



Greenhouse Pest Message, May 19, 2022

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Caring for Plants in Retail Settings

I know how busy you all are, with May sales finally in full swing. Let us all strive to keep sales strong to make up for the slow start in April. Keep your plants looking fresh, and attractive with the necessary grooming practices and regular fertilization, especially in outdoor plant yards.

While in retail settings, plants may develop nutrient deficiencies. One of the first nutrient deficiencies to appear is nitrogen deficiency with lower leaves turning yellow. Phosphorus deficiency symptoms may have developed during the cool April, with reddish or purplish discoloration of leaves, especially in outdoors.



Figures 1 & 2: Nitrogen deficiency symptoms (on left) and phosphorous deficiency symptoms (on right). Photos by L. Pundt

inefficient plants such as million belles and petunia may develop iron deficiency symptoms. Use of an iron chelate (be careful to rinse the iron chelate off the foliage) can green up the plants so they can be sold. (When planted in the home gardens, adequate iron will be present).

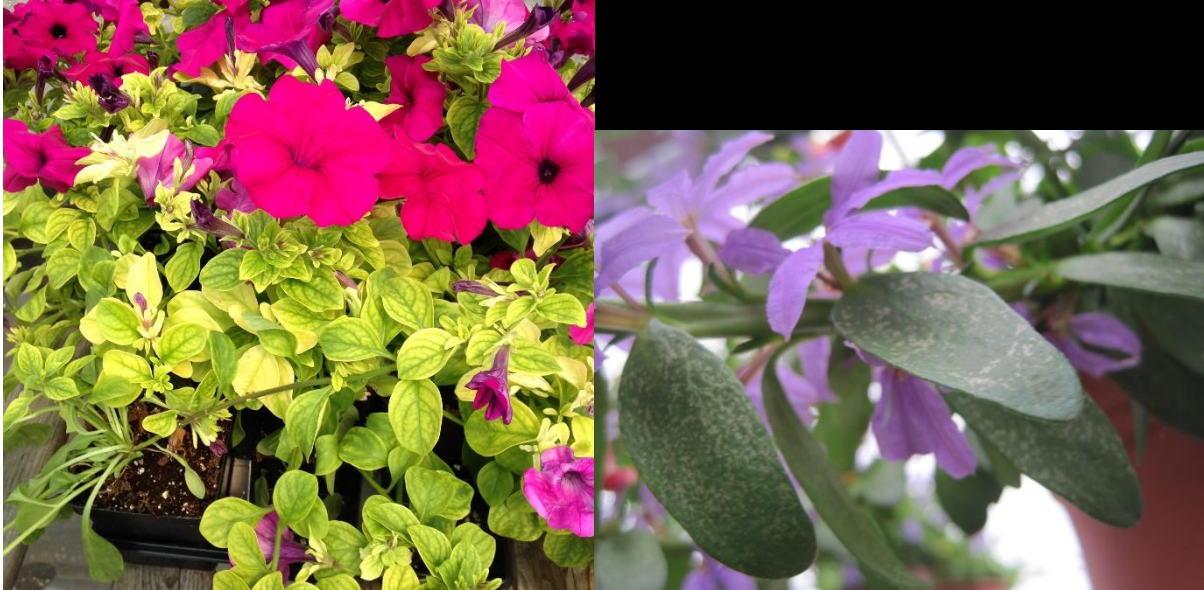


Figure 3: Iron deficiency symptoms (on left) and damage from iron chelate spray (on right). Photos by L. Pundt

Transplants, 4-inch, and other small containers are more susceptible to nutrient deficiency symptoms as nutrients can be quickly leached from the smaller volume containers.

Before fertilizing, check hanging baskets and mixed planters for controlled release fertilizer (CRF) prills. If you find mainly empty prills, or if prills were washed out, another application of CRF may be needed. Check with your wholesale supplier to see if an application was done. Mixed planters and hanging baskets benefit from top-dressing with controlled-release fertilizer (applied according to the label directions) when the plants are sold. (Home customers may not fertilize their plants!)

When using water-soluble fertilizers, ideally, plants should be fertilized with every irrigation using a portable fertilizer injector to maintain plant quality, not to promote growth. Using a neutral fertilizer (e.g. 17-4-17) at a low rate (between 50 to 100 ppm N) with low phosphorus (P) should prevent nutrient deficiencies. When your staff are very busy or if you only have one injector, consider fertilizing at a higher rate (150-200 ppm N) once a week.



Figure 4: Use of a fertilizer injector in outdoor retail yards. Photo by L. Pundt

Plants in retail have well developed root systems and may be displayed in direct sun. So, regular, gentle watering is needed, in the morning and early afternoon. Be sure that the growing substrate is getting fully saturated when watered.

Check with your wholesale supplier to see if they adjusted their growing mix by adding more wood fiber to their growing mix, which does not hold as much moisture as peat.

Groom plants, removing any spent flowers, and removing any dead or injured plants.

Resources:

Maintaining High-Quality Plants in Retail Settings e Gro Alert https://www.e-gro.org/pdf/2016_531.pdf

Don't Let Your Plant Go Hungry in Retail e Gro Alert <https://www.e-gro.org/pdf/338.pdf>

Caring for Plants in a Retail Setting <https://ag.umass.edu/greenhouse-floriculture/fact-sheets/caring-for-plants-in-retail-setting>

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