

Making \$ Growing Poinsettias

The constantly increasing fuel costs are putting a lot of pressure on our cost calculations, especially affecting Poinsettias. We need to find ways to increase productivity per square foot and reduce input costs (especially for heating but also for labor) at the same time. Early this spring many growers expected fuel costs to rise, but what we have seen the last three months topped our worst fears. A trend towards growing energy- and space-efficient varieties has become a necessity.

Selecta offers you a wide range of energy- and space-efficient Poinsettia varieties that are low maintenance and have little shrink (if any at all).

The June News Flash will focus on how to grow energy- and space-efficient Poinsettia varieties.

Sit back, relax, and enjoy the June issue of the Selecta News Flash.

Sincerely yours,
Stefan Reiner



Variety of the Month

MiniFamous™ Double Yellow looks great after one week of unusual heat, including hot nights. I took the image 06/24 on our trial field in Encinitas, the first cooler day in over a week. Flowers are about the same size as in spring, and the plant still has its mounded habit.

Growing an Energy- and Space-Efficient Poinsettia Crop

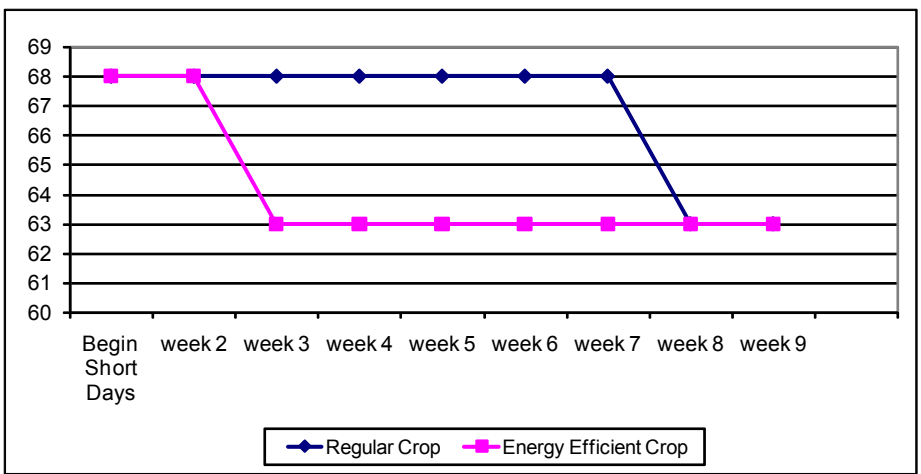


A successful Energy- and Space-Efficient Poinsettia crop starts with the correct planning, quality young plant material (rooted or unrooted), perfect planting conditions, and proper pinching. A critical time is the vegetative crop period from planting until the beginning of short days (about two weeks into short days). This is the time a strong plant with proper height and a healthy root system needs to be built. Once you reach week 3 of the short day (or generative) crop period, it is all about finishing and saving. If you short-cut the vegetative crop period, cost savings are more difficult to achieve. The general growing practices vary slightly between a regular and a cool crop using energy-efficient varieties like Christmas Feelings, Christmas Eve, Christmas Carol, and SK 62 (2008 trial variety). The following recommendations will focus on the Christmas Feelings series and those differences (but can be applied to the above-listed varieties as well).

Planning

The Christmas Feelings series is a low vigor series and requires more time to grow before entering short days. In addition they don't grow much after the beginning of short days and don't stretch toward the end of the crop. Those are all good things but need to be considered during the planning process. Plant varieties in the Christmas Feelings™ series two weeks earlier compared to more vigorous varieties. The extra two weeks are necessary to ensure height and overall plant quality.

The **chart** to the right compares the temperature curve between a traditional and an energy-efficient Christmas Feelings crop. Starting in week three after the beginning of short days, temperatures are much lower, reducing heating costs. The crop will be delayed by about one week, but the overall quality and shelf-life will be improved. It's also the period heating is most expensive. By growing energy- and space-efficient varieties like Christmas Feelings, Christmas Eve, Christmas Carol, and SK 62, you not only reduce heating costs but also grow more plants per square foot, reducing your cost per plant even further. They are low maintenance with little or no shrink, helping to maximize cost efficiency. It is the cost per plant that counts and not per square feet/meter. Looking at it this way will eliminate many energy-efficient varieties because of their high space requirements, shrink, and higher maintenance.



Vegetative Period

Don't try to reduce costs during the wrong time. Energy-efficient varieties like Christmas Feelings are not intended to be grown cool from planting on. During the first weeks, until the beginning of short days, you need to keep the temperature up. Night temperatures are especially important, as heating may be necessary during cold nights in August and September. Recommended temperatures during the vegetative growing period are 68°-73° F day / 68° F night. Depending on the location of your greenhouse and the general condition, cool-morning drops can be applied to control growth. Drop temperature by 8°-10° F two hours before sunrise until about two to three hours after sunrise. Keep the average temperature in mind to avoid stunting, and watch for the dew point. Don't use cool morning if side shoots look uneven. Keep the temperature up in the morning until the plants even out. When humidity is a problem, Negative DIF with 68° night and 65° F day has proven to be the better choice. Additional PGR treatments may become necessary, but remember that varieties in the Christmas Feelings series are low-vigor varieties. General good growing practices should be applied to reach a strong plant quality when entering the generative crop period.



Generative Period

This is the time to reduce costs by turning down the heat. About two to three weeks into short days (depending on the crop and location of your greenhouse) slowly lower the temperatures to the recommended minimum temperatures for the energy-efficient variety you grow. For example, Christmas Feelings™ can be finished with 66°-73° F day / 62° F night. You can continue to use cool-morning drops or negative DIF for height control until the end of week 4 of short days, just keep in mind that Christmas Feelings™, for example, needs a minimum average day temperature of 63° F. Keep in mind also that with such temperatures the plant won't grow much anymore, and that explains why the



vegetative crop period is so important. You need to enter the final phase with strong, healthy, and good-sized plants. Heating is not expensive during summer and early fall but will become more expensive starting mid October, so build the plant when it's cost effective and save when it's not.

