



PERRY LABORATORY

HORTICULTURAL ADVISING AND TESTING

February 2007 Ramblings

As we look back on January, all we can say is **BOY WAS IT COLD!** This was one of those once every 10 years of so cold spells. I believe we had 5 nights of sub freezing temperatures. This was enough to cause major havoc on all types of horticultural situations.

For the cut flower industry, it was a time of seeing how much the heating systems could keep up and for nurseries without heating, to see how they could possibly protect their crops. I have seen varying degrees of success with the use of frost cloth and sprinklers to reduce freeze damage on plants. The problems have been from simple delays in crop timing to almost complete freezing of everything in the greenhouse. There have been the expected problems with heating systems, including excessive fire and the standard gas and electrical issues. From a positive side, this will be a very good Valentine's Day holiday for those operations with product available for sale. With the extensive cold throughout the west coast, there was severe loss of outdoor grown cut flowers in southern California. This is resulting in limited supply and high demand. Of course this also leads to higher prices, something the cut flower industry has not seen for some time now.

The potted plant nurseries have faired pretty well. The very good Christmas holiday is being followed by good demand for Valentine's Day. If this market continues through Mother's Day, this could be shaping up to be an exceptional year. This is also needed as these nurseries have had a hard time in the last few years.

In the landscape trade, there was also quite an effect from the cold temperatures. There were many frost sensitive plants that have been able to be grown in the past few years that succumbed. They were damaged quite a bit and in some cases, will not recover. On the positive side, this will create more work for landscape maintenance and construction companies. It will also create more demand for replacement plants and will make for a good market for the retail nurseries this spring and early summer.

For the landscape stock nurseries, there was also some damage, although many were able to cover plants with frost cloth and were successful in saving many plants. The coldest temperature I heard was 14°F and this was on the coast. The cold spell was more pronounced along the coast this time around. Usually the ocean helps us on the coast, but this was not the case this time. I did see some data that showed a gain of 9°F under the frost cloth and since it was 25°F that night, they were able to save those plants.

An overall positive side of the extreme cold we have had this year is greatly reduced pest problems. This is quite a contrast to last year when the extensive rainfall lead to an abundance of fungal and bacterial problems. The cold weather this year was also accompanied with very low humidity, so there have been much less plant disease issues. The extreme cold should also help in reducing the insect populations for later in the spring. The mild winters of the last few years have lead to additional insect infestations. All of this is resulting in much less pesticides applications and helps to offset the considerable heating expense of this winter. Time will tell if we will continue to benefit or be harmed from our extreme weather this year.

Respectfully submitted, Cliff Low