

SAVE THE GERANIUM!



Bridget White, Editorial Director
(847) 391-1004
bwhite@sgcmail.com

Those of you in the South, where spring is already starting, are probably looking at your benches full of geraniums and wondering what I could possibly be talking about. The crop looks fine, the order arrived on time and sales are starting to pick up...there aren't any problems with geraniums. Think again. There's a crisis brewing with geraniums, and it could change the way most of us do business.

THE HISTORY

Many of you may remember last spring's accidental importation of *Ralstonia solanacearum race 3 biovar 2* on geranium cuttings originating in Kenya. Some of you may even know that the disease was imported a second time late last year; this time from Guatemala, causing relatively minor crop losses of approximately 1 million cuttings to date. What very few people know at this point is the overly drastic actions the USDA has taken to protect one industry, namely seed potatoes, at the expense of another industry, namely ornamental horticulture...us.

According to the USDA, there is no way to be sure that Goldsmith Plants, the company that imported the infected cuttings, is completely clear of the disease, and since this strain of *Ralstonia* is particularly virulent and can cause such devastation to solanaceous crops, e.g., tomatoes, tobacco and potatoes, they had no other option but to decertify this company, effectively stopping them from importing geranium cuttings.

I had the luck, good or bad depending on how you look at it, of being on-site at the Goldsmith Guatemala facility when the news came from USDA and saw first-hand the effect the announcement had on the company and its 450 employees. But in the middle of their sadness and fear, I couldn't help wonder what it would mean for our industry. This year, the geranium shortage was mostly covered, but what about the future? How will it affect geranium sales? The industry?

THE FUTURE

We are at a triple disadvantage in this battle. First, the seed potato lobby is much larger than our own, which by the way exists only in the form of individual associations doing what they can with limited means. Second, this pathogen is listed on the bioterrorism list, which gives the USDA freedom to act at will and the excuse of "protecting the nation

from terrorist threats." Third, our industry is very fragmented and refuses to speak with a single voice even when threatened as it is now. And rest assured, we are threatened.

After the first infected cuttings were discovered, the USDA considered a proposal to stop importation of geranium cuttings from offshore. The motion was killed, but I don't think we've seen the last of these kinds of ideas.

I have been very disappointed by the lack of solidarity within the industry regarding this problem and by the inaction of those most in a position to protect our industry, namely the allied manufacturers, the wholesale growers and each and every garden retailer. You might think this company's decertification is of no concern to you; let them handle their own problems, but no imported plants, more expensive cuttings and closer scrutiny by the USDA are things none of us want and something we can all help to prevent — at least at this stage.

Bridget E. White

Coming in April...

Management:

Category Killers: Find out when to increase and when to walk away

Promotional Strategies:

The cost and benefits of advertising

Green Goods:

Money, marketing, merchandising and new plants

Plus:

- Affordable store renovations
- Benefiting from different fish
- Stone as an accent

LAWN & GARDEN Retailer

EDITORIAL

Editorial Office:	(847) 391-1004
Bridget White	Editorial Director bwhite@sgcmail.com
Carrie Burns	Associate Editor cburns@sgcmail.com
Catherine Evans	Associate Editor cevans@sgcmail.com
Kelley Murphy	Associate Editor kmurphy@sgcmail.com
Neda Simeonova	Associate Editor nsimeonova@sgcmail.com

ADVERTISING

Sales Office:	(817) 731-9352
Felix Schilling	Account Manager (817) 731-9352 felixschilling@sbcglobal.net
Tami Morrell	Integrated Accounts Manager tmorrell@sgcmail.com
Doug O'Gorden	Integrated Accounts Manager dogorden@sgcmail.com

STAFF

Tim Campbell	Group Publisher tcampbell@sgcmail.com
Judith H. Schmueser	Director of Production Operations jschmueser@sgcmail.com
Scott Figi	Production Manager sfigi@sgcmail.com
Linda L. Lambdin, C.C.P.	Director of Circulation llambdin@sgcmail.com
Erica Rivera	Advertising Coordinator erivera@sgcmail.com
Jody Cardinal	Director of Corporate Communications jcardinal@sgcmail.com
Judy Ann Paul	Sales & Marketing Associate jpaul@sgcmail.com
Donna Aly	Classified Advertising daly@sgcmail.com
Joy Stirling Images	Photo Library Barb Versalle, (231) 894-1774 info@joystirling.com

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

Dale Bachman	Bachman's Floral Home & Garden
Stan Pohmer	Pohmer Consulting Group
Judy Sharpton	Growing Places Marketing
Steve Vanderwoude	Spring Meadow Nursery
Jack Williams	Ecke Ranch
Mitch Whitten	Birding Business

CORPORATE

Karla A. Gillette	Chairman
Sheldon Schultz	Vice Chairman/COO
Edward Gillette	President
Halbert S. Gillette	Chairman Emeritus (1922-2003)

Lawn & Garden Retailer accepts no responsibility or liability for the validity of information supplied by contributors, vendors, advertisers or advertising agencies.

Subscription Information

Lawn & Garden Retailer magazine (ISSN 1540-9023) is published eight times a year in January, February, March, April, June, July, August and September by



Scranton Gillette Communications, Inc.,
380 E. Northwest Highway, Suite 200,
Des Plaines, IL 60016-2282.
Telephone: (847) 391-1000 Fax: (847) 390-0408.

Subscription rates in the U.S. are \$30 per year (Canada and Mexico are \$50 and all other countries are \$60 payable in U.S. currency). Periodical postage paid at Des Plaines, IL 60016 and at additional mailing offices. Reproduction of contents is forbidden. Copyright 2004.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Circulation Department, Lawn & Garden Retailer, 380 E. Northwest Highway, Suite 200, Des Plaines, IL 60016-2282. PRINTED IN USA.