



PERRY LABORATORY

HORTICULTURAL ADVISING AND TESTING

Fall 2007 Musings

Although we have had great weather and seem to continue to have small “Indian Summer” type warm days and pleasant evenings, there has been a chill in the air that signals that fall has arrived in the West. As our days become shorter in length, we must keep in mind that the intensity of the sunlight we are receiving is less than during the summer months. When determining irrigation schedules, don’t be fooled by the nice sunny days and continue to water as if it were summer. The plants have already picked up on the seasonal signals that dictate how fast they will grow. It is very common for plants to be “over watered” at this time of year. The cooler nighttime temperatures at this time of year also result in higher relative humidity, which can lead to additional fungal and bacterial diseases for many plants.

The cut flower industry started with a bang earlier this year. However, as we progressed into the late summer and fall, production and sales have lowered. There have been many reports of lower production of various crops, roses among them, in August and September this year. Some of this may be due to the heavy insect and fungal pressure that was present this year, and the necessary additional pesticide applications that were needed. These spray operations take their toll on the plants and this may have manifested in slower growth of the plants. There were also more “dumps” due to damage from insects and diseases. With the cooler night temperatures, it will be important to monitor for botrytis due to the higher greenhouse humidity and lack of heating as of yet.

The container nursery industry is bracing for a difficult spring season. The housing crisis is causing this concern as, without a good housing market, there are less landscape materials needed. Since many large “box” stores are also dependent on housing, there is a big worry out there. Some local nurseries have closed, yet another sign of tough times in this industry. I do believe that the “box” stores have caused a lot of this stress by requiring the plant producers to sell at lower prices and thus try and cut their production costs. This is being done in various ways, but however it is done, it generally results in somewhat lower quality. This makes it more difficult to sell the plants quickly, which is the goal of any retail outlet. By going to more of a “consignment” type of system, the risk is placed more on the plant producers and some have not been able to adjust.

In the potted plant industry, it seems that there have been a bit more poinsettia problems this year, however the crops are finishing fairly well and hopefully the market is decent. Many retailers are beginning to bring plants in early to try and entice Christmas shopping early, and this is also a cause for some concern about this upcoming holiday season.

On a somewhat brighter note, the viticulture industry had a fairly good harvest this year. The production levels were somewhat variable this year, however overall the quality of grapes has been reported to be some of the best in many years. This should set the stage for some great wines in the next few years. The lack of last winter’s rainfall and moderate fall temperatures may be reasons for the reduced crops and higher quality. I can’t wait to taste the wines made from this year’s grapes.

Cliff Low