

# Make-It or Break-It Tips for Growing Transplants

By Nathan Savage, Sunscape Farms Rochester, NY 14625

We all know that strong, healthy transplants are the foundation of every growing season and problems at the beginnings of the season can cause problems all season! For this session, we pulled together some simple tips and reminders based on our experience and the mistakes we have made over the years. Hopefully these tips help you avoid some of those mistakes!

## Sanitation and Routine Inspection is always worth the time, no matter how busy you are!

- Sanitation is vital. Clean floors, benches, soil, trays, and seeds are a must for a successful season.
- Inspect your greenhouse structure and plastic. You might be able to afford to lose a greenhouse full of potted plants, but it would be much more catastrophic to lose a greenhouse full of transplants!
- Inspect your heaters. Timely maintenance is cheaper than costly repairs. If you don't have two heaters in your transplant house, get a second one. It's cheap insurance for those cold winter days!

## Chemicals: Less is More

- When using chemicals and fertilizers on transplants, less is always more! Plants burn easily in the baby stage, so go easy on them! Test products on one tray before you try it on a whole table of trays.
- Biological controls/beneficial insects give you the biggest bang for your buck when you apply them to transplants. If you are thinking about getting into beneficials, your transplant house is the first place I would start.

## Don't trust just anyone with your babies!

- It's up to you to make sure you have the right people for the job.
- Give your staff the information and tools they need to do the right things at the right time.
- Write up Standard Operating Procedures, not only for your staff, but also to remind yourself. The only thing worse than someone else screwing things up is when you do it yourself. Especially when you know better! (Think watering a table of 288's of tomato transplants with acid special fertilizer because you didn't have time to label the stock tanks ☹)

## Be honest with yourself and take notes

- Keep taking notes on what worked and what didn't, and don't stop researching.
- There is almost always a better way to do things, but you won't find it if you stop looking.
- Grow what you are good at growing and let someone else grow what you are not. Over time, this approach has always been more profitable for us. This doesn't mean you should stop trying!
- Know what it is costing you to produce your transplants. With today's rising costs, saving money can be easier than earning it! There are times you can find companies that are producing plugs for cheaper than you could buy the seed yourself. This is probably related to economy of scale and lower out-of-state operating costs. It pays to do your homework!

## Enjoy the Process

Lastly, take time to enjoy the process. Sure, it can be stressful, time-consuming, and frustrating, but don't let that take away from the wonder of seeing those tiny seeds faithfully emerge reaching towards the sun, eager to fulfil their promise and reach their fullest potential. Keep doing what you love and have a great season!

Questions or comments: [Nate@sunscapefarms.com](mailto:Nate@sunscapefarms.com)