

FIRST CLASS NEWS FLASH



June 2006

It's Poinsettia time – Part 2!

June is the time Poinsettias start to dominate our minds. Growers rooting Poinsettias are receiving their unrooted cuttings, and others are expecting their liners soon. "Are Poinsettias an easy crop?" Yes, they can be, as long as everything works out as planned and if we adapt quickly if the weather does not play along, cuttings are delayed, or some other minor problems come up. Because the margin is very small and every change may affect our bottom line, I want to point out a couple of common-sense thoughts and experiences to ensure that your Poinsettia crop makes that bottom line a success.

Poinsettias react very differently from area to area, variety to variety, and crop to crop. What may have worked one year does not necessarily work the next. To my interns I like to say, "You must *feel* what is going on in your Poinsettia crop." A successful Poinsettia crop depends so much on the environment it is cultivated in, and that is something a grower should feel. It's as if the plants are communicating with the grower. I like to say, "Talk to your plants at least once a day." ☺

This News Flash focuses on Poinsettia propagation, pinching, and the vegetative period (the weeks after planting). This is one of the most critical times for a successful Poinsettia crop.

Poinsettia propagation

Propagation always starts with sanitation. Starting clean and keeping it clean will avoid most headaches with your Poinsettia crop. Most pests and diseases in Poinsettias can be avoided with climate control and by keeping the area weed-free. Scouting and early detection is crucial for a good result.



A couple of hours after sticking.



After the first night, cuttings are turgid.

Be ready for your cuttings; everything should be in place so they can be planted right away. The climate in the propagation area should be set at least the day before the cuttings arrive so the perfect climate can be established. Get your cuttings out of the box and stick them. If a cooler is available use the cooler, if not place the open bags on table and start misting.

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The media should be saturated with water so no watering is needed right after planting. I like to water them after the first couple of days, as callus develops better with air around the base, but roots like the contact with the media. If possible, stick cuttings right away in the propagation area. If this is not possible, avoid stress during sticking and move plants as soon as possible into the right propagation climate.

Mist the cuttings from the beginning, but keep in mind that at the same time water is your best friend and your worst enemy. Water quality is very important, as poor quality (especially high salt levels) can damage the cuttings. Use a fine mist and avoid over-misting. Short intervals with little mist are the key, as best results are generated if no drops on the foliage are formed and run-off water is avoided (as it will leach out nutrients and damage the new foliage forming). Wetting agents can improve the misting result significantly. The first night and the next three days (first weekend) will decide about success or failure of the crop, and the climate is the key to success. After the first night in propagation, cuttings should be turgent, and after the first weekend they should be “standing” like soldiers.



Excessive misting leaches out nutrients.



Damage from high salt levels and over-misting.

Start with low light conditions; avoid airflow at plant level (but keep air moving slightly) and create a humid and warm (very warm but not hot) microclimate. When entering a Poinsettia propagation during the first weekend (and throughout the first week), you should start to perspire after a couple of minutes. Create a humid but still somewhat active climate.

After the first weekend, start to increase slowly the stress level to push Poinsettias to root. This is done by decreasing mist, lowering the heat, and slowly increasing light levels. After the first 7 days, callus should form, and after about 10 days, the first white root tips should come out of the callus. If the callus is getting bigger and bigger and no roots form, it is an indication that the stress level is too low; if callus turns brown, the stress level is too high (too hot, over-saturated media).

After the first 10 days, cuttings should start to develop. The perfect moment to mist is when cuttings start to dry off and wilt very slightly (foliage-edges start to roll up). There is no perfect recipe for telling time and intervals, as this depends on plants and climate. Check cuttings on a regular basis and adjust the mist intervals (it can be partly automated by using a combination of light-accumulation and time control).

Start feeding as soon as callus forms, or at the latest, when first roots develop. Use low salt levels (EC between 1 and 1.2) and feed with every watering, using a balanced Cal-Mag based mix like 14-2-14 plus micronutrients. Best if fertilizer solution is washed off after feeding by using pure water. Fertilize early in

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the morning to avoid sunlight damage.



URC (week 2) start to wilt – time to mist.



Week 3 of propagation.

Growth control should start the moment new foliage forms (depending on varieties and the URC, this can be as early as 10 days after planting). A CCC / B-Nine tank mix works the best; concentration depends on the area and varieties. Sprays can be applied even if plants are still under mist. Apply late evening or early morning when mist is turned off and replace a mist cycle with the spray. The same rule applies for fungicide applications. Use preventive fungicide applications to avoid problems like Botrytis, Rhizopus, Pythium, and Rhizoctonia.

Week 3 of propagation is the time to start hardening off cuttings for shipping or planting. Hardening off Poinsettias by no means comes close to hardening off spring plants. Poinsettias must be kept growing, since hard plants won't branch well and will need a long time to get going. In Poinsettia terms, hardening off means to get them away from mist and prepare them for a more active climate (more air flow, slightly lower temperatures, less humidity, and higher light levels). Remember the climate Poinsettias need after planting and for the pinching period; that is what they should get used to.



