost of the mix and the performance of the mix. Ideally, we want to mix the components in such a manner that we optimize the air-water relationship of the mix for the crop at an economical cost. In many situations, the decision is based more upon cost than upon the components or performance of the mix. Determining the cost of the mix is often easier to determine than predicting the performance of the crop. If we mix three components (A @ \$1 per cubic foot; B @ \$2 per cubic foot and C @ \$3 per cubic foot) in equal parts (1:1:1), then the cost of the raw materials is \$2 per cubic foot. If we increase A and decrease either B, C or both (for instance a 2:1:1), then the cost will decrease. If we increase B and decrease both A and C equally (for instance a 1:2:1), then the cost remains the same. If we increase either B or C at the expense of A (for instance a 1:2:2 or 1:1:2), then the cost will increase. Of course this is an over-simplification and does not include costs related to equipment purchases, insurance, housing, labor, purchasing terms, and other ingredients for the mix.

There are well-recognized procedures for determining water-holding capacity, percent air space, and available water for various mixes that help evaluate mixes without having to grow plants in the mix. We often use organic materials having fibers (peat moss, coir, etc.) or clay products (vermiculite, calcined clay, etc.) to hold water and to release that water to the medium or to the plant and exchange that water for air. Various aggregates of raw materials are used to open up the mix and optimize the aeration of the mix. The most common aggregates are aged pine bark and perlite. However rice hulls, coarse peat chunks, and coarse vermiculite can also be used to increase the porosity of the mix. The ideal aggregate will be stable for the duration of the crop, will not float away, and will be economical.

The physical properties of a mix can be manipulated by using different percentages and different particle sizes of the raw materials. Finer particles will produce smaller pores reducing porosity but increasing water-holding capacity of the mix. Using coarser particles will increase porosity and reduce the

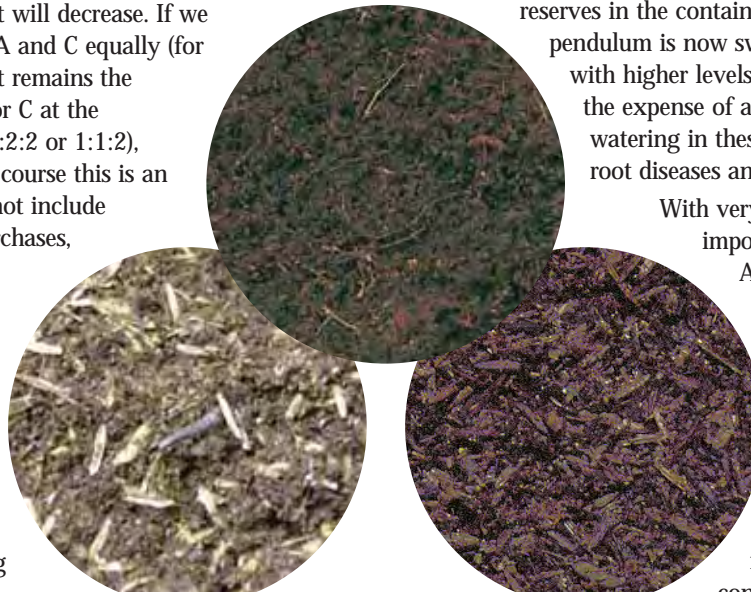
water-holding capacity of the mix. However if very fine particles are mixed with very coarse particles (like sand and gravel), then we have a recipe for cement and not for a growing medium. This is a delicate balance to optimize both air and water relationships in a mix. During my career, growers have increased the use of coarse aggregates and increased air space of most mixes in order to increase growth, to reduce production time, and to reduce disease pressure from root pathogens. They have decreased the water-holding capacity of the mix while increasing the size of the plant and decreasing the container size of many crops. The hidden costs of these measures are now becoming evident with increased interest in nutrient runoff from over-fertilization and over-watering of these porous mixes. Another hidden cost is the post-harvest performance of the crop

at retail and for the consumer due to inadequate water reserves in the container mix as the crop matures. The pendulum is now swinging back in favor of mixes with higher levels of available moisture but at the expense of air space in the mix. Over-watering in these mixes encourages certain root diseases and can reduce plant growth.

With very open mixes it is almost impossible to over-water most crops.

As mixes become "tighter," more attention will be required for irrigation decisions, especially in the early establishment phase of the crop. Water management decisions will become more important as the grower moves toward a tighter mix in response to the above concerns. Our industry is in a transition period as we attempt to be

more sustainable (efficient use of resources) and more responsive to the realities of pay-by-scan and consumer satisfaction. A better understanding of the roles of physical properties and raw materials and how they affect plant performance will be required as we explore new sources of raw materials and ingredients for crop production.



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 The logo for 'ofa Garden Center' features the lowercase letters 'ofa' in a stylized, blue, cursive font with a green leaf-like flourish above the 'a'. To the right of this, the words 'Garden Center' are written in a large, light green, sans-serif font.

ofa Garden Center

Was It Something I Said? Strategies for Improving Customer Loyalty

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Customer Satisfaction and Customer Delight

Most customer-focused businesses consider customer satisfaction a good measure of business success and one that strongly contributes to customer loyalty. Yet, some companies began to question their use of customer satisfaction when “satisfied” customers left for a competitor. They began to ask, “Is there something beyond customer satisfaction?” and began to focus on “customer delight.” Customer delight is a positive emotion in a combination of surprise and happiness. Customer satisfaction is more a state of being where expectations were met. In an effort to measure success beyond customer satisfaction, some business leaders began to make statements such as, “We don’t want satisfied customers - we want delighted customers,” (John F. Pettus, President of SuperAmerica in Dutka 1994, p. 8) or “My company’s aim goes beyond satisfying the customer. Our aim is to delight the customer” (an executive of Lexus in Kotler 1994, p. 20). So, for these firms, customer satisfaction did not adequately predict repeat business and that something stronger than satisfaction was needed.

In some recent research at Michigan State University (MSU), we examined customer satisfaction and delight and the role they played in building customer loyalty. Hicks et. al (2006) tested the role of customer delight combined with prior plant knowledge on customer loyalty. We thought that if a customer knew a lot about plants, they would be harder to delight. Conversely, we believed that plant novices might be easier to delight. We conducted an Internet survey to examine the actual performance of the plant following purchase. The results showed that satisfied customers were not as likely to make repeat purchases as delighted customers. This finding verified that there is something more to building customer loyalty than having good customer satisfaction. So, businesses need to work more to develop a positive emotion that goes beyond customer satisfaction to build customer loyalty.

Strategies for Success

That positive emotion customers have about your business can be built by doing several things. In their book *Simply Better*, Barwise and Meehan (2004) discuss the bad feelings that many customers have because products and services simply don’t work the way they are supposed to. Customers expect products to work or services to be completed, yet many business fail at even mastering the basics. Customers want to have a pleasant shopping experience, find something that meets their needs or solves their problem, and then they simply want it to work after they get it home. Yet, too many customers don’t have a pleasant shopping experience, or they fail to find something that truly meets their needs. If they succeed at shopping and finding,

they may only return home to have it not work properly. Their take-home message is do your work well, and you will greatly improve your perception from the customer’s perspective. If you can’t get the basics right, don’t move on to other tactics. Ground you and your employees well in getting the basics of easy shopping, finding inspiration or solutions, then making a purchase and product performance down to a science.

If you have the basics down pat, another thing you can do to build that positive emotion of delight is attending to the details. Do you call customers by name? Have you complimented them on something lately? What extra value have you given them lately? A simple and sincere “thank you” after a purchase isn’t commonplace anymore. A free flower, a new plant to try, or even a free cold drink on a hot day are much appreciated. Businesses get concerned about the cost of these little things and then the need to keep raising the bar. I would suggest you do these extra things sporadically, but genuinely. Surprise your customers with something nice from time to time. It can go a long way to improving customer delight.

A second strategy to increasing customer loyalty has been through the use of tactics that increase switching barriers or costs. People can switch to another product from the same supplier, or switch to another supplier for the same or different product. How can we prevent customers from switching to another supplier? One way is to avoid the strong negative emotion called regret. Regret goes beyond dissatisfaction. If your burger is cold, you may be dissatisfied. If it makes you sick, you may regret the purchase.

Customer Regret

In other research at MSU, we investigated what happened when things go wrong and customers are dissatisfied, or even regret their plant purchase. Regret is a negative emotion that results from reaction to an event. Consumer satisfaction/dissatisfaction is a state of being derived from the expectation and performance of a particular product.

