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SUN GRO HORTICULTURE

# The Sun Gro'er

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**SUN GRO HORTICULTURE**

## Sun Gro New Products:

- **Sunshine Organic Mixes**
- **Mixes with par-boiled rice hulls**
- **Ellepot® rooting modules**
- **SunTower® bale peat and mixes**

## It's been a while but we've been busy!

Welcome to another installment of the Sun Gro'er! Our last issue was in the Fall of 2005. Oops. I guess we have been busy. Quite a bit has happened at Sun Gro. To name a few:

1. We have been offering customblended products more than ever before. Products with incorporated biological control additives or controlled release fertilizers are increasing every year. Be sure to call your local Sun Gro district sales manager before placing an order with your distributor.
2. We have continued to expand our available peatland holdings to help assure we have high quality peat to supply our customers needs.
3. We have added the production of TOWER bales in virtually all of our Canadian operations.
4. We continue to offer

Ellepot® rooting modules through our Lameque, NB manufacturing plant.

5. We offer growing medium products containing parboiled rice hulls.
6. We added production facilities through the addition of Florida Potting Soils, Sun Up and Kelloggs RichGro to the Sun Gro family.
7. And for those customers who also sell retail... Sun Gro offers a retail Private Label program that seems to be well received.

And at the same time being an avid contributor to programs like the Peat Ecology Research Group (PERG) at the University of Laval, that investigate methods to assure we operate in way that respects the environment.

Sun Gro has been quite involved in many various industry efforts dealing with resource conservation and sustainability.

And this is in addition to the work currently being



*Bedding plant production is the "bread and butter" crop for most growers in North America. See page 2 for tips on Scouting.*

conducted to refine our organic mix line up and identify, refine and secure raw materials that are considered organic and sustainable.

So the SunGro'er took a hiatus but we're back and stronger than ever. For more information about SunGro products visit [www.sunGro.com](http://www.sunGro.com) or call your favorite distributor of SunGro products

*Cactus and Succulents the bedding plant of the future?*



## Bedding Plants 2010 — Scouting



**"...you need to look closely at plant surfaces. Have a magnifying loop handy for looking for pests like mites".**



*We can all appreciate using the space in the production environment to the max, but you need to look above and below when scouting.*

Bedding plants are the "main event" during the spring season. You might be thinking bedding plants — Like Spring crops? Well, yeah Bedding Plants.... , and that time will be on top of use before you know it. So start thinking how your going to make this the best crop ever. Here are a few things to remember to do.

**Continue to scout the crops weekly.** When we say scouting, we are talking about walking through the production area and critically reviewing all crops. The key is to correct issues before they become major problems. Isolating problems and spot treating is much less costly than large scale correction. Scouting is usually associated with insect / disease control but read on...

Obviously, you are looking for abnormal growth or anything that is unusual. Note the specific abnormality and the pattern on the plant, whether it is old growth or new growth, Note any pattern on the bench or within the greenhouse. The patterns will give you clues on the cause or causal factors. Have a notepad to record your observations. Using a bound notepad is the best.

When scouting, many times you need to look closely at plant surfaces. Have a magnifying loop handy for looking for pests like mites.

Don't be afraid to examine the growing tips because sometimes that is where pests feed.

Secondarily, and other than obvious abnormalities, you are scouting for differences or issues in size or color. Bear in mind that many times these differences in size or color may be "varietal" or a result of different planting dates. Varietal differences are often obvious. However, make sure the people who are conducting the scouting can determine different planting dates.

Other than "varietal" / planting date differences, size and color differences are typically caused by things like root health or nutritional issues.

Always make it a habit to look at plant roots. Note the color of the roots and root tips. Also check the number of roots as well. Thick, white, abundant roots with root hairs just behind the root tips typically signal excellent root health. Dark brown or black roots are not healthy. In these cases, note if the moisture of the mix is on the "wet side" or if the plants have been allowed to wilt hard in the recent past. If caught early enough adjustments in watering practices is all it takes. But consider if disease is an issue. Check with your State Extension

Plant Health & Disease clinic if you have one. They can help you determine if it is a root rot disease where a fungicidal drench most likely would be recommended. Alternatively, you can ask a horticultural supplier or a manufacturer technical specialist, like at Sun Gro for advice.

In the past 10 years, our industry has been "blessed" or "blasted" , depending on how you look at it, with a multitude of new and interesting plant types. Many have varied nutritional requirements. This results in maybe a little too much nutrition or not enough of a specific nutrient. The most notorious is iron deficiency of plant types like petunia, callibrachoa or scaevola. When scouting pay special attention to these crops. Check our Sun Gro blog and let us know if other crop types have issues

**Look at the crops above.** No, not because your walking into a hanging basket! But because baskets are often forgotten until it's too late. When scouting, make it a habit to take baskets down to check out their status.

