

# HOT TIPS FOR COOLING YOUR FALL PANSY CROP

Dick Bemis, The Vaughan's Seed Company

No other crop provides the color and show of fall-produced pansies in the landscape. Yet producing good pansies in the hot weather defies what Mother Nature programmed pansies to accept as "ideal growing conditions." To assure the retailer and consumer a quality product, you find yourself working closely with your crop to battle the effects of heat. Here are some tips we have gathered from growers who produce pansies in the hot August to October southern crop cycle:

(1) Order plugs...avoid the risky germination and stage one production steps; many growers believe you can buy 'em as cheaply as you can grow 'em! Transplanting plugs immediately will help insure the best results.

(2) Watering is the most critical management tool when growing pansies in hot weather, and watering correctly requires the development of a certain "touch." First, water flats to completely moisten the medium, but do not saturate the mix. Use a watering tunnel at the end of your transplanting line to insure UNIFORMITY of watering.

(3) Then follow the same watering regime throughout the growing-on stage -- frequent but not soaking waterings. It's important to let the soil dry out slightly between waterings, but don't let plants get too dry (that's the "touch" we discussed in step 2).

(4) Later in the growing-on stage, when the roots have left the plug root mass and have penetrated the medium, water more thoroughly, and allow more complete drying between waterings.

(5) Running your fans during the day makes common sense. Ever try running them all night? The slight differential in day and night temperatures can be exaggerated by moving the cooler night air through the house. This offers the pansies a slight "rest period" from daytime heat. Did you ever sleep under an attic fan at night? Then you get the idea!

Look on the bright side. Even though the pansy is hard to grow during the late summer production months, it's a strong market and one not available to our fellow growers in the north. At least not yet, anyway!

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