

## Speedling Finds Success with Biological Fungicide

**B**ruce Hammersmith, who serves as nursery manager at Speedling's Sun City, Florida, operation, has been searching for years for biological products that could replace methyl bromide, offer fungicidal properties without risk of phytotoxicity and be cost-effective and environmentally friendly.

To that end, Bruce has been testing a new biological fungicide called Companion, a formulation of *Bacillus subtilis* GB03 (Growth Products, White Plains, New York, Tel: (800) 648-7626, Online: [www.growthproducts.com](http://www.growthproducts.com)). After two years of trials he was convinced enough of its disease-prevention properties that last summer he used it on their entire plug crop.

Bruce told us that growing plugs in Florida is a special challenge during the heat and humidity of summer, not only because of disease problems, but also because of the risk of chemical phytotoxicity. He first tested this formulation of bacillus three summers ago on impatiens, a notoriously heat-sensitive plug crop. He says he saw no phytotoxicity and had no more disease problems than when using other fungicide drenches.

Next, he tried a tank mix of 50% fungicide and 50% bacillus on the entire crop. The results were again positive. So this summer Bruce switched to 100% bacillus to prevent diseases. He'll still drench with a curative fungicide if a problem comes up.



Photo: Kevin Hattori

Bruce Hammersmith says the biological fungicide Companion not only protects his crop from diseases, it also gives improved root growth for stronger plugs.

As for other benefits, Bruce says that, with the biological, he gets a much more vigorous root system. It's a simple and safe product to use (minimal PPE and a four-hour REI, which should drop to zero REI when it receives full registration by the end of March). However, Companion doesn't have a long tank life and needs to be mixed thoroughly. Otherwise, it can be applied as a drench through any injector system.

Bruce says he doesn't know if the other Speedling locations have tried Companion yet—but he likes it enough to use it on 150 million plugs. ■

—Chris Beytes

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