Candy Showers
Trailing Snapdragons

There is one thing upon which most of us will agree... color sells!

by Ken Harr

Even under some of the worst weather conditions in spring, summer or fall, beautifully grown bedding plants in full bloom not only sell, but retailers will consistently re-order to get more of those great-looking flowers that almost walk themselves out the door. The radiant blooms of Candy Showers readily fit the bill. Candy Showers Snapdragons, the only trailing snapdragon series from seed, offers quality and dependability in the greenhouse, on retail shelves and in the landscape. In baskets, combination planters or in flower beds, simply put, Candy Showers perform in full color.

To produce premium-quality Candy Showers Snapdragons for fall and early spring sales, a good understanding of their growing requirements is necessary. Following these simple protocols will help hold those colorful blooms under adverse and wide-ranging climate conditions for an extended period of time.

Focus on growing and producing quality color. The growing protocols for producing a quality crop of Candy Showers Snapdragons can be summarized in three points:

1. Photoperiod response
2. Average Daily Temperature
3. Fertilizer rates

Photoperiod Response

When Candy Showers reach five sets of true leaves, they are receptive to initiating flowers.

Snapdragons are facultative long-day plants; that is, increasing the daylength to 14 hours will allow the young plants to develop the most florets per stem than at daylengths less than 14 hours. Also, increasing the moles of light with supplemental lighting from HID or HPS fixtures, especially during the darker days of January and February, will hasten flower development.

Ideally, 14 hour daylengths and supplemental lighting will produce Candy Showers Snapdragon crops with the most flowers in the shortest amount of time, with 14 hour days being the most influencing factor. For early spring production, this will ensure the optimum number of flowers per stem. For late summer and fall crops, extending the daylength is unnecessary until the daylength falls below 14 hours.

Average Daily Temperature

Snapdragons, by their nature, are cool-season plants. They tend to flower less during the hottest days of summer and will re-flower once cooler fall temperatures arrive. Candy Showers Snapdragons have an advantage over other series in this regard due to their ability to constantly produce new branching throughout their life cycle. In order to strengthen and tone plants for retail shelves for early spring crops, it's suggested that growers produce Candy Showers under average daily temperatures of 55°F to 60°F (12°C to 15°C). The transplant-to-finish grow-time should be increased by one to two weeks in a grower's schedule, but some of that time can be made up by increasing the daylength to 14 hours. If desired, an even more toned plant can be produced by finishing the Candy Showers crop the last two weeks of production at an ADT of 50°F to 55°F (10°C to 12°C).

For fall crops, growing Candy Showers Snapdragons under shade cloths and with good air circulation will greatly assist in keeping the plants cooler and better toned.

Fertilizer Rates

Candy Showers Snapdragons are prolific producers of good basal-branching on pliable stems, thus their ability to withstand picking and shipping without a lot of delicate handling. In order to maximize and strengthen the tone of the plants, it is recommended to use nitrate-, calcium- and magnesium-based fertilizers. Balanced 15-3-30, 15-3-16 or 17-5-17 fertilizers are some very good formulations to consider when deciding which fertilizer blend to utilize. Drenching with low ammonium and phosphorous feeds can help to avoid stretched growth when growing for fall sales. Purchasing these fertilizers with extra minors will ensure optimum growth, as well. Snapdragons can be sensitive to high salts, so keeping the soil EC between 1.0 and 1.5 (2:1 slurry) from start to finish will help prevent high salt damage. The soil pH is best maintained between 5.5 and 5.8; pH levels above 6.2 may result in iron chlorosis.

There are certainly other cultural practices that will influence the end quality of Candy Showers Snapdragons. Ensuring that plugs are not transplanted too deep into the final container is one good practice for Candy Showers. However, by focusing on the photoperiod response, average daily temperature and fertilizer rates for fall and spring production, the end results will be crops that finish consistently in bloom, well-toned, on time and at spec. ■

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