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Potential Poinsettia Problems— Don't Blow It at the Last Minute

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Nutrition—Maintain adequate levels of calcium and magnesium. Soil test regularly. Apply additional molybdenum to avoid deficiency which appears around bract coloration time or use a fertilizer formulation which contains extra Mo. Avoid using fertilizers high in ammonium nitrogen, because poinsettias are susceptible to ammonium toxicity. Finally, stop fertilizing poinsettias two to three weeks prior to shipping. Researchers have reported that conditioned plants do perform better (have longer shelf-life) in the home environment.

Temperature—Calibrate thermometers and thermostats. *Keep the beat on*. Don't be stingy. It requires less heat and money to maintain the proper developing temperatures in September and October. That's the time to "build" the crop (plant), when light conditions are also normally at higher levels.

Light—Remove all shade or shading materials from your glass or plastic covered greenhouses. Poinsettias are a high light requiring crop. There are some cultivar exceptions. Check your supplier's information. Do not grow hanging baskets above poinsettias. They need all the available light during October to December.

Insect Control—Monitor the crop's yellow, sticky traps every three to four days. Turn the leaves over to make sure that no white flies are laying eggs. Keep the weeds removed from the greenhouse and mow the outside grass and weeds. Weeds serve as a great reservoir for whitefly build-up. Keep fungus gnats under control, as they have been reported to transmit the disease organism *Pythium*.

Disease Control—No excuses! Sanitation (good house-keeping) goes a long way to prevent problems. It's a constant battle but eliminate plant debris which serves as a source for disease inoculum. Adjust potting medium pH to 5.0 to 5.5 to reduce the incidence of *Thielaviopsis*, one of the root-rot organisms that attacks poinsettias late in the season. **Note:** Before Benlate, pH adjustment was the only tool to slow *Thielaviopsis*. Apply the recommended fungicidal drenches to prevent disease problems.

References

Anon. 1990. *Poinsettia season 1990—in review*. Ontario Ministry of Agriculture and Food, Canada. Grower Notes 12: 1-5.

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