Dennis et. al (2005) surveyed 743 gardening consumers using the Internet to determine consumer perceptions of satisfaction, dissatisfaction, and regret after purchasing one of three horticultural products: hanging baskets, potted roses, and 1-gallon perennials. The objective of this study was to investigate the consequences when gardening consumers experienced dissatisfaction or regret with one of the three products. Questions were asked to pinpoint levels of dissatisfaction and regret and whether they switched from the product based on feelings of dissatisfaction and regret.

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Approximately 27 percent (202) of respondents expressed some level of dissatisfaction or regret about the products. Results showed regret drove switching behavior, and participants who experienced regret were more likely to switch. Approximately 10 percent of gardening consumers switched to another activity outside of gardening because the product failed to perform. Slightly more participants (13.5 percent) switched to another type of plant to remedy the situation. Results indicate that although dissatisfaction is unfortunate, it does not have the same effect on switching behavior that the stronger emotion of regret does.

Customer Loyalty Programs

In addition to reducing regret, loyalty can be developed by providing extra rewards for continued purchases (e.g., frequent flier miles). One of the most commonly used methods is a “frequency program” in which the customer receives points for every purchase, with the goal of getting the customer to focus his/her purchases on a single provider to maximize the rewards that can be received. Customer loyalty programs like these can provide value to the customer, but they also provide a wealth of information for the business, if they are willing to mine the data. If you put the burden of collecting the points on the person, they hold the “punch card” and you don’t get any information. If the seller takes the burden of collecting the points, then they have some additional information. If you’re willing to dig a little, you can identify your top customers by sales, the average sale per customer, and who the best customers were for specific product lines. Using a sophisticated software program, you can then even tailor promotional programs toward those who are most likely to use them. You only send information on new perennials or your next sale on perennials to people who bought perennials.

MSU’s most recent study shows that customer loyalty comes from a combination of what people think about your business and how they feel about you (Spreng, Page, and Behe, 2007). What they think contributes directly to their perception of value. Value is the consumer’s assessment of the usefulness of a product based on their perceptions of what is given up (sacrifices) for what is received (benefits). Researchers have argued for the pre-eminence of value in consumer choice and re-purchase.

What’s the bottom line to building customer loyalty? Take your first cue from *Simply Better* and be sure your staff is well prepared, your business looks great, and your stuff performs well once it leaves your business. Train employees well and get customers planting the right plants in the right places. You can only know if you’re covering the basics for sure by asking customers about their experiences, so identify a core customer group and ask them questions. More important than asking questions is to listen to the answers. What went wrong? That’s the key to reducing regret and improving delight. What happened, either during shopping or while they were at home, that didn’t absolutely delight them. The key to loyalty is in discovering what is important to your customers, doing that right every time, and then giving them just a little bit more.

Make sure your employees are well versed in handling customer complaints, empowered to make customers happy by rectifying the situation right there on the spot, and reporting back to you. Those reports not only help you identify the costs of poor performance, but they are key points to improving things from the customer’s perspective. Guarantee plants for some time period. Your competition does it, and our research shows it reduces the risk some consumers perceive. Think it is costing you too much? Measure returns, and if they are greater than two percent to three percent you may have bigger challenges than customer returns.

The business of doing business gets more difficult by the day. Customer loyalty is valuable to the business, if not necessary for its sustainability. You’ve got to have the basics of customer service and good quality products covered before you can do anything else. Then, focus on some “extra” details that will delight your customers. Keep them delighted and they’ll return for more.

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ofa Garden Center

Keeping Customers through Classes and Events at the Retail Garden Center

by Kathleen Benken



Snow coats the greenhouses. Salt and soil on the parking lot have turned the snow into a slushy cappuccino color as cars begin to roll in for the Advent Wreath class. Car doors slam, kids laugh and chatter, and our visitors' glasses steam up as they enter our lush, humid greenhouse. They lift their noses, sniff, and proclaim, not "Ahhhh, flowers," but "Ahhhh, *cookies!*"

These days, it may not be enough to sell premium quality perennials and annuals, have award-winning floral designers, or even provide the most cost-effective landscape solutions. When our customers can get almost everything they need for the garden from one of those big stores, we have to provide them with something extra: an *experience*. To connect with our customers on a more personal level, develop a relationship with them, establish ourselves as the experts, teach them how to create a new vegetable garden, treat powdery mildew, or pot up a unique container their neighbor will envy – these will keep them coming back to the garden center. One way to achieve this is by providing learning opportunities for our customers. Another way, of course, is through their stomachs. If that means providing home-made breads and cookies around the holidays and hot coffee for early-morning spring shoppers, then that's something we want to do to help create a memorable, happy experience!

Take, for instance, the Advent Wreath class. We're not simply collecting \$25 for all the ingredients and providing the instruction. Whether it's a family, a grandparent and grandkids, or a college-age customer and her roommate, we're not *just* teaching a class. We're helping those customers create an experience that they will remember for years. And we're relying on that experience to bring the child back when she is old enough to start buying flowers and plants, gardening, maybe even getting married and ordering her bridal flowers! You're not going to get rich providing classes; better customer relationship management is the true value of teaching classes and hosting demos. So, if you're thinking about adding classes and demos to your nursery's repertoire, here's how it has evolved at H.J. Benken.

In the Beginning...

At H.J. Benken, we've been providing classes for more than 20 years, and like everything else, the classes have changed to meet the needs of the customers. In the beginning, classes were held on Saturday mornings. We'd set up tables and chairs in part of the greenhouse. Depending on the topic, my husband Michael, daughter Lindsay, one of our floral designers, or I would teach a class. Hand-tied European bouquets, container garden design, herb gardening, lawn and tree care, growing

happy houseplants. You name it, we have covered it and more than once!

In 2000, we added some specialty demos. Teaming up with a local chef for a demo on grilling, our participants got to eat the project ingredients: grilled shrimp, chicken, vegetables, and fish. The Valentine's Day Sweetheart's Dinner demo taught participants how to create a romantic dinner for two. Recently, we've begun to add a few weekday evening classes. Using the girls' night out idea, we started Ladies Night Out events on Wednesday at 7 p.m. For the do-it-yourselfers, landscape design and lawn management classes are popular.

What to Offer

If you listen closely, your customers will sometimes tell you what they want to learn. When she asks, "Do you have those wire frame thingies and the moss to make a wreath out of live herbs like I saw in *Martha Stewart Living?*" it follows that a living wreath class might be well attended. Scour the TV shows, magazines, and Internet for what's hot or what's coming around again for the second, third, or fifth time. Don't be ashamed to borrow an idea from the Internet or be inspired by a magazine article to provide a class for your customers. Often our employees have a bead on what customers are itching to know.

How We Do It

When we teach a hands-on class, we generally provide everything the customer needs for a successful experience. For instance, if you were to take our container garden class in early April, the \$45 fee includes everything you need to create a cool container: pot, soil, plants, fertilizer, and instruction. We make sure we have H.J. Benken aprons on hand to protect peoples' clothing. Tip: We find that when we ask participants to bring something, they don't. So, we provide everything they'll need to be successful.

The hanging basket workshop and window box workshop are run similarly. We limit the customer to two containers (at \$45 each) and then offer to grow them on in our climate-controlled greenhouses. The containers are tagged with the owner's order number and phone number, and tucked away to grow until the first week of May. Everyone has a wonderful time, and some people even come periodically to visit their "babies" while waiting for them to grow on in the greenhouses. People get busy, though, and we are sometimes surprised when a number of people forget to come pick up their containers in May.

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Keeping Customers through Classes and Events at the Retail Garden Center

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As you begin to create and hold classes, you'll learn little money-saving details about what works and what doesn't. For instance, in our hanging basket class, we do not allow people to use last summer's containers. Too often, the old ones needed new moss that the participant wasn't willing to pay for.

Promoting Your Classes

Classes typically need a lot of promotion. We advertise our classes on our web site (www.benken.com), e-mail our customer list, provide in-store flyers and posters near check-out, and stuff announcements or cards into billing statements. In 2007, we partnered with popular Cincinnati weatherman Rich Apuzzo to advertise our classes on his web site. In turn, we offer Rich's Cincinnati area forecast on our web site. Look around for free listings for your classes (free is always good!). Our daily newspaper has a free listing we access online to post our demos and events.



Figure 1. The Living Wreath class is one of H.J. Benken's most popular workshops.

