

Florida Flower Grower

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POINSETTIA PRODUCTION: PART I by CHARLES A. CONOVER

Florida production of potted poinsettias for Christmas sales has increased considerably in recent years. Production in northern and central areas is under glass or plastic, while in southern areas it may be outdoors in full sun or under light shade. However, cultural methods are nearly similar throughout the state.

STOCK PLANTS:

Careful consideration must be given to cultural practices such as container size, soil mixture, spacing, fertilization, watering and pinching to obtain the maximum number of cuttings from poinsettia stock plants.

Best cutting production in Florida is obtained when stock plants are planted outside in full sun, either in large containers or directly in the ground. Stock plants grown in full sun produce heavier cuttings with shorter internodes than shade grown plants. Production under 20% saran shade is also satisfactory if the fertilization program is reduced to $\frac{3}{4}$ of that listed for open field production.

If containers are used they must be large enough to hold sufficient soil so that root growth will not be restricted. Five gallon containers are most satisfactory, but 3 gallon containers may be used although some reduction in cutting production may occur. In any case, adequate drainage must be supplied no matter what type container is used.

Soil mixtures for container-grown stock plants should provide good aeration, water-holding capacity and fertilizer retention. A mixture of $\frac{1}{2}$ peat moss and $\frac{1}{2}$ sand by volume has proved satisfactory. When stock is to be grown in the field, native sands should be amended with peat moss at a rate of 1 bale per 200 square feet and rototilled to a depth of 6 to 8 inches. Soil for container or field-grown stock must be sterilized, preferably with steam (180 degrees for 30 minutes), or methyl bromide at a rate of 1 pound per 100 square feet. Soil pH should be adjusted to 5.5 to 6.0.

Both field and container-grown plants should be spaced so 6 inches to one foot is maintained between outer leaves when plants are producing cuttings (generally field-grown plants are spaced 3 feet on center and container-grown $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet on center).

COOPERATIVE EXTENSION WORK IN AGRICULTURE AND HOME ECONOMICS
(Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914)

Agricultural Extension Service, University of Florida,
Florida State University and United States Department of Agriculture, Cooperating

M. O. Watkins, Director

By allowing plants adequate space they will receive sufficient light for best cutting production.

Temperature and relative humidity are not usually controlled for poinsettia stock in Florida. When dormant stock is received from producers in late April, it can be planted outside without danger of frost. Growth may be slow at first, but this deficiency is corrected as temperatures rise.

Stock should be fertilized weekly or biweekly to maintain a high fertility level and obtain maximum cutting production. Fertilize stock plants weekly with 25-10-10 or 20-20-20 at a rate of $\frac{1}{3}$ ounce per 2 gallons of water and apply to 8 square feet or use $1\frac{1}{2}$ pounds per 100 gallons of water and apply to 400 square feet. When fertilizing biweekly instead of weekly use double the weekly rate ($\frac{2}{3}$ ounce per 2 gallons of water or 3 pounds per 100 gallons). This program applies to either container or field-grown stock.

Sufficient water should be applied to container and field-grown stock so that it is never a limiting factor. When watering stock, sufficient water should be applied to thoroughly moisten soil and also allow for some drainage. This practice will help prevent a build-up of excess soluble salts.

Research has shown that in Florida the best finished poinsettias come from cuttings taken in September and October. Under Florida conditions the cost of producing finished plants from cuttings taken in June and July is greater than cost of additional stock plants to supply the desired number of cuttings in two lots in September and October. Stock must be soft pinched throughout the growing period before cuttings are harvested so a maximum number of cuttings will be obtained from each plant. Therefore, soft pinching should be practiced from the time stock plants start producing cuttings sized material until five weeks before first cuttings are desired. This practice will build up stock plants so a maximum number of cuttings will be obtained.

SUGGESTED LAST PINCH DATE AND CUTTING DATES IN FLORIDA:

1. Last soft pinch should be made between July 25 - 30.
2. Take first group of cuttings between September 1 - 5.
3. Take second group of cuttings between October 5 - 8 (Stock plants should be lighted after September 10 to prevent early initiation of flowering buds).

When lighting stock plants a minimum of 10 foot candles of light should be supplied for two hours during the middle of the night.