

## More Cheese Please<sup>©</sup>

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At McKay Nursery we use a polycarbonate greenhouse to root some of our more difficult-to-root softwood cuttings. We root them in square flats in a peat and perlite medium. We were having problems keeping the cuttings turgid while maximizing our mist interval. Instead of increasing the frequency of misting, which could lead to increased disease, we are using cheesecloth.

In the past cheesecloth has been used mostly for shading and moisture distribution. Our use of cheesecloth distributes moisture evenly and also brings the moisture to the surface of the leaves and stem. Our use of cheese cloth differs from the use in the past because we are laying the cloth directly on the cuttings not using a structure to support the cloth above the cuttings.

The cheesecloth is used to create a moisture-rich microclimate around our softwood cuttings (Fig. 1). To reduce transpiration and decrease solar exposure we drape cheesecloth, which gets moistened by the mist, over the cuttings. Because we drape our flats in cheesecloth the moisture weighs down the cheesecloth and helps it form to the surface of the cutting. We leave it on until callus formation or roots start to show, depending on the plant. This allows us to extend the mist interval and allows for more air exchange in the greenhouse.

We have seen an increase in rooting percentage in many plants using this method. Along with increased rooting success we are able to root softwoods in a structure while it is simultaneously growing other crop. This method is much more inexpensive than modifying or renovating our existing mist system. With this method we are able to use our entire bench space and reduce the amount of mist the plants are receiving.



Fig. 1. Cheesecloth covering the cuttings.

