

WAIT! DON'T TRASH THAT POLY!

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Don't trash that poly—yet! You can still find many uses for it. In this time of harvesting poly prices it behooves us to make the best possible use of petroleum-derived materials. I am talking primarily about the poly used to overwinter plants.

We use ours for at least two things: 1) as a covering for our summer softwood cutting propagation beds and, 2) to provide extra overwintering protection for softwood cuttings and small potted plants in flats in polyhouses, without the use of heaters. Instead of just discarding the poly that comes off our overwintering houses, we save it. We cut it into two pieces which are 12 x 100 ft. by slicing it lengthwise down the center with a knife before the poly is removed from the houses. Then we remove each piece, fold, and tie it into small bundles, and store it out of the sun.

Later in June, July, and August when it is time to root cuttings, we pull out a sheet of poly and after the cuttings are stuck into sand beds we cover them with white poly and seal up the bed. Thus we greatly reduce the amount of mist that needs to be used. By the time the cuttings are rooted the poly is beginning to sun rot, so we remove it and then trash it.

In the fall, as the time for recovering our houses for the winter draws near, we pull out another sheet and cover each bed of softwood cuttings or small potted material. We hold the poly in place by "tacking down" one edge with sand along the outer edges of the polyhouse, then we stuff the poly down around the plants to keep the wind from carrying it off until we can get the polyhouses covered for the winter. To keep the covered plants from molding under the poly blanket, we form half-inch conduit pipe into 12 in. high bows to hold the poly blanket off the tops of the plants. Then in November we finish the job of winter covering by applying two layers of new poly to each house. Insulation is achieved by the use of a pole blower which forces air between the two layers of poly. During the coldest days and nights of winter when the temperature goes down to 15° F and below we pull the poly blanket over the beds making sure it touches the ground in the aisle to insure a good seal, thus keeping the cold out and trapping the ground heat in. These blankets can then be pulled open on days when temperatures are above 40° F. I have found that by doing a good job of sealing around polyhouses and doors, and with this extra poly blanket, the temperature never goes below 25° F even during a -20° F windy storm. Thus you can reduce overwintering heat bills on softwood cuttings and small potted material.