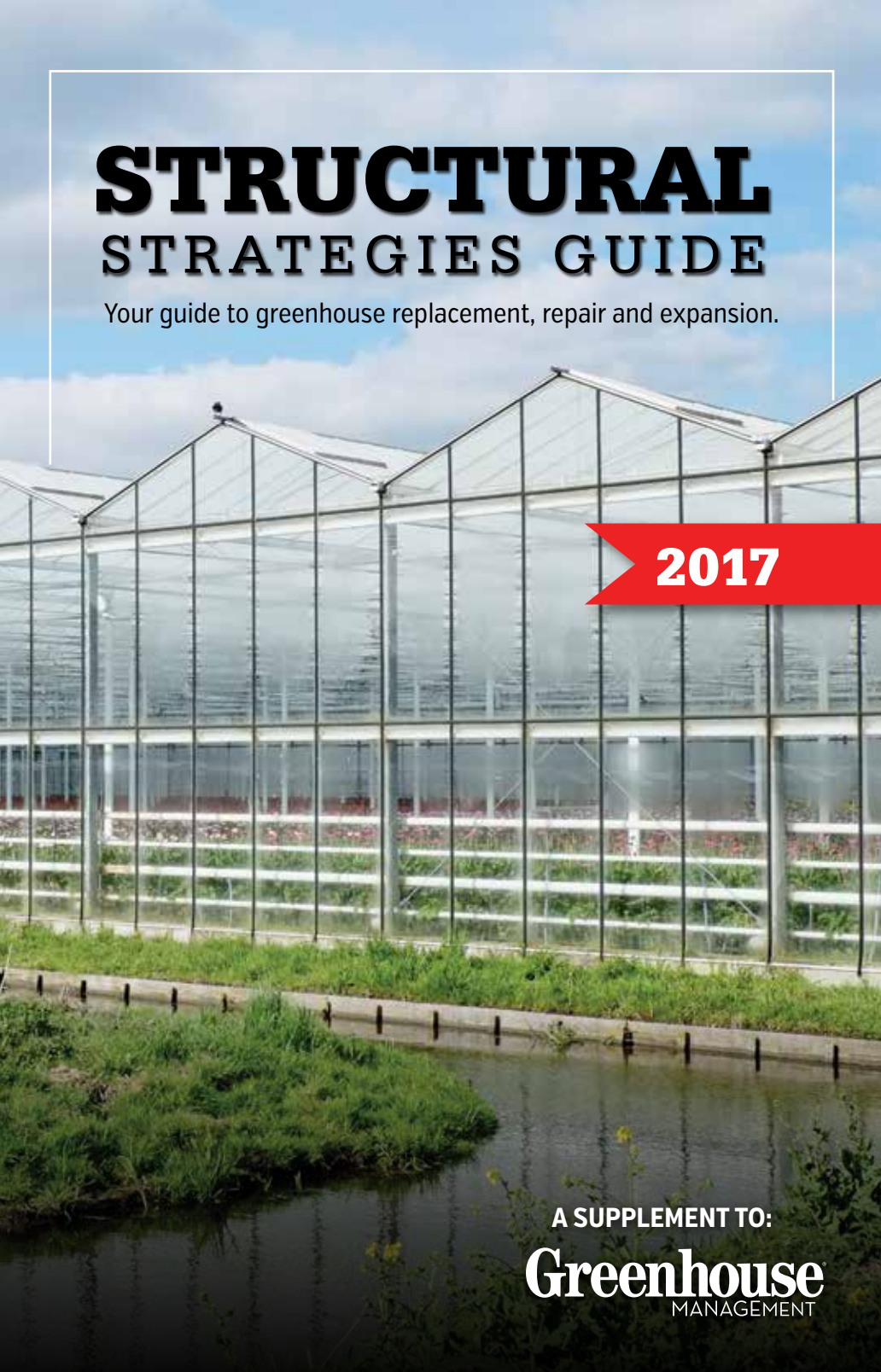
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