

GUIDE TO VALENTINE'S DAY OLD-FASHIONED BLEEDING HEART PRODUCTION

by Thomas C. Weiler*

Dicentra spectabilis L. (Lem.), Old-Fashioned Bleeding-Heart, is an option for the Valentine's Day novelty pot plant market. The long inflorescences of pink and white heart-shaped flowers combined with later placement in the perennial garden would likely appeal to customers.

Recent research demonstrated that production of *D. spectabilis* for this market is feasible. The scheme is not difficult if the following points are considered.

Crown Grade and Pot Size. Purchase top quality 2-3 eye crowns for 5-inch, 3/4 (azalea) pots. Larger crowns or more than one crown can be planted, but larger pots should be used.

Potting and Root Pruning. Crowns are planted with the eyes at the soil surface. Up to 1/2 of the dug root system can be pruned off to facilitate potting the crowns. This degree of root pruning did not seriously affect plant or inflorescence size in research studies.

Growing Medium, Fertilizing and Watering. A high quality peat-lite or soil potting mix should be selected, and standard watering and fertilizing practices should be used.

Greenhouse Above-Ground Environment. While the plants grow and flower well in the 50-65 degree night temperature range, plants are more robust and of higher quality at 50-55 degrees F. Cool-grown plants require more time to force, however (see Table 1). Full winter

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Figure 1. Upper stem internodes which tend to elongate excessively, detracting from pot plant form.

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light and natural short daylengths should be provided to promote compact growth.

Table 1. Planting and timing schedules for pot plant production of Old-Fashioned Bleeding-Heart for Valentine's Day.

<u>Production night temperature in degrees F</u>		
<u>52-55 degrees</u>	<u>62-65 degrees</u>	<u>Event</u>
Jan. 13	Jan. 20	Plant cold-stored crowns and grow under natural short days
Jan. 20-24	Jan. 26-29	Leaves unfolding -- apply B-Nine spray at 1250 ppm Be sure to add a surfactant to assure full coverage of the foliage.
Jan. 25-29	Jan. 30-Feb.3	Inflorescences clearly visible.
Feb. 10	Feb. 10	Plants starting to bloom.
Feb. 14	Feb. 14	Valentine's Day

Growth Retardation. Stem internodes tend to elongate excessively, detracting from finished plant form. This especially occurs at the upper internodes just before the inflorescence enlarges (Figure 1). This may cause the stems to lean away from the center of the pot and reduce aesthetic value.

A B-Nine application (Table 1) effectively optimizes plant form (Figure 2). Two points are especially important:

A. A surfactant must be added to the spray solution to assure coverage of the foliage with the chemical. In experimental studies 0.5% Triton B-1956 was used, that is 1 part of surfactant to 199 parts water.

B. B-Nine must be applied early enough in the production schedule so its effect ends before the inflorescences expand. The ideal stage for application is just as the leaves on the emerging sprout begin to unfold, about 6 days after planting at a 62-65 degree F night temperature or about 8 days after planting at a 50-55 degree F night temperature.

Finished Plant Packing, Marketing and Care. Little is known about post-harvest aspects of *D. spectabilis*. Like other potted crops, plants should be marketed with 1/2 to 3/4 of the florets open. The florets are quite fragile so success with long-distance transport seems unlikely. Minimal jostling, time in the sleeve, or dark storage maximize post-harvest life. Expected aesthetic life is 2-3 weeks after removal from the greenhouses, and this will be maximized in a brightly lit, cool location with the plants kept well-watered.

After flowering, the plants can be kept green in a bright, cool location. Since they have not been cold-hardened they should be planted to the garden only after the spring frost-free date has passed.

Other Species. Cold-treated *D. eximia* 'Luxuriant', 'Bountiful', etc. require about 6 weeks of forcing at 60 degree F night temperature according to the experience of

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some growers. They do not need growth retardant treatment. There has been no work on the species' cold requirement or culture to permit recommendation of a more definitive schedule.

Figure 2. Compactness is promoted by a 1250 ppm B-Nine spray (right); untreated plant is on left.

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