

An Evaluation of Soil vs Peat-lite Media on Post-Production Life of Selected Potted Chrysanthemums

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There is criticism in the trade that plants grown in peat-lite media do not last as long in the home as those grown in soil-based media. This study was designed to test this hypothesis.

Three media were chosen: a commercially available peat-lite mix; the same commercial mix amended with a 20% by volume addition of steam sterilized soil and 1:1:1 by volume mixture of soil, sphagnum peat moss, and perlite. The 1:1:1 mixture received a preplant application of 20% superphosphate, ground limestone and 20-10-20 analysis fertilizer at 2¾ pounds, 2¾ pounds and 1¾ pounds respectively to one cubic yard of medium. The 20-10-20 was dissolved in water before application.

Rooted cuttings of 'Mandalay', 'Mountain Peak', and 'Capri' were supplied by Yoder Brothers Inc. The first two are 10 week cultivars. 'Capri' is a 9-week cultivar. Planting was done May 18, 1982 with 5 cuttings placed in a 6-inch plastic pot. Short days were started May 24. The plants were in bloom July 27. All plants were fertilized at every irrigation with a 20-10-20 analysis fertilizer applied at 225 ppm N-P₂O₅-K₂O.

At full bloom three pots of each variety in each treatment were placed in the floriculture head house under 10 hours of cool white fluorescent light daily. Light intensity at plant level was approximately 25 fc. Room temperature ranged from 72 to 86°F (22-30°C). Each plant was placed in a shallow saucer so that any water applied was retained for later absorption by the root ball. The plants were watered approximately every third day. They were discarded when flowers and foliage were no longer considered to be aesthetically pleasing. The results of the study are given in Table 1.

There were greater differences in post-production life due to cultivar response to media than media alone.

'Mandalay' grown in peat-lite media lasted an average of 21.6 days compared to 23.5 days for plants grown in the 1:1:1, soil-peat-perlite. This was an approximate

TABLE 1. Post production life in days of 3 selected cultivars of chrysanthemums grown in 3 different media. Figures are averages of 3 plants.

Cultivar	MEDIA		
	Peat-lite	Peat-lite + 20% Soil	Soil-Peat-Perlite (1-1-1 vol)
'Mandalay'	21.6	22.0	23.5
'Mt. Peak'	23.0	27.3	27.6
'Capri'	14.0	22.0	23.0

8.8% reduction in lasting life. With 20% by volume soil added to peat-lite media there was a 1.8% improvement in lasting life.

The cv. 'Mountain Peak' showed a greater response than 'Mandalay' to the addition of soil in the media. The average lasting life of the soil amended peat-lite media and the 1:1:1 media was 19.3% greater than for the plants grown in peat-lite media alone.

The cv. 'Capri' exhibited the greatest difference of all three cultivars. Mums grown in the peat-lite media had a 37.8% shorter lasting life than the average for those in the soil amended peat-lite media and the 1:1:1 media.

Under the conditions of this experiment and with a very limited selection of plant species it appears that in two out of three instances the use of peat-lite as a growing medium resulted in a significant decrease in post production lasting life compared to plants grown in a soil amended media. These results should not be extrapolated to other chrysanthemum cultivars or plant species without further extensive testing of the hypothesis.

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GROWTH OPPORTUNITIES IN FRESH FLOWER SALES

It appears as if the market for fresh flowers will continue to grow for a very long time. Throughout the U.S., as well as the world, there are tremendous opportunities for increased sales of fresh flowers to the public.

"In addition to offering the broadest possible selection and quality to the consumer, retailers play an important role in the promotion of fresh flowers," according to Chris S. van der Pol, Chairman of Fleurop Interflora Nederland, and the Vereniging Bloemist-Winkeliers, an association of Dutch florists.

A Retailer Has to Be Creative

"Ten years ago the Dutch florist still had a wait-and-see attitude," continues Van der Pol. "He sat in the shop, waiting for someone to come in and buy a bunch of flowers. Today, the majority of Dutch florists have changed this traditional behavior pattern and have become actively involved in the so-called 'impulse market.'

Today's retail trade in Holland is aimed at the impulse market. Flowers are displayed outside, in eye-catching sales presentations, packaged for the consumer and clearly priced." Of course, the more expensive and exclusive floral arrangements are also displayed.