What to Charge and Why

Rarely is an event or demo free, and we like to get a commitment from the customer that he is going to show up. To that end, we usually charge a nominal fee, like \$5, for a demo like orchid care or a lawn care demo with our Scotts representative, and we ask the customer to register by e-mail or phone. If customers are creating something to take home, like a bouquet, window box garden, or living wreath, we price the class accordingly. A hands-on class for a hand-tied bouquet might be \$20, and the living wreath classes range from \$45 for a small wreath to \$60 or \$70 for the Kinsman Living Wreath (Figure 1). This is one of our most popular classes. Customers use herbs, succulents, or annuals to create a wreath that can be hung on the door of their home or used as a centerpiece on the deck or dining table. Coffee and hot tea is free, and I always make sure there's something to munch, like a loaf of homemade nut bread or cookies. So that nobody goes home empty-handed,

participants get a free goodie bag containing a small plant, a pencil and pad for note-taking, and stuffers about upcoming floral specials or sales. We also treat them to a 10 percent discount on anything they purchase that day.

Location, Location, Location

For years, our classes and demos took place in the greenhouses. Sometimes it was distracting, sometimes it was wet. In 2005, we decided to repurpose a room that didn't get a lot of use on a regular basis and the education center was born. With seating for 50 people at nice, long work tables, and a pull-down screen for slides or PowerPoint presentations, the education center is also available to rent. Garden clubs and other organizations can rent the room for \$50. The fee is a donation that will help defray the cost of my husband Michael's second trip to Jos, Nigeria this fall to teach and work on self-sustaining projects with a Mason, Ohio church group.

Messy workshops, where we know potting soil will be flung around, are still held in the greenhouse, which limits the time of year we can hold these – usually not around the holidays or the first two weeks in May.



Figure 2. Michael Benken conducting a seminar on spring blooming plants and bulbs at a retirement community.

Classes to Go

We can take any of our classes on the road, so to speak. We have done demos and classes at many retirement communities and clubs (Figure 2). Everyone gets a goodie bag and a gift. When we take plants for the demo, we usually raffle off all the plants we have brought with us. It's a great way to add names,

addresses, and e-mail addresses to our mailing list. An off-site class or demo costs \$100.

H.J. Benken does about 35 on-site and 15 off-site classes and seminars yearly. Don't be afraid to try your first class! Make sure you call the participants the day before to confirm the class, seminar, or workshop. We try to have people prepay for a workshop, especially if it involves order-specific product, like the Kinsman Living Wreaths.

Be prepared for the possibility that no one will show up at all! Even if you have people registered for the class, something inevitably comes up, they've forgotten about their kids' swim meet that day, and they won't be able to make it.

If you have someone on staff who's an expert in a certain area, by all means, give them the opportunity to share it with your customers. The great value of doing classes and events is

to establish yourselves and your staff as experts – as the go to people when your customer finds sticky aphids on her Nicotiana, your lawn-nut customer discovers mole mania, or someone needs advice on creating a fountain in a ceramic pot. It's all about providing the experience and developing a relationship with your customer. Trust your customers to return again and again when they know your garden center is a place of respite, renewal, and fun.

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ofa Management

Top Ten Reasons to Apply for a USDA Grant

by Chris Byrnes



Have you heard your growers talking about their USDA grants? Have you wondered if you should apply? Well, you should. The USDA is giving away millions of dollars to agricultural producers for special projects and submitting a grant application is the only way to convince them to send some of it to you!

Here are the top ten reasons you should apply:

10. The USDA will fund renewable energy projects.

The USDA's Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Improvement Program provides grant money to assist with the funding of wind, solar, biomass, and geothermal energy projects. If you are considering "going green" with some or all of your energy sources, this is the program for you. The USDA will fund up to one-quarter of the cost of the equipment purchase and installation with grant awards ranging from \$2,000 to \$500,000.

9. The USDA will fund energy efficiency projects.

The USDA's Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Improvement Program also funds energy efficient grain dryers, irrigation systems, energy curtains, and high-efficiency natural gas heating systems. Again, the grant program provides funding for up to one-quarter of the cost of equipment purchase and installation.

8. The USDA will fund value added product development.

The USDA's Value Added Producer (VAP) Grant Program helps growers create marketing opportunities for innovative products. The focus of this program is to help growers launch

new products. VAP grants will help pay for legal advice, feasibility analysis, business and marketing plans, designing or purchasing accounting systems, purchasing inventory and office equipment and supplies, conducting a marketing campaign, and for salaries, utilities, and rental of office space. If you are launching a new product over the next year or two, you may want to consider having the USDA fund some of the costs.

7. The grant application process is lengthy but absolutely do-able.

Writing a federal grant requires reading the USDA's Solicitation for Applications and understanding exactly what information needs to be documented in the application. Then it requires actually gathering the information and putting it in the USDA's grant application format. It is a rigorous exercise and can take 80 to 120 hours to complete. However, getting a check from the USDA that covers the funding for one quarter of your project can easily make it all worthwhile.

6. USDA representatives can help you get the application process started.

Your regional USDA rep can give you the solicitation for applications and inform you about the grant application process. USDA offices are staffed somewhat differently from state to state so it's a good idea to call your rep early in the process and find out just what types of assistance they can give you.

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Top Ten Reasons to Apply for a USDA Grant

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5. Professional grant writers can help you with your grant applications.

You may not have 80 to 120 hours to pull together a federal grant application. After all, you have a business to run. Professional grant writers are available across the nation to assist you with your application. Your USDA rep may be able to help you find a grant writer. You may also want to check with any of the trade associations you work with. Once you're in contact with a grant writer, ask them how many USDA grants they have written and how successful their grant applications have been. It is wise to work with someone who's been down this road a few times.

4. Writing a grant is an enlightening business project.

Applying for a federal grant requires that you pull together facts and figures and a planning process for your project. It will require you to plan for your project to an extent that may be beyond your past experience in planning. Some growers use the grant writing process to improve their business planning systems, help educate their staff on the importance of planning, and use it as a way to improve their business methods.

3. Money.

The USDA's Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Grant Program and the Value-Added Producer Grant Program are "reimbursable" programs. Once your grant application has been approved, your USDA rep will have you sign a grant contract that will specify the process for your receipt of funds. For this program, you will pay for project expenses up front. Then you will

periodically send a report to the USDA detailing expenses paid to date. The USDA then reimburses their portion of those expenses.

2. Money in the billions.

The U.S. House of Representatives recently approved the new Farm Bill, which calls for \$2.5 billion in funding for grants and support for programs including renewable energy investments, energy efficiency projects, and value-added product development. That is a significant chunk of change ... part of which should be adding to your bottom line.

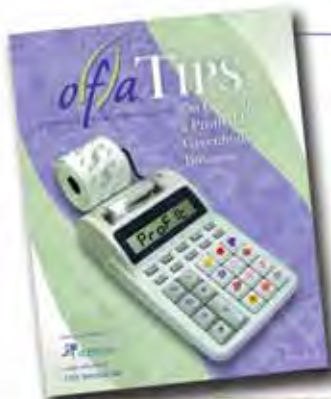
1. It's YOUR money.

Your tax dollars are working for someone, shouldn't it be you?

Writing a federal grant is a significant project that requires exacting detail. Yet, like any other large project, if you approach it methodically and with attention to detail, your bottom line will benefit.

Viability is an economic development firm that specializes in economic development incentives, including grants and tax credits. The company assists growers to receive all the funding that is available to them from the local, state, or federal government, as well as private foundation grants. Growers can contact Viability staff or visit www.viabilityonline.com.

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OFA Fact Sheet: Rhizoctonia

by Janna Beckerman

Rhizoctonia species, including *R. solani*, are true fungal pathogens that can attack seeds, seedlings, leaves, stems, and roots of many of the most popular ornamental plants. As such, *Rhizoctonia* spp. is responsible for causing pre- and post-emergent damping-off, foliar blights, stem cankers, crown and root rots. Unlike most plant pathogens, *Rhizoctonia* does not produce asexual spores (conidia), but spreads between plants by producing thin strands of fungal threads called hyphae. Under the microscope, the hyphae of *Rhizoctonia* are very characteristic, growing at 90-degree right angles. Some species of *Rhizoctonia* produce fungus balls called sclerotia, allowing the fungus to survive adverse environmental conditions.

Symptoms/Signs

Under ideal conditions (63–79°F, even, but not excessive moisture), symptoms of *Rhizoctonia* can develop within a week. Humid conditions that favor the development of *Rhizoctonia* web blight can result in seedlings being covered in fine hyphal threads. Humid conditions also form under the thick canopy of vigorously growing plants, like vinca (*Cantharanthus roseus*), *Impatiens* spp., and *Begonia*. Here, *Rhizoctonia* thrives under the thick canopy and escapes notice until it causes the rapid collapse of large sections of flats. Examination of leaves in the foliar leaf blight stage of disease reveals irregularly shaped lesions. Whether it is foliar leaf blight or damping-off, *Rhizoctonia* rarely destroys all plants in a flat, but instead creates disease centers of collapsed, dying, and dead plants.

