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ACCLIMATING PLANTS FROM WINTER STORAGE

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The act of winter storage itself is quite new as it relates to container growing and the thoughts as to how to handle the transition from storage to the sales lot is even newer. The background of this transition does have some history though for as long as man has tried to overwinter plants in pits or cold storages he had the problem of conditioning plants from the cold, moist, dark environment to the hot, dry bright outside spring days.

Usually we are all so busy shipping, at the time this change has to take place, we do well just to get the plants watered. Probably the most important thing to watch as the warm spring winds start blowing through the houses is: MAKE SURE THE PLANTS HAVE ENOUGH WATER.

If we are talking about container plants that have been in a quonset under double white poly film then there is a need to allow more ventilation and more light as the spring progresses. I do this by cutting progressively more half moons in the plastic as taught us by my friend Richard Vanderbilt at Conard Pyle. This is a fast and easy way to get more light and air into the house and there are no pieces to pick up as they just hang there. It also allows one to tape them shut if a hard frost is predicted such as we had during the spring of 1977.

Another idea that Mr. Vanderbilt had was to cut large access holes in the side of the quonsets, if a drive exists along side, rather than carry plants to the end. It saves many steps.

Another consideration is disease problems during this transition period. Botrytis can become troublesome and yet can be held in check by a combination of ventilation and a number of effective spray materials.

If you can think as if you were the plant and you are coming out of a cold deep sleep into bloom and growth, then perhaps you are in a better position to know what to do for the plant. What are the conditions that a plant is subject to when planted outside? Usually a slow transition! How then can you create a slow change for that plant that has been protected all winter? You must also remember that cold roots often do not function as well as warm roots and so you want to minimize stress until roots have had a chance to at least get above 50 degrees.

The challenge to us is to be a good observer and try to think of the optimum environmental conditions for the plants.

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