

New ornamental crop

■ A flower-inducing hormone applied by a floriculture specialist at the Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences (IFAS) at the University of Florida is expected to bring a popular landscape plant indoors.

The hormone induces *ixora* to produce blooms simultaneously and on demand, making the shrub a new, commercially competitive ornamental, notes extension floriculture specialist Benny Tjia. Star-shaped blooms appear six to eight weeks after treatment, making it ideal for shipping to northern markets.

A conservative prediction is that sales of *ixora* will increase from 100,000 to 1 million plants annually because of the hormone, Tjia says.

"Sixty percent of the ornamental flowers imported into Florida now come from Columbia," he adds. "That totals about \$750,000 worth of plants arriving each day. But instead of rolling over and playing dead, we're learning to cultivate plants that competitors can't."

More seed pregermination under way

■ More and more landscapers are looking toward pregermination of their seed before planting in order to get quicker germination in inclement weather, repair or renovate athletic fields, or to create a turf stand faster than normal seeding methods, says Nicholas R. Spardy, a sales representative with Northrup King Co. As proof of this trend, Spardy reviewed five (count 'em) pregermination methods and extolled the virtues of each. They are:

The Candlestick Park Method, used primarily to repair divots, involves mixing 150 pounds of Turface, 100 pounds of sand and 50 pounds of seed. Keep it in a moist state for up to seven days, layer it in, water it well and mound it.

The Kansas City Method involves soaking the seed in water that is changed every 12 hours. Do this until radical emergence can be seen.

The Northrup King Method has you put seeds in a burlap sack, soak them for 12 hours and then dry them for 12 hours at room temperature. Continue this cycle for seven days.

The Milwaukee Brewers Method, for drought repair, uses two ounces of Aqua Gro to each 55 gallons of water. Soak seeds in this solution, which must be changed every four hours. On the third day spread the seed with Milorganite 6-2-0.

Cal-Poly Method uses an aquarium pump to provide additional oxygen to water, which is changed every 12 hours.

Though all demonstrated a certain level of success, Spardy says, "Changing the water supply or somehow giving the seed a constant oxygen supply seems to be the key to success." That's because changing the water removes seed exudate, he says.

Another avenue being researched, dubbed the **Northrup King Modified Method**, involves placing the seed in 77°F water, which has cut the time of radical germination in half.

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