Bear in mind that that temperatures above are usually warmer than down below. So issues that you

*(Continued from page 2)*

may not see with the same plant types on the bench may be occurring/developing faster in the baskets above, like insect growth or nutritional disorders.

### Look at the crops below.

Trying to grow plants underneath benches is not exactly good practice but these are trying times. Nevertheless, crops under the benches can be a breeding ground for things like fungus gnats or diseases like Botrytis grey mold. If you need to have

these crops under the benches get them out and into outdoor conditions as soon as they can go outdoors safely.

**Follow up!** This is **essential**. Every scouting trip is a follow up to the previous one. However, it is good practice to have a greenhouse walkthrough each and every morning before the day gets in full swing. Quick checks from previous pesticide spot treatments or fertilizer / nutritional applications help keep everything on track and helps organize the day ahead. Record what works and

what doesn't. This helps in future situations.

Remember, when you are "stumped", there are people out there that can help. horticultural distributor supplier representatives, manufacturer sales or technical representatives can help or they know someone that can help. Calling customer services or using E-mail are two avenues to get help. Most companies have a web-site based contact (i.e. "contact us") system. To contact Sun Gro you can either call our customer service or visit [www.sungro.com](http://www.sungro.com) **-R.V.**



*Example of a less complicated and cleaner operation. Production area without materials above and below and items off the floor.*

## Why Does Sun Gro Belong to Trade Organizations?

Our world today of providing high quality growing media and fertilizers is no longer the simple business of years past where we produced and shipped products for you to use to grow flowers and trees. Horticulture like most other industries has become a highly regulated business. We, like you, now fill out mountains of paperwork and often need to respond to new unknown "regulations".

A tool that we have found useful to help us keep up with regulations is participation in trade organizations. These organizations can also influence the development of regulations.

Sun Gro is actively involved

in the CSPMA, MSC, TVA, PI and AAPFCO.

**CSPMA** (Canadian Sphagnum Peat Moss Association) ([www.peatmoss.com](http://www.peatmoss.com)) members are focused on the sustainable management of Canadian peat lands and working with governmental regulatory bodies to ensure the long term availability of peat moss.

**MSC** (Mulch & Soil Council) ([www.mulchandsoilcouncil.org](http://www.mulchandsoilcouncil.org)) meets with various regulatory agencies such as the EPA, USDA/APHIS and others to ensure members have the latest regulatory information. The MSC has also developed a product certification program for

retail potting mixes that has been embraced by many consumer product stores.

**TVA** (The Vermiculite Association) ([www.vermiculite.org](http://www.vermiculite.org)) is an international association of vermiculite miners and exfoliators. TVA has developed a Product Stewardship Program for members to follow regarding the health and safety of vermiculite.

**PI** (Perlite Institute) ([www.perlite.org](http://www.perlite.org)) is also an international association comprised of perlite miners and expanders. The PI provides regulatory information to members and works to improve the

knowledge and use of perlite in horticulture as well as other industries.

**AAPFCO** (American Association of Plant Food Control Officials). ([www.aapfco.org](http://www.aapfco.org)) is comprised of the individual state's fertilizer control officials who develop the laws and regulations for potting mix and fertilizer labels. Although membership in this organization is limited to state employees its meetings and committees are open to industry. Participation in AAPFCO builds relationships between regulators and potting mix and fertilizer vendors to ensure the continuation of "truth in labeling" of products.

**-K.L.**

**"... A tool that we have found useful to help us keep up with regulations is participation in trade organizations."**

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## Sun Gro Quality Program



*The SunGro Technical Team (TNT) devotes a large portion of time to support the procedures and specifications of the SunGro Quality System (SQS).*

SunGro tests raw materials and finished products to assure they meet quality specifications. In 2002, the Sun Gro Technical Network Team (TNT) put together information from the various regions and plants and “distilled” it to a regimented system that is called the SunGro Quality System or SQS for short. SunGro has further developed and refined this system to include not only documented procedures and requirements but also a series of plant audits. Each SunGro manufacturing plant goes through a comprehensive audit to help assure that SunGro plants are complying with the various SunGro Quality program requirements. These audits include compliance with testing and record keeping but also testing plant Quality Technicians on Critical

Skills. Other SunGro Technical Network Team members include:

**Kathryn Louis** — Corporate Technical Specialist, Bellevue, WA

**Liette Lanteigne Levasseur**— Quality Specialist, Lameque, NB

**Fabien Chaisson**—Quality Specialist, Lameque, NB

**Connie Proceviat**—Quality Coordinator, Elma, MB

And these folks were and continue to be instrumental in creating, improving and moving the SunGro’s SQS forward.

So, if we are not in a customer’s greenhouse or nursery we are more times than not in a production plant implementing our quality program.