Interesting Crops for Greenhouse

By: Stanton Gill and Suzanne Klick, UME

Thirty-seven people attended the Alternative Crops Program we conducted with MNLGA at Brookside Gardens last week on August 5th.

Tom Barse, Stillpoint Farm, covered the increased demand for hops plants. Several farms in Maryland are moving into hops production. We really do not have any nurseries or greenhouses producing plants for this new market. One operation in Orlando, Florida is jumping in on supplying plants. Other than this operation the field is wide open at this point. If you want to call and discuss this crop, contact me at 410-868-9400.

Sara Tangren, University of Maryland Extension, mentioned that there are no businesses in Maryland producing native seed. Since plants are adapted to the conditions of specific regions, she spoke of the importance of obtaining the most local source of seed possible when planting native species. Native seed production is one possible niche for new and experienced growers.

Sara Tangren also highlighted several important points to consider when growing native plants in greenhouses. Do not expect to have a uniform crop. Genetic variability is a key to native plant survival so flower color and timing, heights and vigor etc. will vary. You also need to know that native plants grown in containers will need fertilizer, usually at a very low rate. Sara noted that since “plants are not native to pots”, they do need some added nutrients during production.

Joe Kraut and Ellen Hartranft from Brookside led the group on a tour of the grounds at the end of the day. Dahlia ‘Mystic Spirit’ was growing where they highlight new plants that are available at garden centers. The Mystic series is noted for its dark purple foliage and long season of bloom. ‘Mystic Spirt’ is the tallest of the group and is an option for cut flower growers. These dahlias also attract butterflies and bumble bees.
Pythium in Fall Mums
By: Karen Rane, UMD
August is the time for Pythium root and stem rot in fall chrysanthemums. Symptoms include soft, dark roots that pull apart easily and black discoloration of the stem that can extend for a few inches above the soil line. It is important to periodically check root health by removing several plants from their pots and looking for early symptoms of root rot. Pythium is in the group of microbes called water molds, and they are commonly found in soil. The most common Pythium species affecting mums at this time of year is *Pythium aphanidermatum* which thrives in hot, wet conditions. Overfertilization, poorly draining potting mixes, and excessive irrigation are all factors that contribute to Pythium root rot outbreaks. Cultural practices to reduce Pythium problems include adjusting irrigation to keep plants evenly moist, avoiding puddling water around the base of pots, and avoiding high EC values. Preventative soil drench applications of fungicides containing the active ingredient etridiazole (Truban, Banol and the combination product Banrot) or cyazofamid (Segway O) will help protect chrysanthemums from Pythium infection. Mefanoxam (Subdue MAXX) can be used occasionally in rotation with the other products, but keep in mind that many Pythium isolates have shown resistance to this fungicide.

Where Are All of the Thrips?
By: Stanton Gill, UME
In July and August we generally see the populations of thrips increase to high levels. For fall mums they are common in most summers. This summer appears to be different. The frequent rains have helped suppress the thrips activity in most greenhouse operations. I sampled plants at two greenhouse operations and found large populations of *Orius* (minute pirate bugs) in early August. This insect is very aggressive in feeding on thrips. It is great to see some good news about bugs.

Brian Kunkel, University of Delaware Extension, and I are starting our thrips trial in the next week to evaluate several new low risk materials for potential thrips control. I’ll report on the results this fall and winter.

2015 Cut Flower Tour
September 9, 2015
Location: Surreybrooke Farm, Middletown, MD
http://extension.umd.edu/ipm/conferences

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