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Tips of the Trade

by ALLAN ARMITAGE



Postproduction Care of Bedding Plants

Editor's Note: The following is an excerpt from Dr. Armitage's book, "Seed Propagated Geraniums" that is available from Timber Press Growers Handbook series. To obtain copies, contact Timber Press, 9999 SW Wilshire, Portland, OR 97225.

ALTHOUGH bedding plants may spend up to 16 weeks in the greenhouse, it is the period in the retail outlet that dictates whether the plants do or do not sell. All too often those 16 weeks of tender loving care are wasted due to poor maintenance

of the plants in the sales area. Despite the many differences in retail operations and in the people who sell the plants, the following are some rules that must be adhered to if plants are to be maintained in top selling condition:

- Keep the retail sales area neat. It only takes a few poor looking plants to make the whole area appear shoddy.
- Shade all bedding plants from the sun. Both sun-tolerant plants such as geraniums or petunias, or shade-tolerant plants such as be-

gonias and impatiens must be shaded to slow down deterioration. Approximately 60%-80% shade is best for most plants, with 50% the minimum.

Ventilate to reduce temperatures and the buildup of pollutants. When displaying outdoors, keep plants

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from hugging large obstructions such as buildings. When buildings shade facilities, be sure that adequate ventilation is provided. If displaying in a greenhouse, turn on fans for plants and people. There is no air circulation when plants are packed in tiers or crushed together. This may save space, but the plants deteriorate rapidly.

Raise plants off the ground whenever possible. All too often, plants on the pavement, sidewalk, or in the greenhouse sit in a small puddle of water. If the day is hot, the plants are "baked." Air and water movement are greatly increased when plants are displayed on a raised bench.

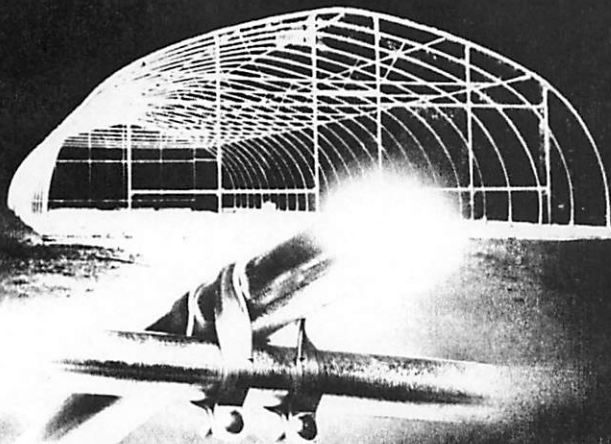
Growers can also markedly influence postproduction life by carefully choosing the proper container size, a growing medium that has proper water-holding properties, restricting fertilizer and water, and by lowering night temperature prior to shipping. All of these practices contribute to the longevity of the plants once they leave the greenhouse. These and other ways growers can help make plants last longer are detailed in Table 1. **GG**

Table 1: Production procedures to increase shelf life.

State of Growth	Procedure	Significant (S) or Minor (M) Benefit or Variable (?)	Comment
At transplant	Wetting agent	M	Plants do not require water as often so dry out less readily
At transplant	Use as large a container as possible	S	Plants dry out less readily thus less water stress
Young plants	Use growth regulators where applicable	M-S	Reduce leaf area thus reduce water loss in sales area
Finishing (final 1-2 wks)	Reduce water frequency over the last few weeks	S	Acclimates plants for impending water stress
	Reduce fertilizer frequency and/or concentration	S	Excess nutrients in soil will cause plants stretch as well as a potential salt problem
	Lower greenhouse temperature prior to shipping	S	Helps plants harden off and cope with stress better
	Use anti-transpirants prior to shipping	M(?)	If plants are under minor stress (i.e. warm temp.) may be helpful. If plants under high stress, of little use.

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