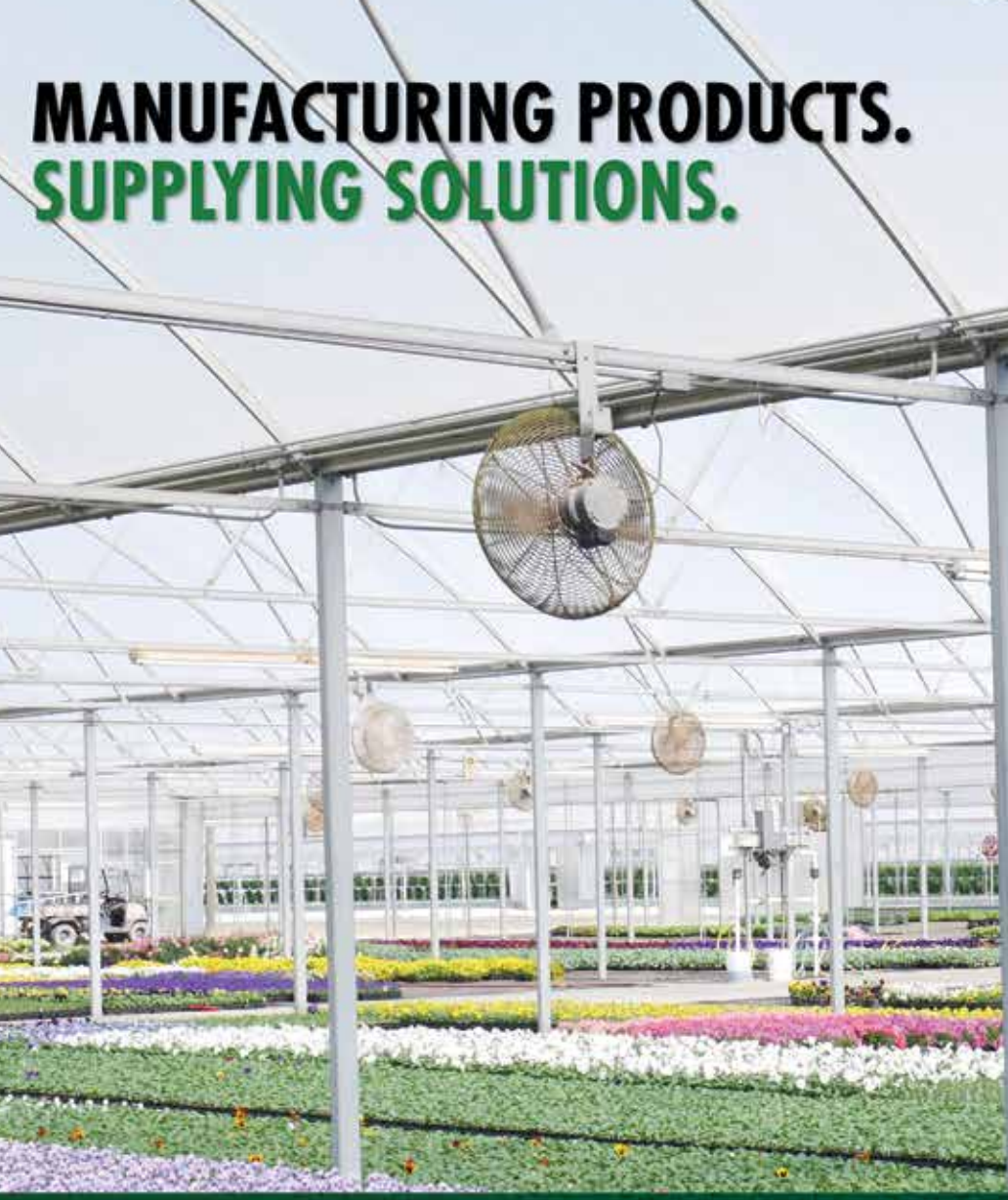
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STRUCTURING SUCCESS IN THE SOUTH

