



Taming the WILD CALIBRACHOA

The crop that consumers love and growers love to hate.
New research from the University of Florida might just change
your perspective on floriculture's newest "wild child."

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Eye-catching color and vigorous growth have brought nothing but popularity for Calibrachoa, and it has become one of the industry's hottest vegetatively propagated specialty annuals. Calibrachoa's petite, single, petunia-like flowers, finely textured foliage and trailing growth habit make it an ideal plant for hanging baskets either alone or in mixed plantings.

As with many vegetatively propagated items, producing Calibrachoa hanging baskets does not come without challenges. Taming vigorous growth to produce a more attractive basket, facilitate shipping and keep plants untangled in a high-density growing situation are concerns. At the University of Florida, we have evaluated the use of growth regulator drench applications to slow the growth of Calibrachoa, which should make this high-value crop more appealing to growers.

EXPERIMENTS

In the spring of 2000, 'Mini-Famous Pink' and 'Mini-Famous Blue' Calibrachos were grown in 10-inch baskets with five plugs per pot and were fertilized every watering with 150 ppm of 20-10-20 fertilizer. The planting date was February 23. Four weeks after planting, three Bonzi rates were

applied as a drench using 15 fluid ounces of solution per container. At the time of treatment, plant size (average of plant width and length of shoots below container rim) was measured at 14.5 inches for Pink and 14 inches for Blue, as indicated by the line in Figures 1 and 2, page 10. Plants of this size will make good, salable plants, and a grower would want to slow the growth rate at this point to keep the plants from becoming overgrown.

Mini-Famous Blue appears to be somewhat more vigorous than Mini-Famous Pink and less sensitive to Bonzi, which indicates the variation in vigor that occurs with different Calibrachoa varieties. In addition, this trial demonstrated that both varieties showed favorable responses to the Bonzi drench treatments. An application of 1 ppm Bonzi reduced the final plant size by 15 percent for Pink and 12 percent for Blue when plants were measured five weeks after treatment. The high rate of 8 ppm reduced plant size by 28 percent for Pink and 27 percent for Blue, as compared to the control plants. Note the line in the figures that indicates the size of the baskets at treatment and that the 8-ppm Bonzi drench slowed, but did not stop, growth. After the 8-ppm drench, the Pink Calibrachoa baskets grew 2.5 inches, and the Blue variety grew six inches (see Figures 1 and 2, page 10).

Taking these varietal differences into account, we carried out a similar



Left: These are 'Mini-Famous Rose Pink' in 10-inch hanging baskets. The basket on the right was treated with a Bonzi drench at 8 ppm seven weeks after planting, and the picture was taken five weeks later. Right: These are 'Mini-Famous Light Blue' in 10-inch hanging baskets. The basket on the right was treated with a Bonzi drench at 4 ppm seven weeks after planting, and the picture was taken five weeks later. (Photos courtesy of Jim Barrett)

trial in spring 2002 with 'Mini-Famous Rose Pink', 'Mini-Famous Light Blue' and 'Mini-Famous Yellow'. For this trial, the 10-inch baskets were planted on February 19 and fertilized every watering with 300 ppm 15-5-15 fertilizer. The plants were treated April 11 (seven weeks after plant date), and the accompanying pictures were taken on May 18, 2002. With regard to the Rose Pink and Light Blue varieties, results were very similar to the 2000 trial. As can be seen in the pictures, Mini-Famous Yellow was the most vigorous of the three varieties in the 2002 evaluation. For the Yellow, 16 ppm Bonzi was required to provide the same degree of control as the 2 and 4 ppm used on Rose Pink and Light Blue.

INFLUENCING FACTORS

Bonzi is a helpful tool when trying to control Calibrachoa growth in production, as illustrated in this study. Differing cultural situations require adjusted rates according to growing temperature, fertilizer applications, time of year (light intensities and day length) and production

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