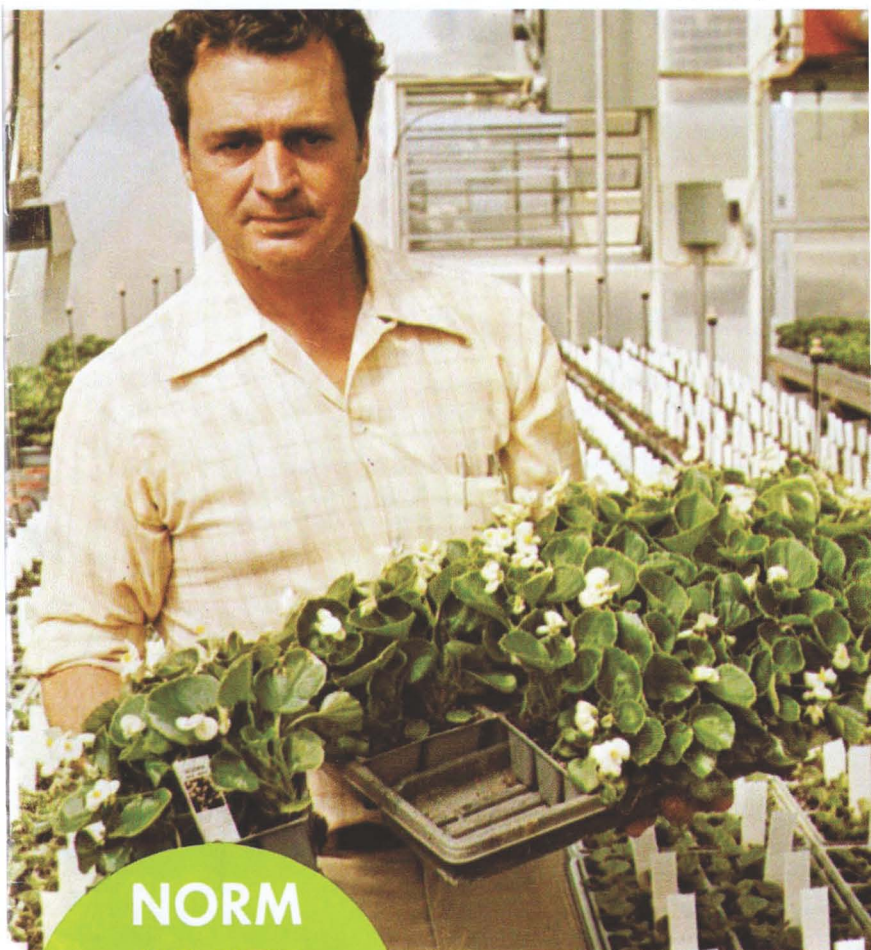


SEPTEMBER 1974

# GROWER Talks

Geo. J. Ball, Inc.



**NORM  
WHITE**

**Bedding "Grower  
of the Month"**

See Page 8

Norm White—See over

**ALSO** in this issue

- **Shortages**—fuel and plastic. The outlook for the winter. Page 1.
- **Mum growers**—cut crop time with gibberellic acid. Page 13.

# **Bedding Grower of the Month**

## **Norm White, Norfolk**

*By Vic Ball*

Norm does it *all* well!

He grows uniformly top quality, has a real marketing plan—and gets top prices, all of which adds up to profit—to finance expansion (up 20% again this year) and a fair return to the Whites for their effort.

Norm (and his good wife, Hetty) turn out around 25,000 flats of annuals a year—plus major pot-plant production—from their spruce range just out of Norfolk, Virginia. We stopped in early May—at the peak of the season. Details:

### **Container/Prices**

Basic annuals (petunias, marigolds) are grown in Cell-Paks®, mainly AC-6/8 (6 cells or plants per pack, 8 packs per flat). No bedding plants here more than 48 to a 21-inch flat. Says

Norm, "I just don't feel that I can grow quality—crowding 72 or 96 plants into a 21-inch flat. I have competitors who do 60 to a flat—but from what I see at the garden centers, the home gardener tends to buy the 48-per-flat plant, even though they get fewer plants per pack—and pay more for my plants.

"I'm straight \$4.72 for a 21-inch flat, wholesale, this year. No break for quantity or pick-up at the nursery. We went up about 9% this year (\$4.32 to \$4.72) and I still have all the business I can handle.

