

Poinsettia Production Requires Precise Attention

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ceptible to bacteria and rot, must be kept in a sterile environment in a shaded house.

The cuttings, about three inches long, spend about three weeks in misting beds. In the beds they grow roots and are ready to be transplanted to various-sized containers by August.

They spend August, September, and October growing, but "they also go through cultural practices that define what kind of plant they will be," he said.

One example of a cultural practice is whether the plant is "pinched" or not. Taking off the top 1/2-1-inch of the stem causes "the lateral shoots to become prominent," he said.

A customer studying a branched poinsettia will see a small light-colored scab on the plant's stem. "That's where we pinched the 'heart' out of the shoot," he said.

The plants are pinched in mid-August, "which causes the remaining part of the plant to branch out. If the plants are not

pinched, the axillary branches are not as prominent, and the plant grows into one strong shoot.

"Most of the crop is pinched, so we get multiple bracts (the colored leaves)." Pinching yields 3-6 bracts per plant. "The advantage is that it takes fewer stock plants to produce a multiple-bract plant."

"It's very time-specific," said Fry. "The pinch has to take place at the right time to make sure that the plant size and color come at a marketable time.

"It's not a crop that you want to put on the back burner, with nutrient management, water management, and insect management issues. We have to stay on top of everything or we'll have things that sneak up and affect the quality of the crop."

After the pinch in August, "September and October are when the plants put on the bulk of their growth," he said. By the end of November, the plants start to show color.

"The phenomena of the color change is a product of the short-

ening days," he said. However "any aberration from the sun's natural light will cause them not to color up. Shop lights, street lights, a TV — any light that you can read a newspaper by — is considered light pollution, and it doesn't take much. Even headlights on a busy highway may cause a week or so delay" in color change, said Fry.

"Once they have changed color, it's not a reversible mechanism. They won't change once they're in your house, for example." By mid-November the plants have, on average, 75 percent of their color.

Although red definitely tops the list of customers' favorites, hues of pinks, whites, marbles, and speckled poinsettias are also for sale.

Customers tend to snap up the novelty colors for the year. This year, for example, they sold yellow/white "Lemon Snow" and the red-and-white "White Glitter." Next year Fry is hoping to add a deep "high-school jacket" burgundy to the color offering. "Whatever's new will sell well."

Fry reminds customers to think of the plants as a living organism that needs basic care.

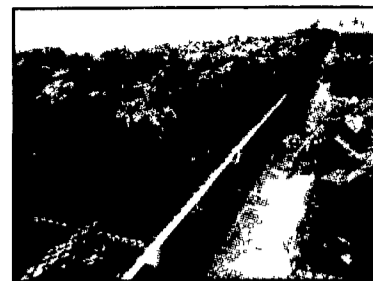
"If they want to move the poinsettia to a table for a holiday meal, that's appropriate, but if they want that plant to last and stay healthy, it would do better in a window.

"Generally plants will forgive you with only one source of stress; however, if it is dry and has a low light situation," recovery to full health will be longer. "Add to that a drafty and cold situation," and the plant's health will be further compromised. "Plants will generally respond just fine, if they don't get overstressed," Fry said.

The family operation includes parents Morton and Beckie Fry, along with children Vincent, married to Caroline; M. Simon, married to Karen; Victoria, married to Bob Gosling; and Anthony, married to Denise.

The brothers are involved full-time on the operation, with occasional help from the spouses and their sister.