Young's Plant Farm continues to grow even after 50-plus years in business. By Helen M. Stone

ALTHOUGH 1961 might seem like ancient history, those who lived it have some vivid memories. John F. Kennedy was inaugurated as president and the Cold War with the Russians heated up alarmingly with the Cuban Missile Crisis. The average house cost less than $13,000 and a dozen eggs would set you back 30 cents.

The U.S. was rebounding from a mild recession, making it the a perfect time for Gene Young to take the plunge and open Young's Plant Farm in Auburn, Ala. With a strong work ethic and even stronger family values, the farm has grown and thrived throughout the decades.

The past 50-plus years included

PHOTOS COURTESY OF YOUNG'S PLANT FARM



Young's Plant Farm recently added about 100,000 square feet for potential expansion.

multiple national economic challenges, including a "soft" economy throughout the 1990s and the Great Recession from 2007-09. Yet Young's Plant Farm quietly added legions of satisfied customers, which led to growth and expansion that is still blossoming today.

In 2017, the farm now comprises two growing operations in Auburn, plus a third farm in Andrews, N.C. With 40-plus acres of greenhouse space and 35 acres of outside growing areas, Young's Plant Farm prides itself on offering the public the best quality flowering plants. These tough, well-adapted beauties have delighted both retailers and consumers with their vigor and longevity for decades.

The management team is led by a half-dozen Young family members, with Greg Young leading as president. The mix of generations has led to cutting-edge technology, a focus on sustainability and recycling, and a corporate culture that fosters creativity and enthusiasm across all employees on board.

One of the keys to success for the business is the ventilated, open-roof greenhouses, providing both improved crop health and yields in a sustainable environment. "You get better energy efficiency and you get natural ventilation," explains Greg Young. "You also get a stronger plant that adapts to the market better. It's grown in and for the local elements."

Shade curtains are also employed year-round. In the summer, the curtains shield tender plants from the blazing sun and heat that Alabama can dish out. When the days grow short and the weather cools, the automated curtains provide heat retention.

"Although we don't have automated

Since Gene Young opened Young's Plant Farm in 1961, his family has been involved in the operation.



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One key to success at Young Plant's Farm is its ventilated, open-roof greenhouses.

black cloth, we do black cloth some crops," Young says. Poinsettias are a major holiday crop at the farm, with cyclamen a perennial favorite as well.

Supplemental lighting is also used in some greenhouses during the shorter days of fall and winter. "We use supplemental lighting for long-day crops when we are growing during the months when the days are short," Young explains.

Although the economy is still considered somewhat soft, Young's Plant Farm just laid the groundwork for even more expansion. "We've just added about 100,000 square feet for potential expansion," Young says. "As the market demands, we will be ready to continue to expand."

Helen is a freelance writer in California with a degree in urban horticulture and more than 30 years of experience in the green industry.

PHOTO COURTESY OF YOUNG'S PLANT FARM







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A plant mall and tropicals

New greenhouses and retail offerings provide prosperity to Mesquite Valley Growers Nursery.

By Patrick Williams

BEGINNING 25 YEARS AGO with a single acre and three employees, Mesquite Valley Growers Nursery in Tucson, Ariz., has since expanded to 27 acres of total production space, including approximately four acres undercover. As it enlarges, the grower-retailer is working to increase its consumer draw.

Inspired by international tours hosted by the International Garden Centre Association, Mesquite Valley Grow-

PHOTO COURTESY OF MESQUITE VALLEY GROWERS NURSERY



The greenhouse that Mesquite Valley Growers Nursery is adding for its second phase of construction is a double arch structure that Bishop says "allows for fewer supports for a clean, open look."

ers Nursery recently installed a new "flower house" and also plans to add a greenhouse for tropical plants, says Cathy Bishop, who co-owns the nursery with Tom Birt. "We have been working many years on ideas for the expansion that we just completed," she says.

However, the expansion isn't done — the project includes two phases. The nursery completed the first phase prior to Father's Day 2017, and it plans to begin the second phase within the next six to eight months.

The first phase includes the "flower house," which is a custom greenhouse structure that houses annuals, perennials, herbs, vegetables, and gift and specialty arrangements. The completed phase also includes the addition of an air-cooled "plant mall," a garden store and gift shop with eight cash register islands and an information counter.

