



SIX TIPS FOR BUILDING A SUCCESSFUL PEST SCOUTING METHOD

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When talking with growers about spider mites or other pest infestation, we always hear the same questions: What and when should I spray? To fully answer the question, we need to start at the beginning of all Integrated Pest Management (IPM) programs: the scouting.

Scouting is not only checking for insects, but also diseases, nutrient issues, height management, irrigation issues, stage of the crop, etc. by walking the crop and examining flowers, stems, roots and leaves. It seems to be a waste of time for valuable greenhouse employees who could instead be doing other tasks vital to the operation. However, a dedicated person is required for an accurate scouting.

With the help of detail-oriented employees, following our basic scouting methods should help control most pests and can over time save money for your organization!

EXPERT TIPS

➔ TIP #1 Prep the greenhouse



Proper scouting starts by dividing the greenhouse into areas. Spend a predetermined amount of time in each area, starting with plants nearest entryways where pests often come in.

➔ TIP #2 Inspect the plants

Growers know certain plants always have issues with specific pests. These plants need to be watched and managed closely and will likely need preventative programs.

Proper scouting involves looking over the entire crop to evaluate overall color, height and uniformness. Look for plants that are not like the others, and if any troubled areas stand out, start looking for pests.

Once this quick overall evaluation is complete, select plants at random for closer examination.

We recommend using a hand lens of at least 10X magnification primarily to find pests, whereas fungal disease can usually be observed with the naked eye. Inspect both the upper and lower leaf surface and the undersides of the leaves, flowers and stems.

Pests are relatively unique to a defined location they prefer on plants. Turn over mature leaves and inspect carefully along the midvein where mites are usually first seen. If you scout for root pests, some dwell in the soil, so don't forget to remove a few plants from their pots in each section to inspect the roots.



➔ TIP #3 Monitor for pest populations

Yellow sticky cards, indicator plants and potato disks are commonly used to trap insects and monitor populations. Yellow sticky cards should be placed at regular intervals throughout the greenhouse, usually three to four cards per 1,000 square feet. Make sure there are extra cards placed near doorways and vents.



➔ TIP #4 Keep records

Make sure your scouting report keeps track of the pest life cycle and growing environment.

- Pest life cycle: Monitor the type of pest, quantity of pests and eggs present on the plant, pest life cycle (adults, larvae, eggs), developmental stage, crop issues and damage types.

- Growing Environment: Don't forget to record information about the temperature, because it plays an essential role in pest development—the warmer the temperatures, the faster the life cycles are.



➔ TIP #5 Know the economic threshold for the crop

Some growers may already have established their pest threshold level in their operations. If not, use the recording results from regular scouting to determine the crop or production pest threshold level. It is usually different for each crop: Stock plants are required to be as clean as possible – pest-free like, while vegetable crops have a significantly higher level of pest tolerated. Beyond the threshold, when the loss of the production due to pest infestation exceeds the cost of pesticide, growers spray. However, when the loss is below the cost of pesticide investment, growers don't spray.



➔ TIP #6 Scout frequently

Careful monitoring over time is key to determine if a new product included in the spray program is helpful or not. Be aware that one application does not show how useful the product is.

Multiple applications will be needed to see the full benefits of a product.



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