"Retail: Good garden centers are getting \$1.19 (cost, 59¢) per pack. That's double their cost. The better chains, (Grant's, for example) get 89¢. Again, for their 'no-service, help-yourself, high-volume' approach, a fair markup, about 50% over cost.

"Impatiens, begonias, some F<sub>1</sub> tomatoes (Better Boy), we produce in an AC-4/8. That's 4 plants per pack, 8 packs per flat. Now we're down to 32 plants per 21-inch flat, still \$4.72.

"On certain of the specialty vegetables, some tomatoes, cucumbers, peppers, where the customer wants two or three plants of each variety, we grow in A-36's. Those are 36 'pots' per 21-inch flat—not in packs at all now. I could tear them into 4's—but it's a lot of work. The A-36 is fast to fill, set out in the bench, and move to the garden center. Always you handle 36 plants at once. Only problem: The garden center hates single plants. They want to sell everything per pack—and at one price per pack, no matter how many plants of what. The AC-6/8 or 4/8 all go at the same price per pack, wholesale and retail."

## Marketing

Says Norm, "We advertise a good bit to help our retail outlets build sales. The ads do not list specific outlets—but so many of both chains and garden centers handle our plants, and they do appreciate the sales support. Mainly newspapers, no radio.

**Alongside the retail display structure is a billboard to accommodate annual posters—including the large planting guide. Helpful for self-service.**



"This policy enables me to push certain items I'm featuring. We drove hard on *Better Boy* tomato this spring, and it's selling out. Same for *Early Girl*—but the sharpest demand was for *Better Boy*. The strong national promotion created demand. By the way, people here think *Better Boy* is great. 'It's a long-lasting tomato.' Other varieties die off to disease—but gardeners tell us they ate *Better Boy* till December!

"Also ran heavy ads on *Carefree*<sup>®</sup> *geranium*. This we grew in AC-4/8 (4 plants per pack, 8 packs per flat). We got \$6.40 per flat wholesale, sold green. They sold well."

### What's Booming?

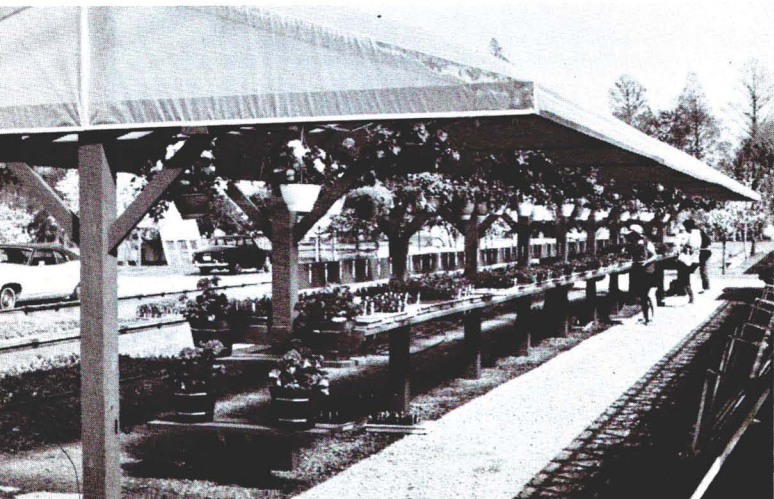
Always some losers, some gainers.

Like almost everyone, Norm says, "Impatiens are exploding. We never have enough. They're grown all from seed here—most plants seem to be going out green. We tell the garden center, but they still take them green—if they are good plants. Petunias are losing just a bit the past several seasons—but still a very big part of our show. Portulaca—much more call for them this spring.

"Vegetables really booming this year. They must be double what they were here last year. Fresh vegetables are so terribly expensive in the grocery store."

Hanging baskets: "We're sold out of ivy geraniums—grew 1100 of them. All 10-inch, \$5.00 wholesale." Other big basket items: Fuchsia, impatiens (see photo, below); also ivy with a fern, fibrous begonias, tuberous begonias. Norm was really pleased with a lot of Rieger begonias (*Aphrodite*) all sold out by April 1 at \$6.00 wholesale."

