

Abraham 89



## VIEWPOINTS

*Sphagnum peatmoss is not perfect, but it's the best thing for the job. Use it without fear; it helps make America beautiful!*

**from the garden center**

### JUST THE FACTS MA'AM

**By Doc and Katy Abraham  
Garden Center Operators**

*Doc & Katy, both college trained, not only have the technical background, but also speak from first hand experience. They owned and operated a commercial greenhouse and retail nursery & landscape business for over a quarter of a century. In addition to writing for 125 newspapers, Doc & Katy have been on radio for 35 years, have authored several books on horticulture and have their own TV program over WOKR, Channel 13, an ABC affiliate in Rochester, NY.*

Recently, trade journals have carried articles warning of the danger of peatmoss. The articles mention the disease Sporotrichosis, caused by the fungus *Sporothrix schenckii* - the name itself is enough to scare you. Customers and garden center clerks have asked us to clarify the "peat problem." After talking with six bedding plant growers and five doctors, we'll try to answer questions that are bothering people who use peatmoss.

First, all the people interviewed never heard of the problem, including doctors. The authors of the technical article failed to point out that the real villain is the moss called Sphagnum moss, the soft stringy mossy plant harvested before it has decomposed to form dry peat. We used to use bales of it to make a base for floral sprays in our retail business, long before "oasis" and other "foam" products came out. Last year an "outbreak" among workers in the floral and nursery industry caused alarm. It was found that packers who wrapped evergreens in the sphagnum moss often contracted the disease, because their skin was punctured by sharp needles of evergreen seedlings. The workers handled blue spruce and other

needed evergreens as part of an Arbor Day reforestation program.

#### Don't Be Fearful

No one should be fearful of handling sphagnum peat moss, because it's so dry there's little possibility of contracting the disease. Sporotrichosis is an extremely rare disease, so rare that nine out of ten doctors never heard of it. Sphagnum peat moss is that brown, dried material plant growers use in the "peatlite" or artificial soil mixes. In a nutshell, the villain which caused the disease in the outbreak is the soft stringy sphagnum used to pack evergreen seedlings, not the broken down sphagnum peatmoss.

We're not living in a sterile world. A gardener's compost pile is teeming with billions of spores of *Sporothrix schenckii*. And that BTL sandwich you ate for lunch yesterday probably had a good dose of the spores. The disease is universal. You can even find the spores on moist timbers deep in gold mines of South Africa. Even refrigerated meat and hundreds of types of plants sold by florists and grown by gardeners have the spores. If you work with roses and other sharp plants, wear gloves. Anyone working with moss, evergreen seedlings, roses or even a hay mulch should be alert

for blisters, nodules, or skin lesions that fail to heal.

Sphagnum peatmoss is not perfect, but it's the best thing for the job. Use it without fear, and be sure to thank the Creator for giving us such a wonderful, natural medium. It helps make America beautiful. (See related article, page 72.)

#### Reel Mowers

Would you believe that reel mowers are coming back in style? Right after World War II, rotary power mowers debuted, and we all said good riddance to hard-pushing reel type mowers. Now, as home owners are squeezed into smaller lots, the need for a rotary mower decreases with the size of a lawn. People with a postage-stamp lawn really don't need a rotary power mower that uses gas and oil and makes a lot of noise. We still like a rotary mower, because in July when the rattlesnake plantain sends up a wiry seed stalk, the rotary clips it off easier and neater than the reel mower. You probably would be smart to handle both types of mowers for customers with large lawns and small ones.

#### White Fly

White fly ("flying dandruff") can be a real pest in the greenhouse in July (or any other month). Pesticides aren't effective in coping with the insect. If your customers have small greenhouses, tell them to take a tip from western strawberry growers and use a vacuum sweeper for fighting them. Go over the leaves, holding the nozzle on the undersides, and you can suck up the flies by the thousands. Obviously you can't do this in a big greenhouse, but it works great in a small greenhouse or in a home. Many companies put out yellow stickers which attract the flies by the hundreds.

#### Nursery Business RETAILER Clinic:

"We raised a lot of everlastings and want to know how to microwave them for drying. How long?"

Answer: Microwave drying is very fast and keeps many flowers looking almost fresh. Timing varies - carnations need about a minute heating and about 10 minutes cooling. Dahlias need up to 7 minutes of heating and 36 minutes cooling. □