RC ready to ship/plant (week 4).



Compact RC with healthy eyes for branching.

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Planting

Make sure the cuttings are well watered before planting (especially if in Oasis). Avoid squeezing of the roots and plant base when planting and don't plant too deep. It is best if the plug is planted at soil level so the stem base stays above the media (as it was in the liner). Water plants after planting and establish a contact between the liner and pot media. Keep Oasis wet the first couple of days until new roots have established in the media. Avoid high light levels, airflow at the plant level, and cool temperatures the first couple of days until the first new roots have developed and plants start to grow (check night temperatures and heat if necessary!).

The first couple of days and weeks after planting are very crucial for a successful Poinsettia crop. Some of you receive the rooted liner in Oasis or root in it. As good as it is in propagation, it can be difficult after planting. Water the Oasis liner before planting and make sure it is well saturated. Plant in moistened substrate, water after planting, and make sure to get the area around the Oasis to close air holes.



Avoid high light levels and keep a humid climate during the first couple of days. This will reduce the stress on the plants and more importantly, keep the Oasis wet longer. You need to balance between pushing roots and avoiding dry plants, but a little stress will be very helpful with forcing roots into the new media.

The picture to the left was taken four days after planting. The second day after planting we watered the Oasis slightly, and on day number five we watered thoroughly for the first time (using a very low concentration of fertilizer).

As soon as the roots reach the pot edges (you will see that when removing the pot) you can start to water on a regular basis, increasing fertilizer levels as the plants grow. About 10 to 14 days after planting, you can pinch (for best results, roots should be visible when removing the pot).



One question is whether to place them pot-tight in the beginning or on final spacing right away. I like to take an approach in the middle. Leave two-finger-wide spaces between the 6" pots to create the needed microclimate for the plants. This will improve branching and plant development. It also gives you more time until the final spacing is needed. Normally you can wait well until the branches have developed, and spacing strong plants will not cause a climate shock. Just keep in mind, just before the canopy closes the space between the plants, you must space to avoid stretch.

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Creating a good Poinsettia microclimate will help you to get best branching results and ensure those small side shoots (picture on the right) will develop well after pinching.



Pinch after about 10-14 days and when roots have formed. Roots should be visible when taking the plants out of the pot. This moment will be reached about one week earlier if directly stuck into the end pot. In general, pinch after 5-7 visible leaves/eyes for best branching results. Pinch a part of about 1 inch off the plant (this is considered a medium to hard pinch) for best results. A too hard or too soft pinch may result in poor branching.

Branching is very much influenced by the stock. Heat stress on the stock (that is where the eyes are formed) will lead to underdeveloped or dead eyes, and if this is the case, no chemical will help. Even numerous Florel applications won't help, as dead eyes will not grow again. Underdeveloped ones may start to grow but will stay behind. If eyes look funny, pinch later, as new eyes will develop in propagation and in the first days after planting (stress in propagation or during planting may influence branching negatively). However, when pinching higher you will get a more unstable plant – best if non-heat sensitive varieties are used. Newer genetics branch very well and are not as sensitive to heat and stress. A PGR application about one week after pinching will generate a more even growth as the top and more dominant branches are slowed down. This will give the lower branches the chance to catch up. Use a CCC for that and spray only slightly.

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Compact cuttings (as shown on page 3) will result in better quality at the end. Stretched cuttings require a high pinch that will lead to unstable plants and a stretched look.

Keep lower light levels and warmer temperatures (avoid too much air-flow) the first couple of weeks (minimum night 67-68 F, and day 70-72 F, open vents starting at 76 F). The minimum average day temperature should be above 70 F. When side shoots have developed, start to increase the light levels and lower the temperatures; this is the time to create a more active climate. Use PGR's or negative diff to avoid stretch. CCC / B-Nine tank mixes or Bonzi work well on Poinsettias. I like the CCC / B-Nine tank mix and multiple applications, as it is easier to react to certain conditions. The concentrations depend very much on the area and the climate.

The goal is to have a well-branched, well-fed, and nicely developed plant (sturdy branches and no stretch) with a strong root system before entering the short-day period. The correct spacing is an important part of it. If you space too early, you may slow down growth and increase lateral branch development. Should you space too late, you will have stretched plants with naked lower parts and a weak base. Plant your crop early enough to have time to develop a good plant; it is tough to make up for errors after the short day has started. The post-harvest performance is strongly influenced by the condition of the plant the time short day starts.

More information concerning Poinsettia propagation can be found on our website <http://firstclassplants.com> or call 800-955 5644.

Don't miss out!

The May News Flash featured a Poinsettia stock update and cuttings specs. For the 2006 season Selecta planted extra stock to ensure on-time delivery and excellent quality cuttings. Stock looks great, and the additional stock delivers extra cuttings.

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Merry Christmas (Vancouver, B.C.)



**Christmas Feelings
(Westcan Trial, Vancouver, B.C.)**



Christmas Feelings Series (UOF Trial, FL)

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