In addition to foliage, *Rhizoctonia* attacks stems at the soil line, often causing a sunken, dry rot that results in plants collapsing where the stem meets the soil. Again, strands of the fungus or even mats of aggregated strands may form on the stem at the soil line. Finally, *Rhizoctonia* attacks the base of cuttings and causes root rots in many plants. It is important to note that *Rhizoctonia* root rot more commonly occurs around the crown of the plant and infects roots closer to the soil line than other root rots. Foliar symptoms of infected cuttings and root rot include wilting, reduced growth, yellowing, and dieback. Compared to healthy white roots of most plants, examination of *Rhizoctonia*-infected roots reveals abnormal root color (yellow to brown to black lesions, depending on host), lesions, and a failure to develop new roots. Essentially, symptoms of *Rhizoctonia* root rot appear similar to many root rots like Pythium, Fusarium, and Phytophthora root rot. For this reason, laboratory diagnosis is essential to identify the pathogen and develop a sound management strategy for control of this disease, as many fungicides labeled for control of Pythium or Phytophthora root rot are ineffective against *Rhizoctonia*.

Management

Rhizoctonia is a soilborne pathogen, a key point to remember when you are trying to manage this disease. Anything that spreads contaminated soil (such as workers, run-off, fungus gnats, and shore flies) effectively spreads *Rhizoctonia*, too. Unfortunately, some peat moss used in peat-lite soilless mixes may harbor *Rhizoctonia*, and occasionally, even seed may be contaminated with the *Rhizoctonia* pathogen.

Good greenhouse practices that manage other problems, like weeds and root-infesting insects, aid in the management of this disease. Many weeds serve as hosts for *Rhizoctonia*, so their removal and management is essential. Fungus gnat larvae effectively vector *Rhizoctonia* from diseased to healthy tissue. In the course of feeding on *Rhizoctonia* hyphae, fungus gnats also inoculate healthy plants when feeding/damaging the roots of plants. Good fungus gnat management is essential for good disease management, including *Rhizoctonia*. By eliminating fungus gnats, there is no potential aerial spread of this pathogen. By eliminating weeds, no reservoir is available for the fungus to persist in a greenhouse. Re-used flats should be sterilize (10% bleach with a few drops of detergent - detergent is a necessary component to get the bleach through the cell wall and membrane of the fungus), and then replant with sterilized medium, using disinfested tools, healthy cuttings, or seeds. Flats should never be set on the ground, as *Rhizoctonia* can enter through soil should that area be contaminated.

Successful cultural management to avoid *Rhizoctonia* (through the use of sterilized soilless mixes, good insect and weed management, and careful sanitation) is essential in managing this disease. Another technique to prevent infection is the use of preplant incorporation of granular fungicides (like those containing PCNB or etridiazole). However, small scale tests prior to production are important as many plants are sensitive to these fungicides, and the use of the preplant mixes may lead to phytotoxicity (especially if the fungicides are not evenly distributed through the growing media). Use of biological controls, like Root Guard, Root Shield, or Mycostop, may help with disease prevention.

If these techniques fail to provide adequate disease management, fungicide use, whether as a spot treatment or to all crops, may be needed. Keep in mind that different crops often have different labeled rates, some fungicides are not labeled for some crops, and to follow these recommended rates to prevent phytotoxicity. Additionally, care must be taken to recognize that

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OFA Fact Sheet: Rhizoctonia

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Table 1. Fungicides labeled for *Rhizoctonia*, and FRAC Codes.

Trade Name	FRAC code	Risk Level	Active Ingredient
Banrot® 40WP	1+M	1	Thiophanate-methyl plus etridiazole
Cleary's 3336, Fungo Flo	1	3	Thiophanate-methyl
Compass	11	3	Trifloxystrobin
Contrast	7	2	Flutalonil
Heritage	11	3	Azoxystrobin
Medallion	12	1-2	Fludioxonil
Mycostop	M	1	Streptomyces griseoviridis
RootShield	M	1	Trichoderma harzianum
SoilGard	M	1	Trichoderma virens
Terraclor® 75WP or 400F, Defend	14	1-2	PCNB
Terraguard 50W	3		Triflumizole
ZeroTol	M	1	H202
26GT, Sextent	2	2-3	Iprodione

fungicides labeled for ornamentals are often not registered for use on vegetable and herbs. As always, READ THE LABEL! Not only is the label the law, but it provides a history lesson as to what fungicides do not work with which crops and may cause problems should you apply them.

Fungicides for the management of *Rhizoctonia* (and most diseases) are most effective when used to prevent infection in the first place. If growing crops with a history of *Rhizoctonia*, or growing in a greenhouse where *Rhizoctonia* is a problem, preventative fungicide use is in order. Table 1 provides a list of fungicides and FRAC (Fungicide Resistance Action Committees) codes to assist in rotating chemicals and preventing issues of resistance. FRAC Codes were developed to aid growers in understanding fungicide resistance management. The FRAC code is a numbering system that assigns a single number to designate a class of chemicals that have the same mode of action, and the risk class denotes the likelihood of fungicide resistance occurring, with higher numbers having a higher risk. See <http://www.frac.info/frac/index.htm> for more information.

Simple fungicide rotations can be accomplished by using two to three fungicides with different FRAC codes. This is becoming a serious issue, and thiophanate-methyl resistant *Rhizoctonia* has already been reported in many greenhouse crops.

In trying to treat *Rhizoctonia*, many growers drench the flat of infected plants - an ineffective practice that rarely, if ever, eliminates the fungus from the soil, nor cures the root rot, and plays a major role in the development of fungicide resistance. The fungus, in the form of thicker fungal strands of fungus balls, remains in suspended animation, or stasis, until fungicide concentrations decline, whereupon it starts the infection process all over. For this reason, plants that develop the symptoms of damping-off should be discarded along with the contaminated growing media.

Managing *Rhizoctonia* is challenging, but not impossible. Incorporating good greenhouse management and sanitation, along with effective fungicide rotations and practices, will minimize or even eliminate this very successful pathogen.

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ofa Management



Employee Rewards – Cash Isn't Always King

by Alicia Wells

Cash isn't necessarily king when it comes to rewarding and motivating employees. While a yearly raise or a bonus is the first thing that comes to mind when talking about employee rewards, it is the small things that employers do throughout the year that make the biggest difference. Small gestures of appreciation increase employee satisfaction, and it doesn't take a big budget.

Personal Rewards

No matter what the reward is make it personal to the employee. A personal touch elevates the reward's value and increases its sincerity. When rewarding employees with gift cards make it a gift card to their favorite restaurant, movie theater, or other place of business. A simple handwritten note in an employee's paycheck thanking them for staying late, coming in early, or helping a fussy customer lets them know you care and are aware of what they are doing as well as what they may not be doing.

Instant recognition is the most powerful personal motivation tool available to you – at virtually no charge. When you observe a staff member surpassing a customer's expectations, calming dealing with a difficult customer, or going above and beyond for a customer or fellow employee, take a moment, right then and there, to personally thank them. Consider implementing a "Gold Star" or "Caught Ya!" program for instant recognition. Have a creative and computer savvy employee design a "logo" that can easily be printed on pre-cut stickers available at the office supply store.

Investing in employee development is a win-win situation for both you and the employee. Consider paying in full, splitting the cost, or reimbursing employees for the money they put forth toward their development as an industry professional. Certification programs often require purchasing training manuals, registering for tests and exams, and paying membership fees to organizations. These costs may be a hindrance to employees, so consider supporting their educational efforts. Picking up the tab on trade publication subscriptions and industry-related membership dues is another way to invest in your employee and develop their knowledge.

Team Rewards

Busy spring weekends in the garden center or holidays at the flower shop are a perfect opportunity to motivate your staff. Early Saturday and Sunday morning work schedules are often difficult for staff. Get them off to a good start by providing coffee and juice along with bagels, muffins, and fruit. Also consider providing lunch on your busiest days. Not only does

it help boost morale but keeps the lunch on schedule, avoiding long lunches and disappearing staff.

Busy times are not the only times to show staff appreciation. Consider supplying lemonade, popsicles, and ice cream treats during the hottest days of summer (you could also extend these treats to customers). During the fall consider providing apple cider, doughnuts, and apples. Partner with a local orchard for discount coupons you can provide to employees and customers.