**Most sales at Whites are wholesale—but they do some retail from the greenhouses. The structure below was built to keep the job out of the rain and bright sun. Everything so clean and neat here!**





**Geraniums also irrigated by Spray Stake. Here's Norm's wife, Hetty, holding one of the nozzles.**

### **"Mighty Little Hand Watering Here"**

Nearly all irrigation of bedding plants here is done with Spray Stakes. (Photo, above). Stakes are spaced 48 inches down the bed. "Yes, we do touch up around the edges a bit." To make it work, Norm says:

- "1. Always use a loose, open soil. My bedding plant mix is half peat-lite mix (peat/vermiculite), half of 1-1-1 (peat, perlite, and soil), so it's five-sixths artificial humus or similar material. Very light and porous.
- "2. When we water, we really soak everything good. Water runs through the bed and down the aisle. That way there is plenty of water for the bigger plants, and the little newly planted seedlings don't get hurt because of the loose, open soil."

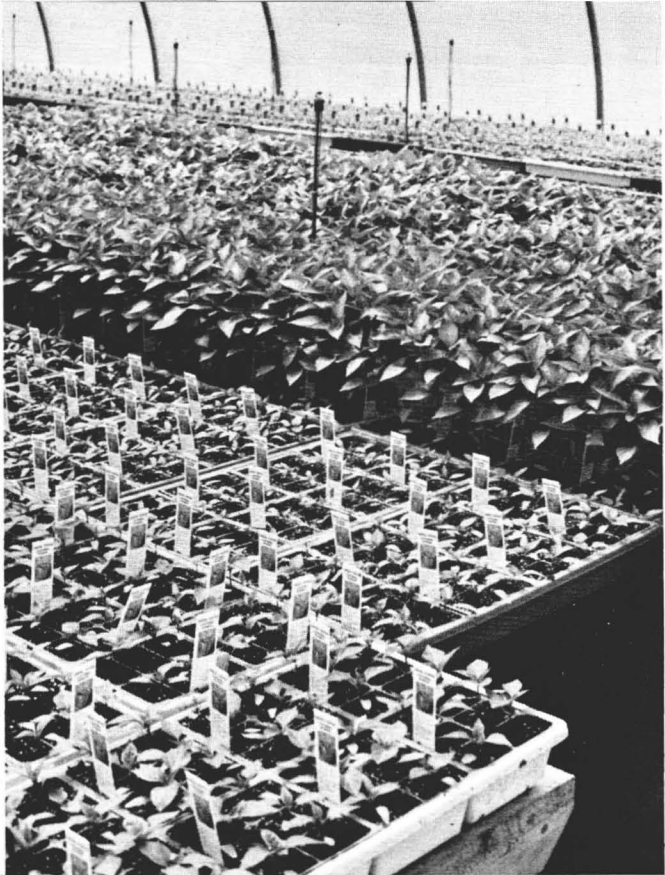
It works! Note (photo, page 12) the larger, ready-to-sell peppers alongside the newly-transplanted peppers—all under the same Chapin stake. By the way, Norm maintains 50 pounds pressure at the pump, 1½-inch main minimum to the bed.

Baskets are all on Chapin tubes and also pot plant crops.

### **Other Points**

Germination—all in Jiffy-Mix®, with electric cable to keep soil temperature 73-75°, never less. "We hand-mist seed flats—don't get it too wet!"

Structures: "A double poly roof costs me one-third less than fiberglass, so from now on we're building Criterion houses with double poly roof. My fuel cost is up over 50% against 1972."



Everything at Norm's is overhead irrigated—Spray Stake (center in the above photo). Note the large pepper plants on the right—and the newly transplanted peppers on the left—both watered by the same nozzle. See how it's done on page 11.

Petunias sold in flower? Says Norm, "It's mighty hard to turn out a quality petunia in flower. They get overgrown and hard so fast. So we sell most plants green—and always with a color tag. Tag-Along® seems to be our answer to the chains' demand to have both a colorful plant and still a quality plant."

Geraniums big here, too—all irrigated with Spray Stakes (overhead). Again, when we water, we soak them good—always water geraniums in the morning. Soil mix for geraniums is 1-1-1 (peat, perlite and soil). We use good specialist cuttings. One lot arrives February 15 (for early April 4's); the second lot comes March 15 and is mostly in flower in 4's by May 1. Six weeks, plant to flower. *Sincerity* is good, stays compact. Geraniums up some in '74.'

Conclusion: Certainly, Norm White is a fine example of U.S. bedding plants done well.