When a customer has bought a bunch of flowers and is satisfied, he will keep coming back. "Once flowers have been sold by the impulse method, the customer's inhibitions have disappeared," according to Van der Pol. "He is now more likely to buy the traditional—and more ex-

pensive—presentations, such as exclusive floral arrangements.

"Of course, in addition to eye-catching sales displays, high quality and clearly marked goods and prices, service will also determine whether or not the customer comes back. A friendly remark, a smile and a few good tips on how to care for the flowers will greatly increase goodwill and satisfaction."

Future of the Impulse Market

Aiming at the impulse market provides an additional dimension to the retail florist trade. The appearance of the store is vitally important: with flowers displayed on both the outside and inside, the customer should not be able to resist temptation. "The store should look very cheerful and attractive," according to Van der Pol.

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Fresh Flower Sales (continued)

Impulse purchases will slowly but surely increase over all store sales. Even though prices of impulse items will generally be lower than traditional floral arrangements, profitability will be higher. Good purchases, however, adapted to expected sales, will be necessary.

Mr. Van der Pol has a flower store in the picturesque Dutch town of Tiel. He has steadily built impulse sales to a point where they now represent some 40% of his total flower sales. "Holland is ahead of other countries in this respect," notes Van der Pol. "Prices of flowers are somewhat lower in Holland than those prices abroad, and the Dutch consumer is used to buying flowers. A bunch of flowers purchased every week has become a Dutch custom."

Presentation for Impulse Sales

"To see is to buy" is the basis of impulse buying. Therefore, it is essential that flowers are presented to the buyer in the most advantageous manner possible. "The show window must always look its best," says Van der Pol. "A florist must be creative, and offer the largest possible assortment. Changing the window twice a week will attract more customers and increase overall sales."

Even more important, perhaps, is a florist's creativity in the front or entrance to the store. "One has to show outside, what you are busy doing on the inside," remarks Van der Pol, "and an attractive outdoor presentation always compels the public to stop and look." Again, it is very important to present a broad assortment and a large quantity of flowers. Differences in height makes the selection seem even more attractive.

"An outdoor flower display must be a real show, and should reflect something of oneself," continues Van der

Pol. "Although there is a number of racks and stands available, I prefer making my own display material. By using separate units and repainting every now and then, one can greatly change the appearance of a particular presentation."

Assortment & Quality

While flower presentation is important for impulse sales, good quality and a wide assortment are also essential. Lower quality means disappointment to the buyer, and he will not be back again. In addition, research shows that customers are prepared to pay more for a higher quality product. A wide assortment of flowers has a positive effect on the customer's buying decision. The larger the assortment, the more choice the customer has, and the more certain that he will buy.

Flower Sales Tips

- Prepare an outdoor flower presentation in addition to the display inside the store.
- Only sell the highest quality flowers.
- Present a broad assortment.
- Display as great a quantity of flowers outside as possible.
- Price all flowers clearly, both inside and outside the store.
- Mentioning and displaying flower names provides an extra buying stimulus.
- Position flowers as attractively as possible—use different heights in outside displays.
- Only display less expensive flowers outside.
- Present products that are already packed and ready-to-sell.
- Use the available promotional materials.

GROWING GERBERAS

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Gerberas are profitable, long lasting and colorful flowers. A recent surge in popularity has resulted from several factors.

1. The increasing availability and advertisement of gerberas as cut flowers from the Netherlands.

2. The promotional activities of major seed companies introducing new flowering strains for use as potted and bedding plants.

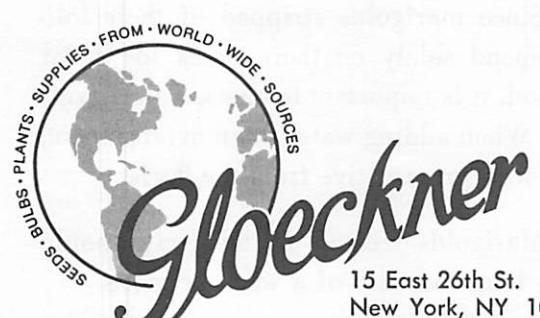
3. The adoption of new selections from Florida breeders and their rapid clonal multiplication by tissue culture

techniques.

The gerbera of Transvaal Daisy (*Gerbera jamesonii*) is a tropical perennial. The flowers are very showy in varying tints of yellow, orange, red, pink and white. Many hybrid gerberas have been developed, grown and evaluated in Florida. Cultivars have been selected for cut flower production or for pot plants.

Culture

Contrary to common belief, gerberas are not a difficult
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