Don't under estimate the value of company picnics, family days, and employee appreciation days. Events such as these facilitate interaction between employees and between management and employees. In addition to the typical BBQ and employee discounts think about using your company picnic as a venue to raffle off damaged good or products that are out of date or not selling well. With a creative mind and a little time you could start "Employee Olympics." Create fun events that teams of employees can compete in such as "Container Mix-Up Planting," "Fill-a-Flat," and "Funky Floral Design."

The most motivating employee rewards can be given every day by listening, asking for input, and offering a sincere thank you.

No-Cost Rewards

- Share bonus gift cards and products, obtained through purchases with vendors, with staff.
- Feature a staff member's profile in your newsletter and e-newsletter (also connects your customers to the business).
- Handwritten note in the paycheck.
- Recognize employee for dealing with difficult customers
- Casual Clothing Days – Pick a theme for the day and allow employees to wear clothing showing their support of local schools, universities, favorite pro sports teams, or civic and church organizations.
- Employee Hall of Fame or Employee of the Month programs.
- "Caught Ya!" recognition program where employees recognize each other for doing good deeds for customers or other employees.
- A sincere thank you at the end of each day.

Under \$25 Rewards

- Movie tickets or movie rental vouchers complete with pop, popcorn, and candy
- Tickets to a local concert or theater show
- Gift certificate for employee's favorite restaurant.
- Floral arrangements to commemorate birthdays, anniversaries, or special achievements

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Employee Rewards – Cash Isn't Always King

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- Free plants encourage gardening among employees and strengthens their knowledge about the products they sell.
- A book or video on a subject the employee is interested in or on a professional development topic such as sales, leadership, etc.

\$25 to \$50 Rewards

- Make a donation to your employee's favorite charity, church, or other group an employee is involved in.
- Take one or two employees out for dinner or drinks after business hours.
- Provide employee with clothing featuring the company's logo and their name embroidered.
- Give a subscription to a trade publication or membership to a trade organization.

\$50 to \$100 Rewards

- Gift certificate for time with a massage therapist, hair dresser, or nail specialist.
- Gift certificates for dinner to thank families/spouses for supporting employee's overtime during a busy spring season.
- Invest in your employee's professional development by reimbursing their expenses for obtaining their nurseryman, florist, or horticulturist certifications.

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Impatiens Necrotic Spot Virus

by Dennis Lewandowski

Impatiens necrotic spot virus (INSV) continues to be an important and damaging virus in the floricultural industry. Two virus characteristics contribute to the significance of INSV in the ornamental industry: 1) a very wide host range, including many popular ornamental crops and many weed species, and 2) a prolific vector, Western flower thrips (*Franklinella occidentalis*), which can be difficult to manage. Greenhouse ornamentals that are highly susceptible to INSV include New Guinea impatiens, impatiens, gloxinia, cineraria, and cyclamen. Other common greenhouse crops susceptible to INSV include African violets, anemone, aster, begonia, chrysanthemum, dahlia, geranium, gerbera, kalanchoe, lobelia, marigold, phlox, ranunculus, petunia, snapdragon, stock, and verbena.

Symptoms

INSV causes a wide range of symptoms, including chlorotic (yellow) or necrotic (black or brown) ringspots or target spots on leaves, stem lesions, wilting, stunting, mosaic, leaf distortion, color break, and flower deformation. As with many viral diseases, the age of the plant at time of infection and environmental conditions can greatly affect symptom severity. Symptoms caused by INSV are sometimes mistaken for those caused by fungal or bacterial pathogens, thus delaying a timely diagnosis and implementation of an aggressive action plan of eradication and vector management. Symptoms on New Guinea impatiens include black or brown necrotic spots and leaf



deformation (Figure 1). Gloxinia plants infected with INSV often develop a crown necrosis (Figure 2) that can be confused with other diseases. It is valuable to learn the typical INSV symptoms on those crops that had previous INSV problems.



Figure 1. Typical symptoms of necrotic spots on New Guinea impatiens caused by INSV.



Figure 2. Crown necrosis in gloxinia caused by INSV.

Transmission and Spread

INSV is not easily mechanically transmitted between plants, but is spread by vegetative propagation from infected plants. INSV can enter a greenhouse through one of two routes: within infected plant material or with thrips that are carrying the virus. Thrips that have acquired INSV from outside the greenhouse can enter on incoming plant material or through openings in the greenhouse. Weeds growing adjacent to the greenhouses can harbor both INSV and thrips and should be controlled.

Within a greenhouse, the route of secondary spread is by Western flower thrips (WFT), the most common vector of INSV. INSV is acquired by WFT larvae as they feed on infected plants. However, only adult thrips are capable of transmitting INSV. INSV cannot be acquired by adult thrips, nor can it be passed to offspring. If an existing thrips population lays eggs on INSV-infected plants, the larvae can acquire the virus and become adult vectors of INSV.

Integrated Management

Because INSV has a biological vector and an extremely wide host range, effective control requires an integrated approach that targets virus, vector, and alternate hosts. Successful efforts to exclude INSV will have the greatest impact at minimizing losses due to INSV. Purchasing virus-indexed plant material is recommended. A first line of defense must include a careful inspection of all incoming plant material for virus symptoms. Because the virus can be introduced either with infected plant material propagated from virus-infected stock plants or by thrips carrying INSV, incoming plant shipments also need to be inspected for signs of thrips feeding or infestation. New plant

material should be quarantined for several days for observation of symptom development or the hatch of eggs.

Scouting for virus symptoms and signs and presence of WFT are essential for early detection and management of INSV. Suspect plants should be tested for INSV by a diagnostic laboratory. Rapid test kits, such as the ImmunoStrip produced by Agdia, Inc., give results in less than 30 minutes and are available to growers. Plants testing positive for INSV should be immediately bagged and destroyed. Once plants testing positive for INSV have been discovered, it needs to be determined if there is a population of thrips present in the greenhouse. If so, management of INSV becomes a two-pronged approach to destroy infected plants and control thrips.

Thrips populations should be regularly monitored with yellow or blue sticky cards. Examine plants for symptoms caused by INSV, particularly if thrips feeding scars are observed. Indicator plants such as fava bean or certain petunia cultivars can be used to monitor whether thrips populations are carrying INSV. Flowers should be removed to force the thrips to feed on the foliage, and non-sticky blue cards can be used to attract thrips to the indicator hosts. Petunias are preferred because INSV causes necrotic (brown/black) lesions at the site of thrips feeding and the virus is restricted to these leaves. INSV will move systemically in fava beans, so these need to be discarded when infection is noted to prevent the systemically infected plants from serving as a source of INSV.

Older plant material in the greenhouse can provide a source of INSV inoculum. Stock plants should be maintained separately from propagation houses. We often observe plants at the end of the season infected with INSV, so leftover plants should be discarded at the end of the season to reduce inoculum. Weed removal, both inside and outside of greenhouse, is recommended to reduce populations of WFT and reservoirs of INSV.

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Tips & Tricks to Increase Add-On Sales – A Different Angle

by Sid Raisch



Sid Raisch is President of Horticultural Advantage, a consulting firm serving independent garden centers and suppliers, and is affiliated with The Garden Center Group. Sid has taken 30 years of experience assisting the growth of a wide range of green industry companies and formulated it into a step-by-step program designed to help garden center owners improve their condition by making, implementing, and profiting from decisions that drive sales, improve operations, and deliver profit.

Who doesn't want to increase add-on sales? Everyone wants to, but is it because the average sale you have to start with isn't big enough? Although I was asked to write about tips and tricks to increase add-on sales I've been at this long enough to know that this is not what you really need from me. I know this is tough talk for a nice guy, but it's what you and I need to talk about.

Increasing the average ticket has been a major strategy to increase sales for a long time. For most garden centers it has been a godsend to just hold their ground while the increased competition from discounters continues to erode traffic counts. Let's focus on increasing the original sale to each customer

Do you think the decline of transactions means there are fewer customers, or that some customers are coming to you less frequently? The ubiquitous presence and convenience provided by discounters may be reducing the number of times your core customers come to you. The same effect may be reducing your traffic from customers who shop only once in the spring whether they need to or not. (Isn't spring fever wonderful?) Either way, only close examination of your point-of-sale data will reveal the truth. The first notion to set aside is that the average sale is really all that meaningful. What really is important is each customer, the number of purchases they make individually, and the total of their purchases over a year and over a lifetime.

While discounters provide convenience and low price, they lack customer service. But let's get real about that for a moment. In many cases there is a nearly indistinguishable difference between their lack of service and the service actually provided by the average independent retailer. I've shopped many of your stores, and I've read hundreds of mystery shop reports from "good" garden centers. The perception of service is not always

as high as you perceive it to be. Real sales are the real indicator of real service, and they are earned by real attentiveness to the real needs of each customer.