The second phase will include the structure for the tropical plants, as well as new meeting rooms the nursery will use to host plant clubs, nursery presentations and other events. The plant mall will eventually include areas to relax and drink coffee. There will also be a lounge with cable TV that will air sports games as part of an effort to appeal to customers who Bishop deems "non-nursery-aholics." "In traveling around the world and looking at the best garden centers, it was very easy to see that one of the reasons people spend a lot of time in those facilities is the fact that they offer them indulgences that make it easy to hang out for a longer period," she says.

The expansion focused on creating a comfortable, air-cooled space where customers could spend time while they shop, Bishop says. It has been a success so far, she says, because since the nursery opened its plant mall, sales have been up 10 to 15 percent.

Out of its numerous greenhouses, the nursery has two retractable roof structures, Bishop says. One of the two covers more than an acre, and the other covers about three-quarters of an acre. The majority of the nursery's production greenhouses are heavy metal hoophouses with 1-acre flat roofs. Many of its greenhouses do not have heating, but the seedling house has hot water bench heating. Some of the greenhouses are equipped with shade cloth. "There is only one that has environmental controls in it, and that is one that we use both for growing orchids and for starting cuttings and seeds of more delicate plants," Bishop says.

Mesquite Valley Growers Nursery is saving money for the second phase of its expansion, Bishop says. "That's a funny thing about us — we like to save the money for something before we do it, rather than going into debt," she says. "It's very hard to do a multimillion-dollar expansion without having some bank assistance, but we do try to do the best we can."

