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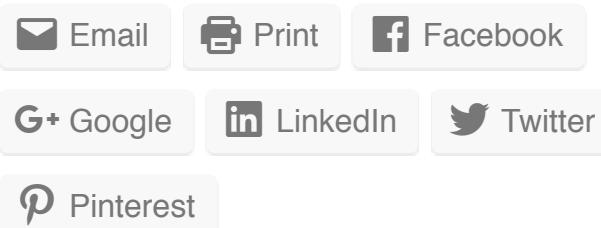
## Plant Culture

# 5 Things You Should Know About Growing Cyclamen



By: Rob O'Hara | Email

November 8, 2012



While I am certainly not an expert on cyclamen production, I have learned some key elements (often the hard way) to pay attention to when growing this

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somewhat finicky crop. In my experience, there are five essential things to focus on in order to grow a healthy cyclamen crop:

## 1) Pay Attention To The Nitrogen-To-Potassium Ratio

When growing cyclamen, one of my biggest concerns is Fusarium. This fungal disease is like a silent killer slowly infecting your crop. You can identify it by cutting a cross-section of the tuber; if it's brown inside, it's not good news. When this started happening to me, I turned to the breeder of the series I was growing for help. The question I was asked was, "What was your N-to-K ratio?" After thinking about it, I figured out it was approximately 1:1. The breeder then recommended that in hot times of the year to start the plants with a 1:3 ratio and, as the climate got cooler, go to a 1:2. This tip really seemed to help reduce my losses to Fusarium at the end of the crop, and it has probably been the best piece of advice I have been given on cyclamen.

## 2) Don't Let Salts Get Too High

Cyclamen has a very sensitive root system, and I think you may need to have a chemistry degree to understand what is happening in the pot during the crop. My goal is to keep the roots happy, and the plants will be fine.

We grow our cyclamen on ebb-and-flow floors, so managing the salts in the pot in order to keep plants healthy right through shipping has become one of our biggest priorities. We test weekly with a sat paste and try to make sure we are staying at or below 1 EC. When levels have gotten higher than 1 EC, we found that our roots tend to stall out and show damage.

I have also found that as you get closer to flowering, the plants are not using as much feed, so you really need to pay close attention. One year, we started losing our roots right at shipping time; it turned out our EC had crept up, and the roots were not happy. We did a heavy leaching of clear water, and within days we started to see new roots coming from the tuber. What a relief — but it all could have been avoided with better management of the



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fertilizer.

### **3) Keep The Climate As Stress-free As Possible**

We don't grow cyclamen year-round. Most of our production starts in July and ends in March. This adds some interesting challenges in terms of the environment. My biggest concern is temperature and light control. When planting in July, we make sure we have enough shade to control the temperature. I have found that if I was growing the crop with too little shade and allowed the temperature to get too high, I had more problems with disease throughout the crop.

You may also need to keep a level of shading on longer than you think. One year, I moved my crop in September to an area with no shade, thinking that the days were getting short and I would need the higher light to grow a strong plant. This backfired — it was too much of a shock to the plants. I have found that cyclamen in particular don't like any sudden changes. It irritates them and stresses them out, and they will soon let you know. Try to keep the growing environment as stress free as possible.

### **4) Apply A Preventative Fungicide At Planting**

I am not a big fan of applying any chemical without a specific reason. However, I have been impressed with the results I have seen when using RootShield or Actinovate on my cyclamen crop. This is a good strategy to help the roots as well as to help prevent other diseases. Since applying this at planting, I have seen less attacks of Pythium, Erwinia and Fusarium.

### **5) Space Properly And On Time**

Last but not least, spacing on time is critical. I know this is true for all crops, but cyclamen seem to be less forgiving than other plants. Late spacing can result in plants getting too soft and stretched. We try to space before the leaves ever touch each other and my rule is to finish the crop without the plants ever touching. I even like to do a double spacing to lessen the environmental

stress that comes with the wider spacing.

Cyclamen isn't an easy crop to grow, but focusing on these five areas have helped my growers succeed and grow a great crop. **GG**

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