Problem #1 – Un-Selling

Who's buying anyway? The customer is the one who is supposed to be doing the buying, yet if you use your imagination a bit you can see your "salespeople" talking customers into not buying. Imagine if your salespeople had to pay you for everything they don't sell when customers are trying to buy. Many sales are simply "erased" by salespeople who, intentionally or not, devalue the product and service you employ them to provide. I'm not talking about selling customers something they don't need. What I am talking about is something as common as a customer asking for a zinnia, and being told, "I wouldn't plant those in the shade because they don't do well without sunlight and will get mildew and look ugly," without suggesting a suitable alternative. Don't assume this isn't going on in your store. Salespeople often say things that make you cringe, but then it's ignored and you go back to work rather than deal with the unpleasant task of correcting them.

Tip #1: Pay attention to un-selling, and take active steps now to put a stop to it. This is a symptom of a simple lack of training, which represents a lack of interest, which represents laziness.

Trick #1: Take an active role in selling and use these sales-erasing situations as coaching moments to correct the problem.

Problem #2 – Being Satisfied Without Satisfying the Customer's Unrealized Need

When customers talk, they are trying to buy. When you're fortunate enough to have a customer come into your store, the first priority should be to get them talking. People are busy. They came there for a reason. Sometimes their "need" is unrealized, meaning they don't know how to express it. "I'm looking" really means "I'm looking for something I can't describe."

Tip #2: Getting the customer to talk is the first priority. If you can't accomplish that you don't have a chance at increasing their original sale, and that is what you must do to increase your add-on sale. They go hand-in-hand. It is a lot more practical to sell a \$14.99 package of fertilizer to a customer who is spending \$150 than it is to add that on to your average- or below-average sale.

Trick #2: Ask customers about the specifics of their landscape and garden. Get them talking about what they like and don't like about it. Ask about what they would like to accomplish at your garden center today.

Desired Result

When you stop allowing salespeople to un-sell and start helping them learn to guide customers to identify their realized and unrealized needs, your total sales will go up more than if you simply use tricks to add on sales to customers who aren't buying anyway.

OK, enough tough stuff, and back to Mr. Nice Guy. Go talk with your customers and have a nice day. And think about getting some of that sales training to help you get your "original sale" up further.

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ofa Management

Are You Empowering Your Team?

by John Stanley

I recently had a challenge. I checked my luggage in Lisbon, Portugal and travelled to Barcelona, London, and on to Dubai in the United Arab Emirates. Would my suitcase come with me? As you would expect, it did not arrive in Dubai until three days after I did. I was travelling in jeans and hiking boots and needed clothes for the next conference and had little time to shop.

I had no choice; I had to go shopping, and I had to buy. This may sound like a fun venture, but it became a real challenge. My first stop was the shoe store. I selected a pair of shoes and asked if they had a size 10 (UK). The salesperson returned with a size 8 and presented them to me with a, "We only have size 8." I'm not sure what or how I was supposed to react in this situation. I visited three more stores before I could find a pair of shoes to purchase.

My next challenge was a pair of trousers. At the clothes store I explained that I needed a pair of trousers immediately. I selected a pair that needed altering to the correct length. The salesperson asked if I could return in two days to allow time for altering. I re-emphasised my problem and told him I would not be buying the trousers. The manager appeared and again I explained my problem. He suggested I go for a coffee and the trousers would be ready in an hour.

I do not mean to bemoan or complain about the salespeople, all were pleasant and "doing their job." My concern is the lack of empowerment.

Empowerment is the Key

We have all attended conferences that advise us to invest in the brand and build the brand. What is rarely emphasised is that the success of the brand also depends on the in-house empowerment policy.



Every retailer should trust the team members they employ. If they don't trust them they should not continue to employ them. Trusted team members should be empowered. Part of the role of retail management is to empower team members and to support them in their decision-making process.

In the first example, I can accept that the shop may have not had my size in the selected shoe. But, if the team member had been empowered to provide two alternative styles in my size, I may have purchased. In the clothes shop, it is difficult for me to understand why a manager can short circuit the system to satisfy the customer's needs, but a salesperson cannot. Both situations damage the brand.

Have an Empowerment Policy

To ensure customer satisfaction is achieved, I believe it is critically important to have an empowerment policy. All team members should be able to make a business decision equivalent to the average sale per customer. This amount of financial leeway should be increased as team members earn more trust and obtain higher positions. The aim must be to build the business by ensuring everyone performs in a positive way.

The role of retail managers is to recruit personable team members, train them in product knowledge to ensure they have confidence, and then empower them; give them to the confidence that management will support them when decisions have to be made. A failure to introduce an empowerment policy often results in a quicker turnover of staff as they seek out businesses who they feel do trust them.

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Are You Empowering Your Team?

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The Rules of Empowerment

As a manager you must introduce rules of empowerment. These will vary depending on the situation, but could include:

- If we do not have what the customer has asked for, always offer an alternative; you may still satisfy the customer's needs.
- As a business you will support any decision to satisfy the customer made by any team member in order to increase the value of the average sale per customer.
- Always listen to the customer and anticipate what problems may occur and solve these problems prior to them becoming an issue in the customer's mind.
- As the salesperson you own the relationship with your customer. You become their partner throughout the sales

relationship. Once you start passing the customer on to other team members, the relationship is broken and the retail brand often suffers as a result. The customer may not return.

Empowerment strategies apply to all retail relationships. Too many retailers do not appreciate the importance of them in building advocates for their business. Your role is to ensure you have the best empowerment policy in your retail community.

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The Importance of Networking

by Marty Grunder

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It's important to network and get your name out. It's also important to never take your eye off of your clients and their happiness. Let's consider another facet of networking – how to get others to sell for you. I have your attention now. Here are four ways to get others to sell for you:

Do A Great Job

Not a good job, a great job. Exceed your client's expectations, not just meet them. For starters, underpromise and overdeliver. If you can complete your client's winter cleanup by December 1, tell them you can have it done by the December 10. And when they come home on November 30 to a clean yard, you'll look like a hero. If you really want to show how much they mean to you, put a wreath on the front door. There are many ways contractors can make a client smile and tell others about their services. It doesn't have to be much, just go the extra mile and show you care. For example:

- Apply free fire ant control application
- Plant some tulip and daffodil bulbs by the front door
- Aerate a client's lawn for free

- Snowplow your best client's driveway for free a time or two
- Send a handwritten thank you note
- Visit a client's house, walk around, and make certain they are happy.

Ask for Testimonials

What others say about your company is infinitely more impressive and convincing than what you say about yourself. Ask a happy client to write a letter saying why someone should hire your team. At Grunder Landscaping Co., we mail them to prospects the day after we've met with someone. Plain and simple, it works. If you're not receiving unsolicited testimonial letters, then you aren't doing a great job. And if you're skeptical of the power of testimonials, look at the weight loss ads in your Sunday paper. Not one lacks a testimonial.

Reward Your Clients

Show your clients how much you value your referrals and you'll get a bunch of them. I've implemented a program at many landscaping companies that consists of a letter and a coupon that the client gives to their friend, family member, or neighbor. When redeemed, both the user and the person who gave the referral get a credit toward landscaping work. If you want to keep it simple, send a thank you note with a gift

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Ask the Doctor

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Have You been to the Southern Nursery Association's Research Conference?

This was my last year to have the pleasure of editing the floriculture section of the Southern Nursery Association's Research Conference that was held August 8 and 9. On the outside chance that you are unfamiliar with the conference that is held in conjunction with the SNA Trade Show and Forum 2007, let me digress a moment. "SNA is a professional trade association encompassing the total nursery/landscape industry from nursery production through retailing and landscape installation in the states of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. As a regional association, SNA works to advance the horticultural industry in the southeast by supporting and enhancing educational, commercial, and research opportunities; by gathering, analyzing, and disseminating information; and by providing a marketplace to promote the exchange and sale of nursery stock and other allied products to our members, our participating state associations and the industry."

While SNA is regional in its focus, the Research Conference draws researchers, growers, and allied industry researchers from around the country who have new knowledge to share. Hundreds of topics in 13 categories are shared each year. Presentations are approximately seven minutes each and are concise and easy to understand. The conference format allows you to sit in on all or only those topics of interest to you or pertain to your business.

Presentations are divided into the following categories: container-grown plant production; field production; entomology; pathology and nematology; economics and marketing; engineering, structures and innovations; growth regulators; propagation; weed control; landscape; water management; plant breeding and evaluation; and floriculture.

