

GERBERAS COULD 'TAKE-OFF'

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GERBERA is the fifth most important cut flower crop in Holland with some 650 acres under cultivation (double that of standard carnations). The crop was first grown on Guernsey about 20 years ago, with trials at the island experimental station over the past 12 years.

While the crop has so far failed to 'take-off', the advisory service suggests that just as spray carnations have been successful over the past year — so could gerberas.

Gerberas can be grown as a 12 month, 18 month or two year crop (generally as an 18 month crop in Holland). Guernsey experience is that smaller flowers result at the end of year-two and subsequently.

The most recent trial at the Guernsey station produced the following yields over a 12-month picking period (July 81 to June 82). Rooted cuttings were received April 21, 1981.

Variety	Colour	Blooms/ plant
Clementine	Orange	32
Rome	Red	27
Marleen	Yellow, double	30
Delphi	White	22
Appleblossom	Pink	24

There were disease problems with the last two varieties, the trial demonstrating the importance of clean planting material. The house had never grown gerberas before and the

soil was thoroughly steam sterilised, yet disease was rampant in two varieties.

The following points are of immense importance, Guernsey growers are told:

- incorporate plenty of organic matter in the soil.
- soil sterilisation: methyl bromide is effective in controlling fungi and root knot eelworm (club root).
- insist on very clean plant material from a reputable firm.
- uniform planting material is essential so as to achieve uniform establishment.
- install drip irrigation so that crowns are kept dry.
- plant on the ridge or in single plant containers.
- soil warming has *not* been used in Guernsey but may be beneficial.
- plant in April for 24 month crops.
- expect to cut eight weeks after planting.
- ensure that flowers are harvested at the right stage of development.
- heat must be given for winter production: 12 to 13C night/15 to 17C day.
- keep on top of pests, particularly leaf miner and whitefly.
- look out for crown rot (*Phytophthora cryptogea*), scourge of the gerbera crop.

As with any high value flower, a proper understanding of the crop is necessary if the grower is to succeed and no grower should contemplate growing the crop unless he is prepared to spend money on good soil preparation and good plant material.