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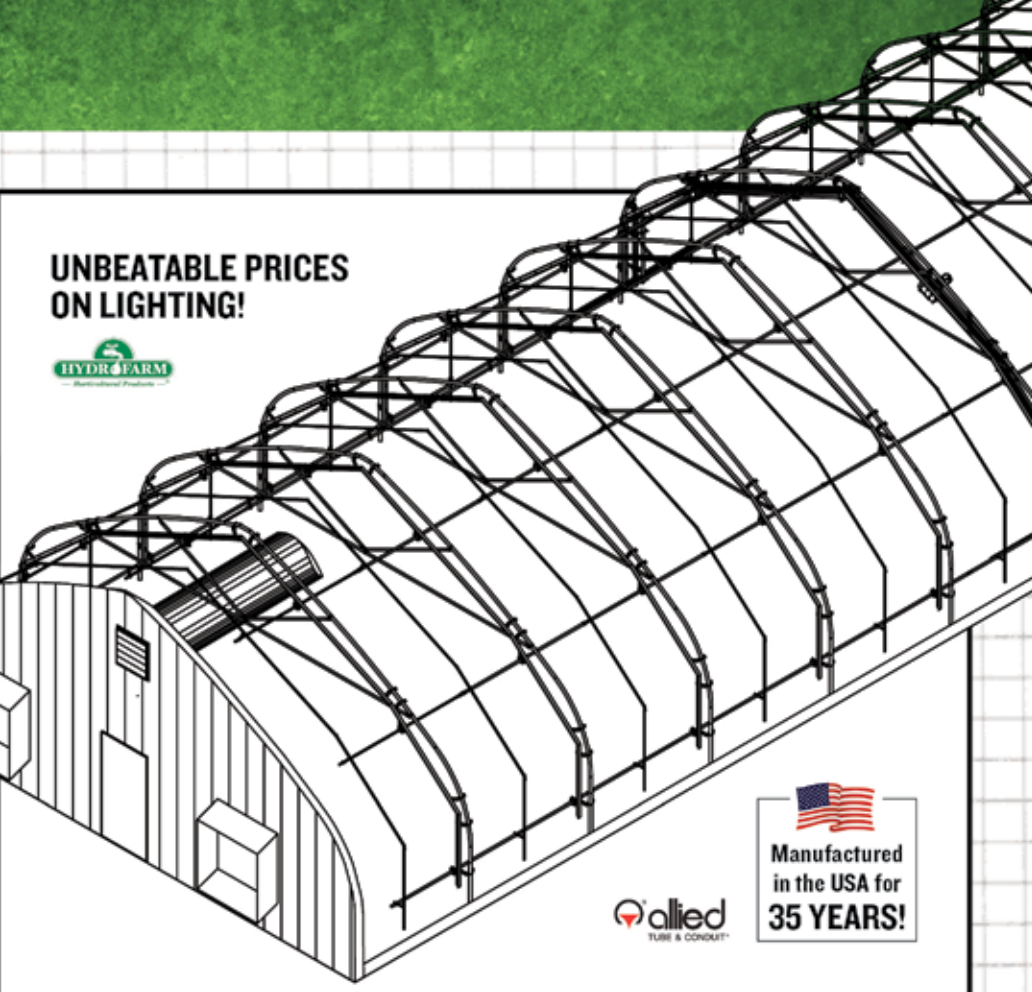
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