The purpose of this brief article is to share a sampling of the "good stuff" that is and encourage you to consider attending next year (did I mention that there is no registration fee for the conference?).

Researchers have been looking for viable replacements for peat in media mixes. Peat has a number of outstanding attributes; its one dark side is that it is a non-renewable resource. That, together with the growing consumer interest in sustainability and the availability of various waste or byproducts from other industries, has fueled research into alternatives for a number of years. The supply of another stalwart for media mixes, pine bark, is diminishing (= cost increasing) in part because of reduced supply and greater demand as an alternative fuel and other uses. Two of the research presentations at SNA this year looked at the feasibility of several potential candidates.

The first presentation was titled "Evaluation of Spent Tea Grinds as a Substrate Component" by Daniel E. Wells, Jeff L. Sibley, Charles H. Gilliam, and William A. Dozier, Jr. from Auburn University, and Jay L. Evers from Milo's Tea Company Inc. The authors compared various crop quality characteristics of Boston fern and lantana grown in 100 percent spent tea grounds (SPT – an organic waste product of the tea-brewing process), a 50:50 SPT:pine bark mix, a 100 percent TBC (50:50 STG:PB combo composed for a month) mix, a 80:20 TBC:perlite mix, and a popular peat-based mix. Most media treatments were given a fertilizer and micronutrient starter charge. The plants growing in media containing the spent tea grounds (composed or not) generally exhibited quality characteristics equal to or better than those growing in peat-based media. The authors concluded, "Results suggest that STG blended with PB in proper proportions can produce marketable plants. Furthermore, TBC is a viable substrate for greenhouse production. Further tests should be conducted to document the responses of other species grown in STG and TBC substrates, and to manipulate pH levels in these substrates."

The second paper, "Lime and Micronutrient Use in Clean Chip Residual Substrate Amended with Composted Poultry Litter or Peat for Use in Annual Production," was by C.R. Boyer, C.H. Gilliam, T.V. Gallagher, and J.L. Sibley, Auburn University; H.A. Torbert and G.B. Fain, USDA-ARS. In it, the authors evaluated clean chip residue as a potential substitute for pine bark. They defined clean chip residue as a "material composed of limbs, needles, and bark after pine plantations are thinned at about the 10 to 12 year age to produce pulpwood. Generally this material is left in the field or sold as boiler fuel. While CCR has a high wood content (~50 percent), it also has high bark content (~40 percent). The remaining 10 percent is roughly composed of needles and other miscellaneous forest materials."

They grew petunias in four media mixes, pine bark (7 parts) mixed with either peat or composted poultry litter (1 part of either), and CCR mixed with either peat or the composted poultry litter (7:1). There were lime and micronutrient treatments superimposed on top of the four media treatments, but they had little meaningful impact on the petunia's growth and response to the four media treatments. The authors conclude by saying, "In summary, PB and CCR were similar in plant growth response while plants grown in substrates amended with CPL exhibited a reduction in growth. Lime and micronutrient use did not make an appreciable difference in plant growth for Petunia 'Dreams Sky Blue'. Pine bark, CCR, and peat can, therefore, be recommended as substrates for Petunia. Composted poultry litter is not recommended for use as an amendment in annual production."

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The Importance of Networking

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certificate to a nice restaurant each time someone sends you a client. People remember these things and will send you more work in the future.

Be A Friend

The best way to get others to sell for you is to be their friend. You need to be someone who always has your client's best interest in mind. Don't sell the client something they don't need; sell them only what is best for them. If you become known as someone who can be counted on to always do the right thing, you will reap the benefits over time. I have walked away from work because I did not believe it was in the client's best interest. Clients are surprised by my stance. But if it's not right, it's not right.

At Grunder we spend a lot of time doing a lot of little things for our clients. We send them birthday cards; we send them

thank you notes; if we see an article about them in the paper, we'll have it framed and take it over to them. These are all things a friend would do.

A company with happy clients is destined for success. Make a client happy and you've just added another salesperson to your team that comes at a price every budget can afford.

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Safe Vehicle Operation

by Gary Hanson

In a recent study OSHA concluded that the number one occupational death claim was the result of motor vehicle accidents. This came as quite a revelation to many people, but it makes sense when you realize how many individuals are required to drive either full time or part time everyday as a part of their employment. Add to this the increasing number of motor vehicles on the road today, car telephones and other distractions and you can understand why vehicle accidents have become the leading cause of death on the job.

It is even more important today to keep safety in the forefront at all times. An accident can happen in a heartbeat, it does not take much. A minor distraction, highway congestion, weather conditions, visibility, physical conditions and the actions of other drivers can all lead to a serious accident. A driver has to be mentally alert 100 percent of the time, without fail. Yet it is estimated that 25 percent of all truck drivers are on "automatic pilot." From time to time we all fall victim to this condition, but we need to be alert to this and keep our mind on the job at hand.

Safe Vehicle Operation includes the following:

- Proper physical fitness
- Proper vehicle maintenance
- Safe fueling
- Defensive driving
- Reporting all accidents

Proper Physical Fitness

This is a critical area for professional drivers. It is important in maintaining alertness, quick response time and reducing fatigue. Always:

- Get the proper amount of sleep
- Eat properly
- Stay in top physical shape
- Exercise at regular intervals
- Only use approved medications as prescribed by a physician
- Abstain from alcohol and drugs
- Wear glasses or contact lenses if required to do so
- Always wear the seat belt provided in your vehicle

Proper Vehicle Maintenance

Always complete the daily pre-trip and post-trip inspection of your vehicle. Fill out your company's safety inspection report and report any discrepancies immediately.

General Vehicle Condition - Check the following:

- Cab, doors, windshield, and body
- Oil, coolant, and steering fluid levels
- Belts, battery, and hoses

Interior

- Cleanliness
- Gauges and warning indicators
- Windshield wipers and washer fluid
- Horn, interior lights, and mirrors
- Brake, emergency brake, and clutch
- Emergency equipment
- Seat belts

Exterior

- Lights and reflectors
- Tires, wheels, rims, and lugs
- Exhaust pipe, air line, and mud flaps

Safe Fueling

Avoid fire and explosion by always:

- Turning off the engine
- Not smoking (ever)
- Avoiding all ignition sources
- Keeping the nozzle in the vehicle intake pipe at all times during the fueling process
- Carrying extra fuel only in approved containers designed for that purpose

Defensive Driving

This can never be stressed enough. Always be alert and on guard for anything that could put you and your vehicle at risk. Use the following tips as a guide:

- Keep your eyes on the road at all times.
- See the road, when driving look a block ahead, in rural areas look farther ahead.
- Check your rearview mirror frequently.
- Know the blind spots and avoid driving into these.
- Always maintain a safe driving distance.
- Slow down on slick, wet, icy, or poor road conditions.
- Put your lights on when visibility is poor.
- Use the turn signals anytime a lane change is made.
- Be prepared to make quick defensive moves at anytime.
- Drive within the posted speed limit at all times.
- Be aware of traffic situations ahead of and behind your vehicle.
- Be ready to yield to the right away to avoid an accident.

- Slow down when crossing railroad tracks.
- Avoid unnecessary sudden stops.
- Maintain your composure and be courteous.
- Follow all other traffic rules.
- Stop and rest if necessary or if you feel sleepy.
- If involved in a skid situation, turn your wheels in the direction of the skid and avoid locking up the brakes if possible.
- Before moving your vehicle or after having been stopped, check your vehicle. Check for pedestrians and vehicles parked behind or close to your vehicle and other obstacles that may be in your path.
- Always check behind you before backing up, and use the rear view mirrors.

Reporting All Accidents

- Always keep calm.
- If injured call your department to summon help or call for medical assistance.
- If not injured find out if anybody else has been injured, then call an ambulance if necessary.
- Only provide first aid that you are qualified to provide.
- Set up emergency warning devices.
- Take precaution to prevent traffic congestion if possible.
- Cooperate fully with the local law enforcement agencies once they arrive.
- Report all facts surrounding the accident on your company Vehicle Accident Report.
- Get the names of any other individuals involved in the accident.
- Record the exact position of each vehicle in the accident before and after the accident, note weather conditions and the time of the day that the accident occurred.
- Do not talk to anyone other than the law enforcement official or company official or give a signed statement to anyone except the police.
- Ensure that the accident report is completed, filled out in detail and be honest in your reporting.

As a professional driver you have a key position. Your judgment, skills, and ability are critical to the success of your company. Your family, community, friends, fellow drivers, and company rely on your ability. Take pride in your driving skills, be alert, and be safe everyday.

