

SUNSHINE IMPATIENS

Adam Henning Henning's Greenhouse, DeMotte, IN

In starting any crop, it is important that you have good, clean stock. Variety selection is also critical. I have grown varieties that have done very well in 4 1/2" pots, but do poorly in hanging baskets. Therefore you should choose varieties that are suited for your needs (ie: bedding plants, 4", 6" or 8" pots or hanging baskets). Many of the new varieties will perform well in one container size, but poorly in another. Breeding has come a long way and is changing quickly. It is a good idea to talk to your salesman or ask the breeder about variety selection that is best suited to your market needs. Some of the varieties that I have had success with in 4 1/2" pots are listed in Table 1.

Propagation

Know your propagator. Make sure they test their stock for viruses and keep it free of insects. Sunshine impatiens are susceptible to Tomato spotted wilt virus (TSWV) that is spread by thrips and

other viruses which can be detrimental to the success of the crop. If you propagate your own cuttings, you should buy in stock that has been virus indexed. Never hold stock over from one year to the next because of the risk of TSWV.

Planting and Temperatures

Our crop is planted in mid-March. We use a soil-based potting mix which contains about 10 to 15% soil, with the other ingredients being 25% Sunshine mix #1, 25% peat moss, 25% perlite and the remaining 10 to 15% being torpedo sand. The night temperatures are kept at 70 to 72°F. I like to keep the temperature up until the plants are well rooted in the pot. This usually takes 10 to 14 days. At this point, the night temperature is lowered to 67 to 68°F. Avoid letting temperatures drop below 65°F, because growth will slow. In fact, growth will stop at temperatures under 60°F and the foliage will curl and turn a dull red, all leading to decreased crop quality.

Insects

Insects are seldom a problem for us because of our production schedule. We shut down all of our greenhouses for two months after we ship poinsettias. The greenhouses are cleaned and disinfected. This limits any possible insect carryover when we open for the spring. Still to be safe, the crop is monitored with sticky traps for thrips. As an additional safety precaution, we segregate the sunshine impatiens in a separate greenhouse and try not to put any other plants in there. This way any possible disease problems (ie: TSWV) are isolated in one greenhouse.

Fertilizers

We do not feed the plants until they are well rooted (ie: when I can see roots at the edge of the pot), which takes around 10 to 14 days. Fertilizer (20-10-20) is then applied at every irrigation at the rate of 200 ppm N. I try to water only when the plant needs it. I let the pot dry out, but do not let the plant wilt (it is especially important not to let the plant wilt when you have high soluble salt levels). Agribrom is used in the beginning to help prevent

algae and root rot problems. Once the crop is established and growing well, we stop using Agribrom. I inspect the root system for root rots every time I water and only apply a fungicide if a problem is starting. Soil samples are taken midway through the crop, or when a problem is suspected.

Finishing

The crop is constantly being pushed to maximize growth. The newer varieties branch very easily and have good growing habits. Therefore, no pinching or growth regulators are used. We finish our 4 1/2" pots in approximately 7 weeks. A 50% shade cloth is put on towards the end of the season when the outside temperatures start getting hot and sunny. The exact timing depends on Mother Nature. Before shipping it is a good idea to acclimate the crop by lowering the night temperature and exposing then to some full sun.

We are currently raising 7,000 - 4 1/2" pots. Most of them are sold wholesale to garden centers in Northwest Indiana. The price for the spring 1992 will be \$1.35 per pot.