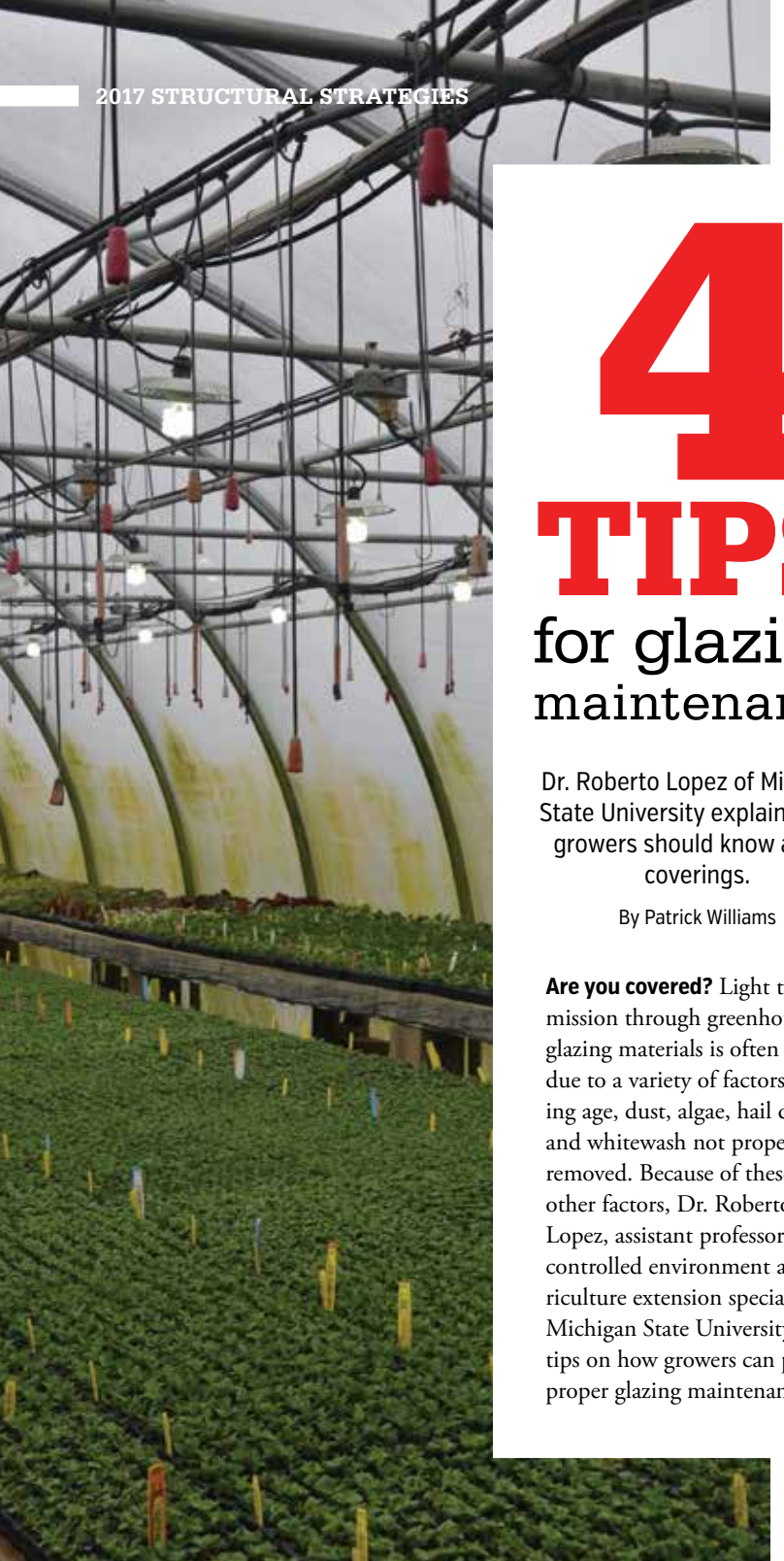
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4 TIPS for glazing maintenance

