

GLOXINIAS 365 DAYS A YEAR

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My first love in horticulture was and still is orchid breeding but running a close second is the breeding of Gloxinias and commercial production from seedlings. I have learned a tremendous amount of information from Gloxinia about color inheritance, fertilizer requirements, as well as humidity—temperature—light ratios on production problems.

We started a year around production schedule of Gloxinia plants about ten years ago and have found they fill a very big gap in the requirements of Florists for showy pot plants at all Holiday periods as well as off season periods when other plants are scarce.

All our plants are grown from seed, transplanted first into 2" bands, then potted directly into a 5" or 6" pot, to produce a finished plant. The best plants are those that are never slowed down or shocked in any way. For this reason, we prefer plant bands over clay pots. If a plant is grown on the dry side in a clay pot, or is allowed to grow until a complete root ball is found, the plant actually sets its growth pattern and finishes very fast with a small inferior type of plant and only relatively few flowers.

The largest and finest plants we produce are those that flower from February 15th to May 15th. This may not hold true in all climates but it is a proven fact for Florida and other Southern States. A seedling should be transplanted into its final pot size before its roots reach the edge of a plant band. The fact that they may be a little tall or spindly seems to be of little importance as this can be compensated by merely planting it down deeper in the pot, leaving only 1/2" to 3/4" of the growing tip above the soil level with about two pair of leaves out of the soil. If a plant has broken leaves or is even completely broken off from the roots by poor transportation, all is not lost. The tip of the plant, if potted out in good sterile soil, will usually root out and grow into a fine specimen with only a few weeks delay over the rooted plants.

Gloxinias require plenty of light but not so much as to burn foliage or cause leaf spots when watered on bright hot days. Too much light can cause short flower stems with flowers that open under the leaves. If they get to little light, tall plants, that need stakes to support them, will be produced.

In order to maintain good green color in foliage, a steady fertilizer supply is required. For years we used a weekly feeding of a good, balanced fertilizer such as 20-20-20, at the rate of 3 lbs. per 100 gal. of water, but last Fall, we installed a Fert-oject Machine (an automatic proportioner, geared to the flow of water). Now all the water we use in our greenhouses contains fertilizer at the rate of approximately $\frac{1}{2}$ lb. per 100 gal. This has produced even better Gloxinias as it provides a more even supply of nutrients. The best soil for Gloxinias is a relatively light and porous one. Rotted dairy manure and peat, added to a regular soil, usually makes a good mixture.