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MINI POTS COLORADO STATE UNIVERSITY STYLE¹

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This is the first of a series of articles on the evaluations of mini flowering pot plants.

The floriculture industry has been too conservative in its growing and marketing activities. Its major research efforts have been aimed primarily at improving the quality of existing offerings, rather than developing new products and methods of marketing. In the marketing oriented environment of the 1970's, if industries are to compete and/or exist, they must constantly search for new products and services to meet the ever changing interests of the customer. One such change, among consumers, seems to be the desire for smaller sized flowering pot plants. Thus far, the floral industry has not effectively responded to this new interest, primarily because of an uncertainty as to its profitability and the lack of educational programs to expand its horizons.

The foliage plant "boom" of the mid 1970's has had some impact on the sale of smaller plants. One florist found that 60% of his foliage plant sales were in 2½" to 4" pots (Adamo, 1978). The customers either wanted to watch the plants grow or didn't want to pay the price for a larger one.

Vic Ball (June 1973) described a 4-inch pot mum program developed by Jim Peters of Peoria, Illinois. He grew 10,000 pinched plants in four-inch square pots for the 1973 Easter and sold out. He also sold out for Mother's Day.

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In spite of these and other individual successes, the floriculture industry, especially the florist, has never really become enthused about smaller flowering pot plants.

A program was initiated by Colorado State University in 1973 to evaluate the growth responses of some flowering plant materials commonly used in the floriculture industry in four inch "mini" pots. Consumer responses to mini flowering pot plants were also observed.

The program involved two principles familiar to a grower, but never combined: (1) The "ole time" growers obtained large sized flowering pot plants by shifting them from small pots to the next size larger pot, keeping them vegetative until the desired sized plant was achieved. (2) On the other hand, the bedding plant industry has learned that many plant materials will flower earlier if the root systems are confined to a small volume of growing media. By reversing the "shifting" procedures and incorporating the "bedding plant principle", a program for flowering mini pots in a minimum time, has been accomplished.

STPS System

The term STP is most familiar as an oil additive, but in the CSU mini pot program, the STPS System of production means:

- S = Seeding
- T = Transplanting
- P = Potting
- S = Salable

More than 13 species of flowering pot plants have been evaluated for the mini pot program using the STPS

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production system. The system begins with accepted methods of seeding (S) and seed germination. Seedlings are transplanted (T) into cell packs and grown like bedding plants. When the foliage covers the packs and just before the plants start stretching, they are potted (P) in 4-inch azalea pots. Production space and costs are prorated for each period of time after seeding (S), transplanting (T) and potting (P). Pots are spaced four per square foot on the bench until the time of sale (S). The key to the program is the number of weeks the plants require bench space in four-inch pots, which depends on the time of year and plant species. This period can range from 3.1 to 9.3 weeks. An average time for seed crops in the evaluations, was approximately 7 weeks. Seed grown plant species or varieties requiring more than 12 weeks from "pot" to "sale" during the winter months were dropped from the program. Plants grown in summer months when spacing was not at a premium, were allowed to grow on for an "extended time".