



PERRY LABORATORY

HORTICULTURAL ADVISING AND TESTING

Summer 2008

We are in the throes of summer and, as with the general economy, the horticultural industries seem to be slow. On the positive side, multiple reports from different segments of the nursery industry show more interest in regional sales than before, particularly with the large retail stores. High petroleum prices are making everyone look for suppliers closer to their stores, to reduce transportation costs. It seems it should always be this way, however the bigger stores have always tried to find vendors large enough to supply some if not all of their locations. In these times, there is greater efficiency and savings in using local suppliers.

This being summer, the cut flower market is traditionally slow, however many nurseries have reported a slow market most of the year and this summer is just a continuation of it. With high-energy prices still looming, the prospect of winter heating is not something anyone wants to think about now. It doesn't help that the weather is cooperating and not being too hot, but hot enough for the plants to produce a good quantity of flowers that cannot be sold in a tight market.

The container nursery industry is also having a difficult time this year. The poor housing market means the larger retail stores that have traditionally sold a lot of plant material are having a difficult time, and this is affecting the nurseries that supply them. There are reports that the nursery plant industry is down by 20-45%. There are also reports of large nurseries on the verge of bankruptcy, however there are also people who believe that all of the incentive and stimulation techniques that have been put in place will begin to pull us out of these recessionary times. One can only hope so.

For the potted plant nurseries, it is poinsettia time. The plantings have begun and the plants are looking fairly good so far. There have been a few reports of poor cuttings coming in, however not as much as in some years. As many of these nurseries sell quite a bit of product at Christmas, a lot of crops are being grown at this time to make this important holiday.

The landscape industry has also seen variable results, as some contractors seem to be staying busy, while others are scrambling for work. With the reduction in home values there is less emphasis on yard improvements and less money to do so.

The viticulture industry is seeing the grapes ripening a bit earlier this year. The grapes have begun to purple, which is a few weeks earlier than last year. We have had a relatively mild summer, with less fog and this may be a reason in our coastal areas for this earlier ripening. There is still a lot of time to go before harvest, so the crop could still slow down, but right now it is looking like an early harvest. In our own lab, we are busy trying to get our basic wine testing procedures in place for this fall. With hope, we will be able to provide our local vineyards with testing of their grapes, must and wine this coming season. For those of interest, we will be offering pH, TA, VA, SO₂ (total and free), ethanol, glucose/fructose, malic, and tartaric acid. Let's all hope for another great harvest as the vineyards continue to increase and the small operators become better at their craft.

Cliff Low