UK COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY — COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE

Hanging Baskets

Introduction

Incorporating hanging baskets with bedding plant production enables growers to generate income from areas above benches and in walkways. In some cases, growers may devote whole greenhouses or sections of greenhouses to hanging basket production. Commonly grown hanging plants include ferns, fuchsia, impatiens, New Guinea impatiens, geraniums, petunias, verbena, bacopa, and lantana.

Marketing

Potential retail markets include farmers markets and direct sales from the greenhouse or farm. Wholesale markets include local garden centers, landscape contractors, discount stores, grocery stores, farm stores and roadside stands.

Market Outlook

Sales of hanging baskets are currently increasing, and hanging baskets are a key part of spring greenhouse profits.

Production Considerations

Site selection and planting

A heated greenhouse structure is necessary for producing hanging baskets. Plants are propagated from seeds or cuttings and can either be grower-grown or purchased. Growers who purchase transplants, rather than starting them in-house, are referred to as "finishers," an option many small to medium growers choose. Growers who purchase rooted cuttings or plugs may still opt to produce some of the more easily grown crops from seeds or cuttings.

While most growers choose soilless mixes, there is no single best formulation for growing quality hanging plants. The choice of mix can depend on a number of factors, including grower preference, cost, and type of irrigation. The number of cuttings or seedlings planted in a basket can vary from one to eight, depending on pot size, plant quality, growth rate and cost.

A drip irrigation system is used for the distribution of water and nutrients; however, it is essential to control emitters so that there is no excessive dripping on the bench plants below. One or two soft pinches are generally necessary during the production period. Timing production properly to have a wide assortment of species ready when the market demands is critical to profitability.

Pest management

Greenhouse conditions that favor plant growth also favor the rapid build-up and spread of insects and diseases. Potential disease problems include damping-off, root rots, powdery mildew, fungal leaf spots and impatiens necrotic spot virus. Common insect pests include thrips, aphids and white flies. Prevention and careful

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monitoring are the keys to insect and disease control. Weed control under benches and around the greenhouse will also help reduce insect pests and disease problems.

Post-production

Consumers demand uniformly flowering plants that are cascading over the rim of the basket. The foliage should be dense enough that no potting soil is visible. Proper post-production care is essential to maintaining a quality product up until purchase. Plants ready for sale should be kept cool and shaded from direct sun to extend their shelf life. Ideally, plants should be sold within three to five days after removal from the greenhouse.

Economic Considerations

The production of hanging baskets can be a highly profitable venture; however, this is a high-risk business with significant start-up costs as well as demanding labor and management. Initial investments include greenhouse construction, production system costs, and equipment. The cost of a production-ready greenhouse, excluding land costs, can run approximately $10 per square foot.

Production costs and returns vary greatly depending on crops grown, greenhouse size, production system, and marketing strategy. Rutgers has established sample budgets for the production of fuchsia and New Guinea impatiens in hanging baskets.

More Information

- The Greenhouse Business in Kentucky – A Review of Crops and How to Begin a Business (University of Kentucky, 2002) http://www.uky.edu/Ag/HLA/anderson/greenhousesinkentucky.pdf
- Selected Resources and References for Commercial Greenhouse Operators (University of Kentucky, 2002) http://www.uky.edu/Ag/Horticulture/anderson/greenhousereferences.pdf
- Commercial Floriculture Information Center (North Carolina State University) http://www.ces.ncsu.edu/depts/hort/floriculture
- Flowering Hanging Baskets (Auburn University) http://www.ag.auburn.edu/landscape/Hangbask.htm
- Flowering Potted and Foliage Plant Production Guidesheets (Purdue University) https://sharepoint.agriculture.purdue.edu/agriculture/flowers/pottedpltguides.aspx
- Greenhouse Costs of Production Budgets (Rutgers Cooperative Research and Extension) http://aesop.rutgers.edu/~farmmgmt/Green-House/Greenhouse-Index.html
- Greenhouse Production of Flowering Baskets, ANR-1147 (Alabama Cooperative Extension, 2007) http://www.aces.edu/pubs/docs/A/ANR-1147/ANR-1147.pdf