Dr. Roberto Lopez of Michigan State University explains what growers should know about coverings.

By Patrick Williams

Are you covered? Light transmission through greenhouse glazing materials is often reduced due to a variety of factors including age, dust, algae, hail damage and whitewash not properly removed. Because of these and other factors, Dr. Roberto Lopez, assistant professor and controlled environment and floriculture extension specialist at Michigan State University, offers tips on how growers can perform proper glazing maintenance.

PHOTOS: ROBERTO LOPEZ





Growers should replace coverings at the manufacturer's recommended rate.

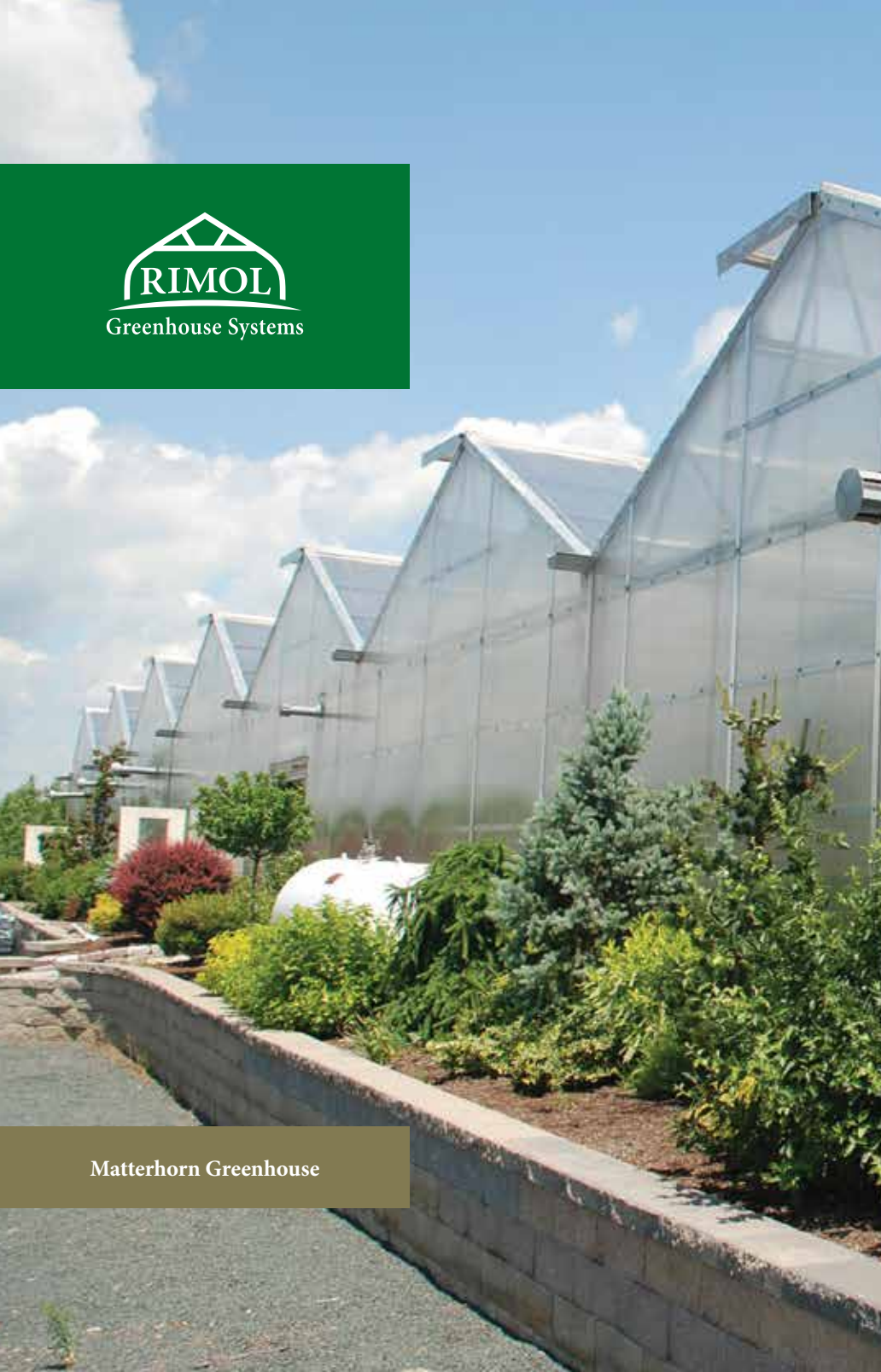
1. Replace coverings at the manufacturer's recommended rate.
Growers should replace coverings at the rate the manufacturer recommends to maintain optimum light transmission, Lopez says. This is especially true with flexible plastic films such as polyethylene, polyester and polyvinyl chloride, which 59.5 percent of respondents to G*reenhouse Management*'s 2017 Structures Report said cover most of their production area (**bit.ly/structuresreport**).

