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Stocker Horticultural & Hydroponic Supplies (2004) Ltd

Newsletter

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HAPPY BIRTHDAY STOCKER'S

August 20th marks our 14th birthday. On this day in 2004 I signed the lease document of Grenville, Joyce and Neville for the Tirau depot and purchased the business of Stocker Hort & Hydro from the Stocker family.

We have shifted the Stocker business from Tirau to Cambridge.

Thank you to all of our growers for your loyal support over the past 14 years and welcome to our many new growers.

I enjoy finding low cost solutions for growers, and look forward to many years of providing cost effective solutions in an industry constantly hit with low prices and problems.

GERMINATION

Growing green leafy salad crops should be neither complicated nor expensive and time consuming.

Over the years we have seen all sorts of systems – what is wrong with using low cost open air – (protected or semi protected systems). You can spend a lot on infrastructure – payback could be 5 to 10 years away, and then because of market dynamics – you might have to turn around and take it all out again.

The following is an expanded version of an e-mail I sent to one of my top growers back in March.

Dear Sir,

(My grower was having trouble with germination, and asked do I have any suggestions). This article is very timely – because it is as the weather cools and conditions become wet we strike more problems with germination.

There are 3 major things to watch for when germinating seed.

1. Wetting
2. Ventilation
3. Temperature

Over-watering is the major problem. If a germinating seed is continually soaked in water – it will 'drown'. The seed needs oxygen for respiration and growth. In

cooler conditions for the whole germination process – just the one watering may be all that is required. Make sure that the water is cool in summer and take the chill off in winter, and has been well oxygenated (the easiest way is to have 2 air stones bubbling strongly in the water reservoir, always use a fresh lot of water – your germination rate will improve).

Another grower has a very simple and effective way to germinate his seed. He has a stack of about 10 trays high of seeded media – this stack sits in the corner of his tank room. When he checks his nutrient etc, he has a quick look at the germination trays – if watering is required he simply hosed the trays – job done, the water drains down from tray to tray. So that the germination process takes place in the dark there is no light for the emerging leaves to stretch to – so you get a broad leaved, strong seedling that will go on to produce a viable plant. So if the media is already wet do not apply more water i.e. if you lift the plant or tray up and you can see its water logged or dripping water it doesn't need more.

In water logged conditions the plant or seed will drown from lack of air, and you are setting the stage for collar rot, black spot, powdery and downy mildew.

The second major item to watch is temperature, 18 °C is best; as you go above this so success rates fall away, and if you pay 5c a seed, another 5c media and

10c worth of time – this could be money down the drain. If you overhead water take care, and remember, it is always as the weather cools that you will have problems. All through the long hot summer months – daily watering is in the ball park, but as the temperature drops – so the watering should drop to every second, third or fourth day.

One of my growers using flood and drain simply uses nutrient from his main system CF approximately 9, he runs on approximately 100% germination rate and produces the best stocky seedlings – he does exclude the light to the cotyledon stage, in his germination green house. Experiment with level of CF. Mostly the first watering use no fertiliser – then perhaps CF3 experiment with this and higher temperature can cause bolting. After the germination process full light and 18 °C temperatures are a great start to producing great plants.

Provide plenty of fresh air – get them into the NFT system quickly. We promote our growers to use a nursery gully system on the lower CF – but in the end you need a system that will suit you. If you germinate in a compact gully system with intermittent watering – you can grow those plants on for 2 extra weeks and so

handle them just once. Avoid wetting the foliage and stay clear of fungal trouble etc. Remember our potassium silicate will also provide valuable protection for your crop.

Most of our salads grow as cool weather crops. In the South Island the winters are too cold, so we fight this with twin skin green housing and heating – make sure you vent, have a fan or two running, and while you can; shut the house up on a cold winter night it is essential to get the whole thing fully opened at 9.00 am – fresh air is free and your plants need it and light – they are quite unlike us and don't need to be all rugged up against the cold. Lettuce can be covered with heavy frost and the tank reduced to an ice block – but as the day warms up and if a little warm water is dumped in the tank the crop will thaw out and carry on growing like nothing ever happened. I am 'not' saying that you; what I would call mother your crop – but in newer growers this is very prevalent.

- Not too wet (seedling stage)
- Fresh air
- Cool temperature
- Sunlight

Go part of the way to producing the crop you want.

THE BUILDING SEASON IS HERE AGAIN

Any ponding i.e. depth of nutrient in the gullies and you will have problems with Pythium etc optimum conditions for Pythium are low oxygen, stagnant solution, warm temperatures and algae. We should have a film of nutrient moving along the gullies.

Of more concern than algae etc in the gullies – which is unavoidable – is this free movement of the nutrient solution. We promote the slope as 40:1, that's 150 mm

over a 6 m length. We think 250 mm would be better, what are your thoughts. If you think harvesting would be difficult – if possible 'slope the ground'.

The maximum distance between gully supports has always and will always be 1500 mm, any more and the gullies sag under the weight of the crop (causing ponding).

FOR SALE

1999 Isuzu Elf Chiller Truck

3 Litre Diesel, 5 speed manual. 260,000 km (truck is still being used). Has a current WOF 11/18 and Rego 08/18. Inside box measurements 2660 long x 1550 wide and 1240 high.

Drive on a car licence, easy to drive with a great steering lock, three seat belts, air con, power windows, tidy condition. Change of crops from food to flowers means chiller is no longer required.

Well worth viewing. \$9500 ONO. Phone 027 475 1911

GO ANOTHER ROUND

Some time ago I mentioned that we were recycling our twin cushion nutrient boxes. Like all recycling – ‘for it to work’ requires ‘time’ and ‘effort’ for all parties involved.

The boxes have to be in reasonable condition, broken down and tied in a bundle and ready to go. I would pick these up and return to the Stocker depot in Cambridge as a back load while on my visit rounds.

‘At the moment’ these boxes are worth 25c each by way of a rebate when you next purchase. One box may make 4 or 5 trips easily. So – why not be good to mother earth – especially when she is so good to us. Remember for various reasons – some cartons will simply be not suitable for another round, this decision remains with me.

RECYCLE

As hydroponic growers using re-circulating systems, we are the great recyclers. We really do look after the planet. We not only recycle the water and nutrient, but we are easier on the environment, staff and consumers by using fewer sprays etc.

Please pay accounts: Directly to our bank A/c 06-0317-0725026-00 (we NEED your grower name on the statement) or you can Mail to Stocker Hort & Hydro, 1 Matos Segedin Drive, Cambridge 3495.