The business began in 1760, when the first Fry was estab-



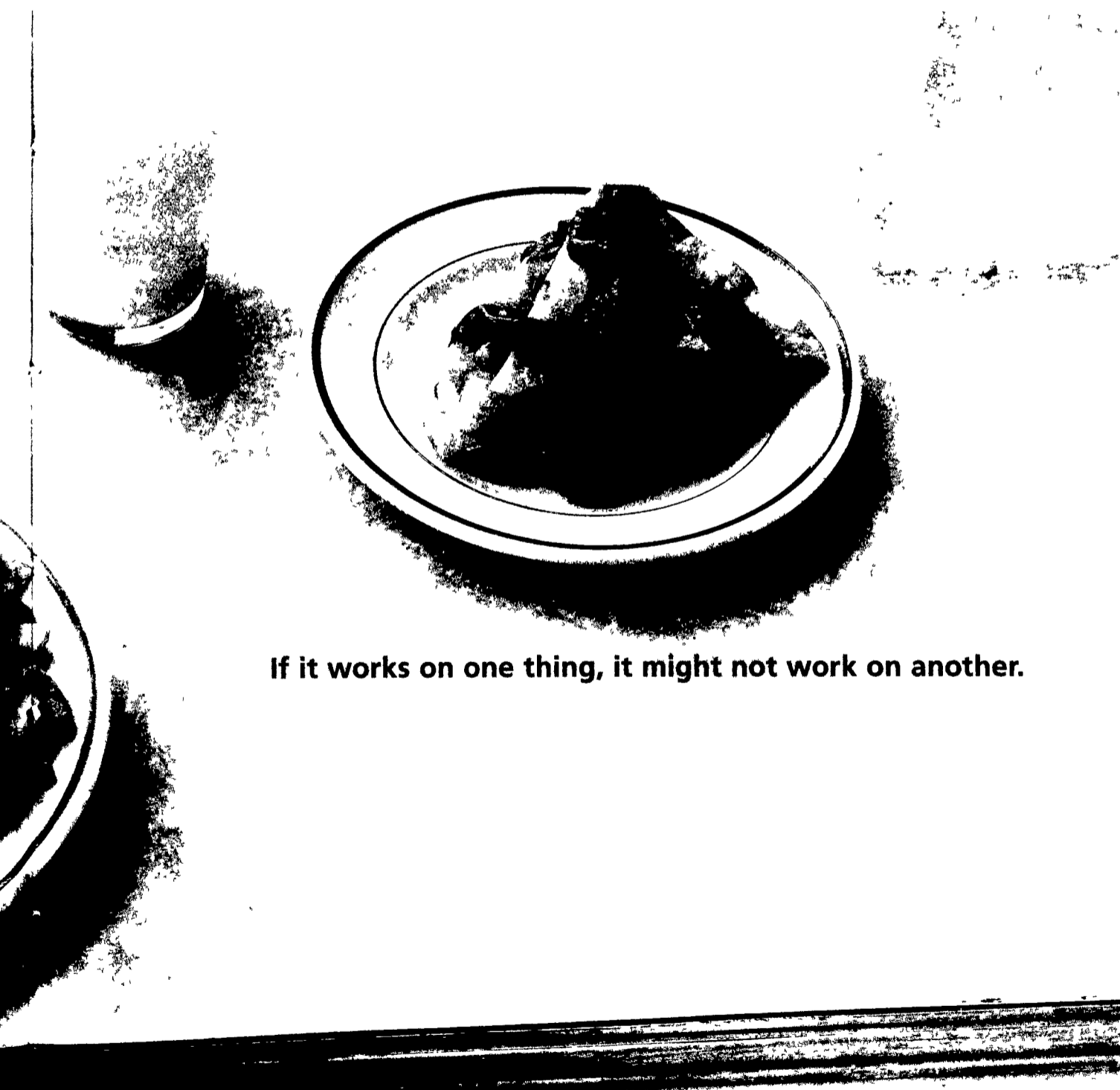
These stock plants will yield about 20 cuttings per plant. The cuttings grow into the plants the customer purchases.

lished on land that once hosted a grist mill. After evolving through several industries, most recently a dairy, the land was put to use by Morton and Beckie as a nursery.

Fry attributes the continued success of the business to the staff. "They certainly have jumped in with their effort," he said.

"We owe a tremendous amount of gratitude to the work that our staff puts in, their input and assistance."

Twenty full-time employees form a core group of workers at the business.



If it works on one thing, it might not work on another.



Although there are a variety of colors to choose from, "without question, red is the top seller," according to Fry.



Mixing poinsettias and tropical foliage creates eye-catching displays.

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