Remember

To secure quality and cost savings, you will need to watch a couple of important points during the low temperature finishing phase. In general, a cooler grown crop will finish a couple days later, will have smaller bracts, and darker colors (whites may turn cream-yellow). If you grow the crop cooler as recommended, the crop might be further delayed and bracts underdeveloped. However, Christmas Feelings gives you the option to balance cooler night temperatures with higher day temperatures. So if you have a nice bright fall and are able to keep the day temperature up, you can further lower the night temperature without delaying the crop. Just keep the needed minimum average day temperature in mind and don't undercut it.

Keep the humidity in mind as well, and if possible, stay below 75%. Keep air circulating! Regular air exchange will help you to avoid botrytis and powdery mildew problems. Space plants accordingly to help keep humidity lower. Avoid dropping the temperature below the dew-point (especially in humid areas)!

Use the correct light levels whenever nature provides it. Especially in Northern Areas, wash the roof if necessary. In Southern Areas shading may be necessary. Recommended light levels are 3,500-4,500 foot-candles from a week after pinching until mid-October, 3,000 foot-candles until two weeks before shipping, and 2,000-2,500 foot-candles for the last two weeks. Observe light level recommendations for propagation, planting, pinching, and spacing, as those are periods where Poinsettias require less light!

When planning on growing an energy-efficient crop, avoid mixing energy-efficient varieties with regular varieties. You can grow energy-efficient varieties warmer, but it won't work the other way around. Know your varieties and consider all aspects during the planning process.

Selecta varieties that work great for an energy- and space-efficient Poinsettia crop include:

- **Christmas Carol** series is the earliest we offer. Use it for pots sizes up to 6.5-inch.
- **Christmas Eve** finishes about 3 to 5 days after Christmas Carol and is considered an early mid-season variety. It can be used for a variety of pot sizes and plant forms. It is a very sturdy plant.
- **Christmas Angel** series finishes about the same time as Christmas Eve. It has a medium-high vigor, sturdy stems, and a perfect V-shaped habit. Because of its higher vigor use it for 6-inch an larger pots. It makes great 8-10-inch plants.
- **Christmas Feelings** series is our mid-season top seller. Available in a wide variety of colors, it works best in pot sizes up to 6.5-inch.
- **SK 62 (2008 trial variety)** is a new variety for 2009 but available for trials in 2008. It finishes about the same time as Christmas Feelings but has a slightly higher vigor and sturdier stems. Therefore it can be used for a variety of pot sizes and plant forms.
- **Merry White (2008 trial variety)** is a new variety for 2009 as well but you can test it already in 2008. If you are painting you may want to test Merry White together with its sister variety Merry Christmas (candy color). Both have a medium vigor, an early mid-season finish, a perfectly round plant form, and showy bracts. They can be used for a variety of pot sizes and plant forms and look stunning painted. However due to their larger bracts and round habit they require more space compared to the previously listed varieties.

Images to the right from top to bottom show Christmas Carol, Christmas Eve, Christmas Angel, and Christmas Feelings.

Selecta offers a wide range of energy- and space- efficient varieties suitable for all needs and all areas.



Dollars and Cents (Sense)



MiniFamous™ Compact Safran is our top-selling variety in the compact series = mounding habit, early flowering, low-medium vigor.



FlowerPower™ Compact Purple Blue is easy to grow and bench-run for better profits = upright habit, flowering without cold treatment, low vigor.

Selecta News

July 12-14, **booth # 1821** at the 2008 OFA show in Columbus, Ohio we will lift the secret about the all new MiniFamous™ Club.

Make sure to visit our booth and spend enough time to check out our all new TrixiLiner™ program, our brand new point of purchase kits for MiniFamous™ Calibrachoa and Bonfire®/Bellfire® Begonia, and find out all about the new MiniFamous™ Club.

Make sure to ask us how to qualify for our grand prize for the best MiniFamous™ mixed basket recipe / MiniFamous™ quality in 2009.

Our team of experts is awaiting you. Angela Storm, Mike Cade, Frank Magnusson, Nils Klemm, and I (Stefan Reiner) will answer any questions you might have about the upcoming season.

I mentioned before that the costs per plant are important and the calculation can't stop at the square foot/meter. A good example is the comparison mentioned in the 2008 Poinsettia catalog of one of our competitors. Their variety was, according to their presentation, the one with the lowest heating cost per square meter, which I am sure is correct. The variety in question may give you 9 plants per square meter, but by using Christmas Eve, for example, you are up to 12 plants. This is already a cost reduction of 1/3 per plant. In addition, the variety listed in this example is known for its higher maintenance and shrinkage, adding additional costs to it. So at first it might look great, but what counts is the bottom line or in other words, costs per plant at the end. It is a combination of factors like energy- **and** space-efficiency with low maintenance **and** low shrinkage bringing the best results and the most \$.

Keep that in mind when looking at the upcoming 2008/09 season. What is true for Poinsettias is also true for spring annuals like Geraniums, Calibrachoa, Osteospermum, and many more. The more great quality plants you can produce on a square foot/meter (and ship on a cart!), the better your result will be. If you can bench-run your crop, you will further reduce costs and be able to turn more crops on the same floor space. Varieties branching freely with an easy-to-control vigor will help keep costs under control (less labor and fewer chemicals needed). It might be just a couple cents per plant, but it adds up at the end.

Look at Selecta for true grower varieties with proven consumer performance. It's the combination and not one feature on its own resulting in the most \$ for you.



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