

Stay Focused on Scouting and Sanitation This Spring



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Benjamin Franklin is quoted as saying, “An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.” Our wise Founding Father and this e-Gro alert remind us all that taking small, early steps to prevent a problem is more effective and less costly than fixing a larger, more difficult problem in the future.

Regular scouting and the use of sound cultural and sanitation practices can prevent many future problems for greenhouse and nursery producers, retailers, and ultimately, consumers.

Preventing issues today can greatly reduce future headaches and expenses needed to resolve the issues. Consider these few guidelines to help you stay proactive and remain vigilant during some of the busiest times of the production year.

Many pests “hitchhike” within the media substrate, on foliage, flowers, and other plant parts, or even on containers themselves (Image 1). Thus, it is important to quarantine all incoming plant material until it has been thoroughly inspected and given a clean bill of health.

Pay special attention to containers carried over from last year, as pests may overwinter in the media and/or plant material (Image 2.).



Image 1. Unwanted pests like land snails can hide within the potting media, attach to foliage and other plant parts, or adhere to container rims and surfaces. All containerized plants should be thoroughly inspected upon arrival. Photos by Beth Scheckelhoff.

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Keeping hard surfaces clean and free of organic debris is an important goal for all greenhouses. Standing water, accumulated potting soil, and plant waste attract nuisance pests, including animals, insects that may transmit disease, and weeds like liverworts and moss.

Liverworts and mosses thrive in damp, nutrient-rich environments. They can be introduced into substrates by several means, as small leafy fragments or by spores that can move with splashing water and in contaminated media. Production areas that stay wet such as under benches or near cooling pads are especially prone to having liverworts and/or moss.

E-Gro Alert [9\(3\):2020](#) provides excellent information on liverwort identification and management practices, of which the main points are included here for review. Key liverwort management strategies include:

- Limit overhead irrigation and use drip irrigation to keep the media surface dry.
- High fertility levels on or near the soil surface encourage liverwort growth. Incorporate slow-release fertilizers into the media instead of top-dressing to limit liverwort growth on the substrate surface.
- Cover any bulk substrates that are open to the environment to prevent contamination with liverwort spores.
- Apply a 1/2 to 1-inch layer of rice hulls or pine bark mulch to the media surface to prevent spore germination.
- Regularly power-wash walkways, benches, and hard floor surfaces to remove organic debris. Once clean, follow-up with labeled disinfectant products containing hydrogen dioxide/peroxyacetic acid or quaternary ammonium to sanitize the surfaces.

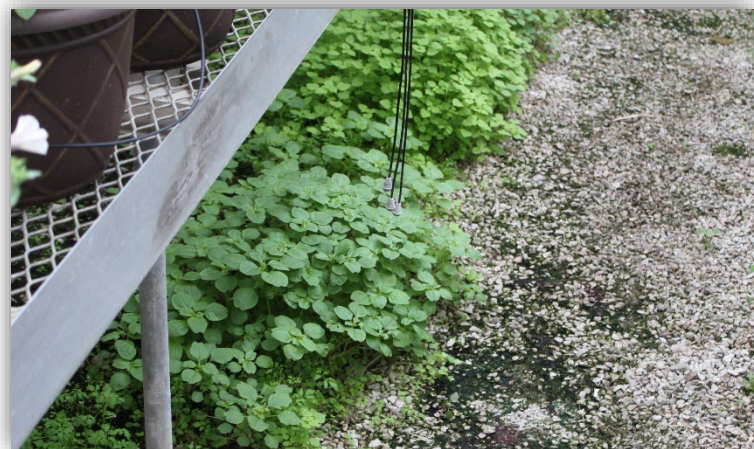
Benjamin Franklin's wise advice and these few reminders have hopefully encouraged you to scout the greenhouse environment and identify areas that need attention.



A small mass of slug eggs can be seen on the roots of an overwintering container shrub. The small, clear eggs measure 3-6 mm in diameter and can be easily overlooked. They are commonly found in clusters of 3-10 or more eggs. Photo by Beth Scheckelhoff.



Greenhouse producers can face issues with weeds, liverwort, and mosses, especially when infested containers of perennial and nursery stock are carried over from one season to another. Photo by Beth Scheckelhoff.



Wet soils and surfaces under benches provide an ideal environment for weeds to grow, potentially harboring insects that can transmit diseases like plant viruses. Controlling weeds prior to and during the growing season is an important practice to ensure plant health. Photo by Beth Scheckelhoff.

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