If your company has any safety concerns or questions, please feel free to call American Safety & Health Management Consultants, Inc., at 800-356-1274.

Gary Hanson

American Safety & Health Management Consultants Inc



Article provided via Compensation Consultants Inc, Dublin, Ohio.



Academic Update

Application Technology Research Unit Update

by Charles R. Krause, Research Leader

The Application Technology Research Unit (ATRU) is the largest multidisciplinary research team in the United States Department of Agriculture, Agricultural Research Service, conducting studies on floricultural and nursery crops. On-farm research is a major approach to the mission of this unit.

The mission of ATRU is to conduct fundamental and developmental research on new and improved application technologies to protect floricultural, nursery, landscape, turf, horticultural, and field crops against injury from diseases, pests, nutritional stress, and adverse environmental conditions, while safeguarding environmental quality, and food and worker safety. ATRU is located at the campus of The Ohio State University, Ohio Agricultural Research and Development Center in Wooster and at the campus of the University of Toledo. The following is a list of our research objectives, a sampling of current projects, and our personnel.

Agricultural Engineering Research Group (Wooster)

Evaluation of use patterns will be done on ultra-low, low-, and high-volume greenhouse sprayers for safe re-entry; use neutral-buoyancy droplets to study airflow patterns produced by internal fans and possibilities for operating them to improve pesticide distribution produced by whole-room fogging devices; there will be studies using high-speed imaging to assess nematode distribution patterns from commercial nozzle tips; and experiments using imaging techniques to detect conditions that enhance disease development and presence of disease spores.

The Agriculture Engineering Research Group has established studies to evaluate spray application systems for better penetration and uniform deposition within dense nursery canopies under nursery field microclimate conditions. In addition, they have expanded nursery production field experiments using half rate of insecticides and fungicides with air assisted sprayers. The group is developing a harmonic radar transponder for tracking insect populations, and methods for injecting soil borne insect control formulations. The group is researching interactions and efficacy in applications of pesticide, irrigation, and nutrition to improve the quality and production of horticultural and field crops. The development of precision sprayers for nursery and horticultural crops and the investigation of evaporation and residual pattern of spray droplets on different structure leaves is also occurring. Finally, other activities include:

- Spray deposition and off-target loss in nursery applications
- Release of DRIFTSIM computer program
- Spray characteristics of hydraulic nozzles
- Effect of air velocity on spray deposition and coverage inside canopies

- Effect of spray additives on droplet evaporation, spread factor and residual patterns
- Research Weather Network
- Impact of application technique on apple scab management on crabapples
- Water and pesticide management of nurseries

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Greenhouse Production Research Group (Toledo)

This group is involved in improving soilless media production technologies using peat substitutes or soilless amendments such as hydrogels, silicon, and beneficial microbes; developing initial test kits for detecting micronutrient stress; characterizing nutrient deficiencies in gloxinia, cyclamen, and geranium; developing Virtual Grower software into a comprehensive decision support tool for greenhouse producers; determine the environmental influence of nutrient uptake and partitioning; and characterizing diverse ornamental species and cultivars for biotic and abiotic stress resistance. Other activities include:

- Release of the program updates for Virtual Grower (August, 2006; July, 2007)
- Effect of a polyacrylamide hydrogel soil amendment on growth, shelf life, root morphology, and disease susceptibility with pansies, New Guinea impatiens, and geranium.
- The effects of nutrition on disease development including silicon and nitrogen.
- Use of non-destructive techniques, such as variation in leaf temperature, to diagnose root diseases.
- Determine the environmental factors that control sudden pH decline in geranium

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Horticultural Insects Research Group (Wooster)

The entomologists are evaluating the efficacy of several insecticides as quarantine treatments for Japanese Beetles, along with testing of essential oils as quarantine treatments; studying on drip chemigation for control of white grubs in field-grown nursery crops with testing Marathon II and one strain of insect pathogenic nematode, pheromone-based mating disruption for

management of the oriental beetles; determining life histories of exotic scarabs in nurseries of northern Ohio and evaluation of host preference of black vine weevil for laying eggs and its successful establishment on several species of ornamental plants. Additionally:

- Subsurface application of insecticides for control of white grubs and black vine weevil in field-grown nursery crops in collaboration with the agricultural engineering group.
- Trapping to survey for ambrosia, bark, and other wood-boring beetles.
- Evaluation of insecticides for control of Emerald ash borer (EAB).
- Evaluation of natural enemies for control of white grubs and black vine weevil.

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IR-4 Food Use and Ornamental Group (Wooster)

The IR-4 Program is a national agricultural program to clear crop protection chemicals and biological pest control agents for food-use and ornamental specialty crops. ATRU usually completes 15 food-use projects and 50 ornamentals projects per year in cooperation with the national IR-4 headquarters at Rutgers University. IR-4's goals are to provide data for pesticide registration and label expansion for specialty crops (minor crops, ornamental, and food-use plants).

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 Betsy Anderson (Betsy.Anderson@ars.usda.gov),
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 and IR-4 Food Use technician (vacant position).

Plant Pathology and Horticultural Group (Wooster)

This group is engaged in evaluating the:

- Impact of application technique on fungicide effectiveness for apple scab control.
- Control of Botrytis blight on Reiger begonias with soil amendments.
- Enhancing soilless media to control root rot diseases.

Contact persons are
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Imagine

By Stan Pohmer, America in Bloom Vice President

Imagine ... across the nation kids, parents, volunteer groups, businesses, municipal workers, and city governments, all working together for a common goal – beautification and improvement of their Main Streets, public spaces, and residences with environmentally sound practices and floriculture products.

Imagine ... the sense of community, the spirit of pride and ownership that's achieved through this involvement of working together to make communities a better place.

Imagine ... the opportunity this presents to get non-gardeners exposed to the benefits of our products, and to get gardeners more involved with our products.

Imagine ... the opportunity this presents to expose kids – our future purchasers – to the products, to the joys and benefits of plants and flowers, and helping lead them to the life-long experience of gardening.

These aren't just dreams; they can be your reality. It was only a few years ago that some visionary floriculture industry leaders captured this dream and have been working toward bringing life to it through America in Bloom (AIB). This all-volunteer group has worked diligently in positioning AIB, a non-profit organization, to develop the platform necessary to spread our gospel across America, and to get people involved and excited about the positive aspect of plants and flowers and building community spirit through involvement in community beautification and environmental horticulture.

Though best known for the friendly, professionally judged competition between communities of comparable population size, there's also an educational symposium held annually that hosts seminars open to both contest participants and interested communities. The ultimate goal is to become a grassroots resource for all communities to benefit from AIB's goals, whether they participate in the contest or not.

Our industry is at a crossroads. Sales growth as well as the number of households involved in gardening has stagnated, while production quantities have increased. The result has been a focus on cost control and predatory retail price points, putting more emphasis on price value than the benefits that plants and flowers provide.

The shifting population demographics – especially with the increasing age of the population, and the fact that we aren't effectively reaching out to developing new floral and horticulture consumers – don't provide the impetus for new growth that we need to expand our industry. Just as important, family and social/community values throughout our country have major opportunities for improvement, and the AIB ideals can help make a positive difference.



We've seen and heard first-hand from towns, villages, cities, and academic campuses the incredible power their participation in AIB has made in their communities. Our challenge is how to expand this enthusiasm to more communities.

But we understand that, while achieving ideals are great, we're all looking for a return on investment on our resources – time, money, people, and energy. The key benefits to your participation in supporting AIB are:

- Increased exposure of our products to more people, especially those who are not currently involved with plants and flowers. This will help increase household penetration and build a stronger future for our industry
- Increased exposure and involvement to kids, our future consumers, through the activities of schools, boy/girl scouts, and other organizations
- Increased usage of our products by municipalities as well as our current consumers
- By becoming actively involved as a sponsor in your own communities, you, in a non-commercial way, are viewed as a civic and industry leader.

Industry involvement is crucial to AIB's future success. We need:

- your financial support to help us expand programs that will help keep our industry strong and growing
- your enthusiasm to help spread the word about AIB to your communities and to other industry members
- your help getting your community involved in AIB's programs and activities

You have the power to help turn the ideals and dreams that AIB encompasses into reality – benefiting our communities and our industry. But we'll never realize them without your support and commitment! Get involved and support in America in Bloom!

For more information about the 2007 AIB symposium and awards program (September 27-29 in Rockford, Illinois) or to learn about getting your community in the program, please visit the AIB web site at www.americainbloom.org or contact the AIB office at 614-487-1117.

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