

Christmas Tree Issue

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containing the plant, placed inside.

The system solves a variety of problems for growers. It moderates container media temperature, providing a more favorable root growth environment during the summer. Plants growing in this system do not blow over during high wind.

The PIP system, noted Bates, is ideal for overwintering plants, eliminating the need for polyhouses or thermal blankets.

PIP technology has been adopted by growers at a phenomenal rate since its inception about a decade ago, and PIP acreage increases yearly.

How does it work? Bates provided an example of a typical 5- or 6-foot tall tree placed into a 15-gallon container in a PIP system. "A key

component of the PIP system is copper-impregnated paint applied to the inside surface of the growing container," he noted.

When the tree roots grow, they typically hit the container wall and begin to circle, a response known as "girdling." In the PIP system, the roots hit the copper, which slightly burns the root tips, causing them to branch and become more fibrous and dense. This improves the growth rate of the plant and enhances establishment after transplanting, according to the specialist.

Bates emphasized that while the PIP technology may not be the answer for all container growers in the state, PIP technology could be used more fully by Pennsylvania growers.

In his newly created position, Bates noted he plans to address production and pest manage-

ment issues.

And the only way to go about developing an effective extension program for growers is to "talk and visit and interact with you," he told growers at the meeting.

Bates, who was born and raised in Cincinnati, Ohio, also worked in West Virginia and Montana.

Bates' field of expertise is woody ornamental plants. But he has worked in teaching, research, and extension.

Through Bates pointed out he doesn't come from a Christmas tree production background, he has experience working with the nursery industry, which uses many of the same production practices as Christmas tree production.

Bates noted that "effective extension programs for growers should be geared to solving problems and include information growers could take back to

their farm. That would include looking at ways to address issues such as best management practices, marketing, and developing improved pest tolerance," he said.

Research and marketing work also needs to involve the national and state Christmas tree grower associations.

One of those areas would be improving marketing. Now, about a third of the public uses artificial trees.

"It's important to continue encouraging consumers to use real Christmas trees," noted Bates. "One key will be to emphasize how Christmas tree production benefits the environment and to rekindle the tradition of using real trees."

Bates comes to Penn State via Montana, where he held a teaching/research position in the Department of Plant Sciences at Montana State University. He

also worked as an extension agent in Hamilton County, Ohio and Botetourt County, Virginia.

Bates obtained several degrees, including his bachelor's in 1982 at West Virginia University, a master's in horticulture in 1985 from the same university, and a doctorate in horticulture in 1994 from Virginia Tech.

For growers, Bates indicated the Christmas Tree Management Short Course at Penn State is scheduled Feb. 21-22 at the Penn State in State College.

Bates can be reached by e-mail at rmb30@psu.edu or by phone at (814) 863-2198.

Also, a new agent, Laura McNutt, a Berks County native, has joined Berks extension as a horticultural agent. McNutt, who has ornamental experience and was employed as a technical services and sales representative with E.C. Geiger Inc., grew up in Wernersville.

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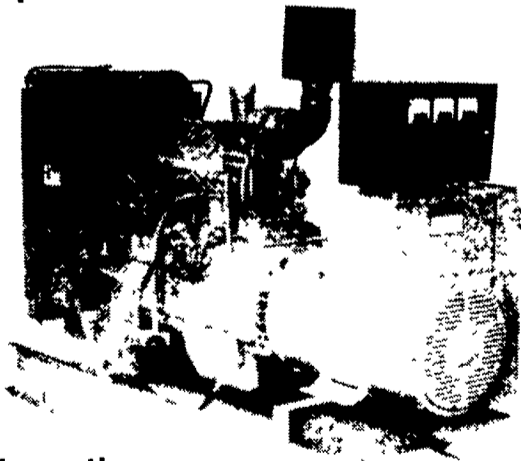
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