

Growing Quality *Cyclamen*®

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Cyclamen are becoming more and more a major crop for the holidays, especially Christmas, they could be considered the alternative to poinsettias. The uses for cyclamen include interiorscapes (although for a short time), in containers as the main focal point with other mixed annuals and perennials, and outdoor landscape areas. Cyclamen can take relative cool nights (38°F) and warm days (75-80°F), partial shade with some direct sunlight.

The propagation of cyclamen is not complicated, just time consuming. Normal germination time is between 6-8 weeks for emergence, then another 4-6 weeks before they can be handled. Germination percentage is quite variable and can range from 40 to +80%. There are two approaches when germinating seed:

- 1) Sow into a standard flat, prick-out the seedlings and put them into plug trays and grow on to final transplantable size.
- 2) Sow directly into plug trays and repair the plugs trays to create uniformity within the trays. Either way, be prepared to give time to allow the cyclamen seedlings to reestablish completely before final transplant to a container (usually 6-10 weeks).

Transplanting to final containers should be done when the plugs are fully rooted. The soil preferred is a peat-lite mix with a pH of 6.0 to 6.5. The mix must have good drainage. Day temperatures should not exceed 90°F for an extended period of time; night temperatures should be in the mid to high 50s. Light levels should be between 3000-4000 ft-c which will keep the plants tight and compact; whereas, lower light levels will create a softer, more lush growing plant (not desirable). If the foliage starts to bronze a bit, give the greenhouse a little more shade in 500 ft-c increments. A preventative fungicide drench after planting should be done to cover the major diseases (*Pythium*, *Rhizoctonia*, and *Phytophthora*).

Spacing involves costs that are directly associated with what your customers demand, the look of the final product, and your final sell price. Normal spacing for 4-in. pots is 6-8 in. on centers; 6-in. pots are 12-15 in. on center. Tight spacing's produces "sidewalls" which is not conducive to a quality product unless you are going to use a pot wrap that will hide the sidewall. Fertilize after the 4th week in the container with 250 ppm nitrogen for the next 5 weeks; watch your pH! After the 5 weeks of fertilization, drop nitrogen to 50 ppm to force flowers. Water when possible in the morning, allowing the foliage to dry before night or you will be inviting *Botrytis* infection. Major insect pests of cyclamen include aphid, cyclamen mite, and bud mite. Use the appropriate pesticides to control. Being proactive is important because once the canopy develops it is hard to get sprays to the inside of the canopy.

Now that you have produced the crop, you are ready for order assembly. Set the number of open flowers you wish and then pick the bench; you cannot bench run cyclamen as not every plant has the same number of blooms open. It will take anywhere from 10-15 days to ship the bench because of your adherence to your quality standards (in part the bloom count).

Questions and Answers

Nick Milfeld: What is a good pH for cyclamen production?

Richard Wilson: About 6 to 6.5.

Richard Criley: What kind of color mix (e.g., reds, white, pink, etc.) do you find most popular?

Richard Wilson: Red and white constitute more than 50%. Purple is also a popular color. We follow the color trends in the fashion industry. Variegated flowers are starting to grow in popularity as well as pinks and lavenders. It is important to know your market.

Wendy Proud: Could you talk a little about some of the new types that are starting to appear in the market? How many are you producing this year?

Richard Wilson: Some of the new flower forms include the ruffle-type. You usually see those

in the larger pots. They are novelties comprising only about 5% of the market. I haven't seen any doubles yet. I have a tendency to stay with the mainstream selections as long as they continue to sell. There are also some mini selections that stay very compact and form high numbers of flowers. We product approximately 600,000 4-in. plants per year and approximately 250,000 6-in.