2. Clean your glazing materials.
Between replacing coverings, growers should clean them. "Some growers have a lot of problems with dirt, pollen or dust collecting on the glazing material, which is going to reduce the light transmission," Lopez says. "[Other issues are] algae and iron deposits from irrigation water."

3. Remove whitewash in the winter.
Whitewash does its job of reducing light intensity and helping reduce air temperatures in warmer months, but it keeps those effects through the winter, often blocking out too much light. When natural light levels drop, growers who have applied whitewash should remove it, Lopez says. "That's what makes whitewash not as nice as a retractable shade curtain that you can be opened up on a cloudy day and retracted when it's sunny," he says.

4. Consult with the glazing manufacturer about protecting against harsh weather conditions.
Some glazing materials are more prone to damage by hail and environmental conditions than others, Lopez says. And as they age, coverings are more likely to be affected by harsh conditions. "If you're in an area that tends to have a high incidence of hail, talk to a manufacturer about what materials would be most resistant," Lopez says.

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Building blocks for **IMPROVEMENT**

Walters Gardens replaced decades-old greenhouses to enhance what it does best.

By Chris Manning

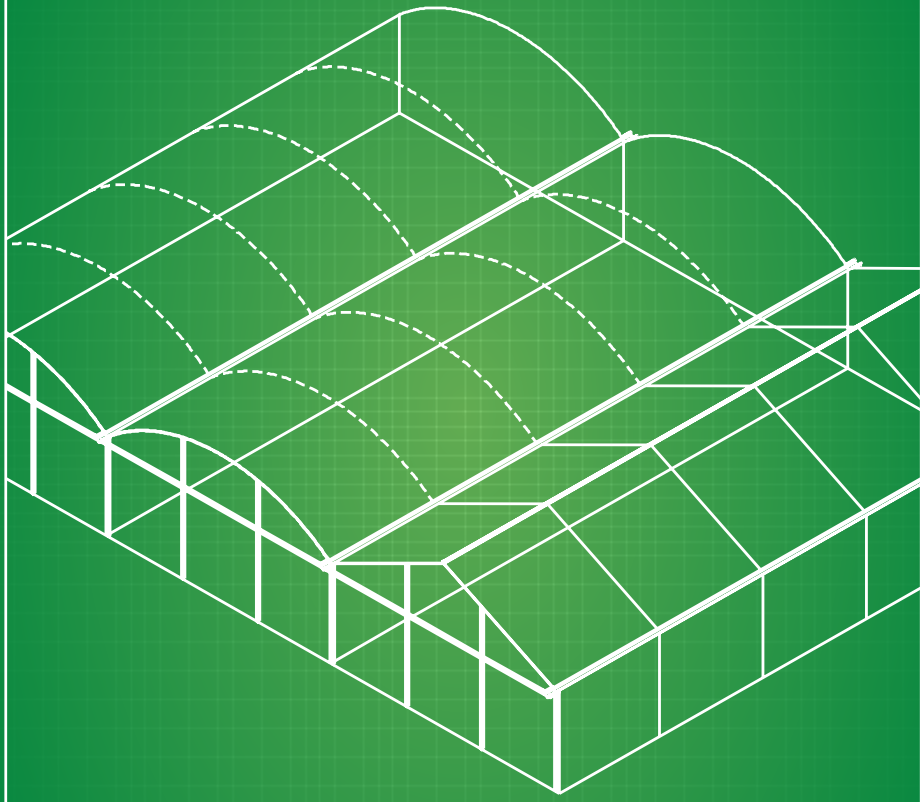
WALTERS GARDENS, the Zeeland, Michigan-based grower best known for its perennials, has been building 30,000 square feet of new production space for about a year. Before winter last year, it was able to complete a third of the construction before continuing the work and finishing it this year for it to be fully operational when the busy spring season begins in a few months.

"We're finishing up right now," Drew Koschmann, Walters' head grower, said in November. "We're hanging up the irrigation booms right now, and after that, it's pretty much ready to go."

To make room for the new greenhouses — which are made of diffused glass, have a dry fog system, a heated floor, utilize high pressure sodium (HPS) lights and are fitted with an environmental controls system that offers detailed insight into every aspect of the greenhouse — old structures home to high-humidity and propagation areas

PHOTO COURTESY OF WALTERS GARDENS

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had to come down.

About half of the older structures were built in the 1980s, with a quarter having been built in 1994 and the last quarter built in 2004. All were showing signs of wear and tear — posts deteriorating, yellow-tinted walls, repairs becoming too frequent to be manageable or affordable — and it was simply time for something new.

"The older half was getting to the point where it wasn't structurally sound anymore," said Justin Dyk, Walters' maintenance supervisor. "At the base of the posts, we were getting a lot of rust. In some spots, you could poke a screwdriver right through the pipe."

According to Koschmann, the new structures make everyone's job easier. For one, the new greenhouses are bigger, giving employees more room to move as they stick cuttings, and to push through the greenhouse. It's also a taller facility — 19 feet from floor to ceiling, according to Koschmann — which allows for better light distribution, a key attribute in a Michigan climate that requires supplemental light for successful growing. And they're right next to the Elle Plug production room, which Koschmann said makes propagation easier to manage because of the proximity to one another.

The new facilities will primarily serve the same purposes as the old structures did, and act as acclimation houses for propagation efforts. Koschmann said this facility will be mostly used for two to three weeks a year, but it's still essential to the operation's ability to produce the amount of perennials needed to support sales.

"We're doing a lot of our propagation in the colder months here in

Walters built its new structures to replace ones that were decades old.



PHOTO COURTESY OF WALTERS GARDENS



Walters' new facilities features higher ceilings that allow for better light distribution.

Western Michigan, so our income starts increasing as we get closer to the first of the year," he said. "Just having that soil temperature be in the low 70s, and also grow lights that help turn the product faster, matters. It helps with rooting and overall growth, so it allows us to turn around things faster and make room for incoming [plants]. We have to empty those houses out and make room for what's coming in."

During warmer months, Koschmann said the new facility will be able to hold plants for longer times when the operation is cramped for space in other houses.

"Now the plants that need a few more weeks can be left in there, finished in there and sorted in there," he said. "It's going to make us more productive."

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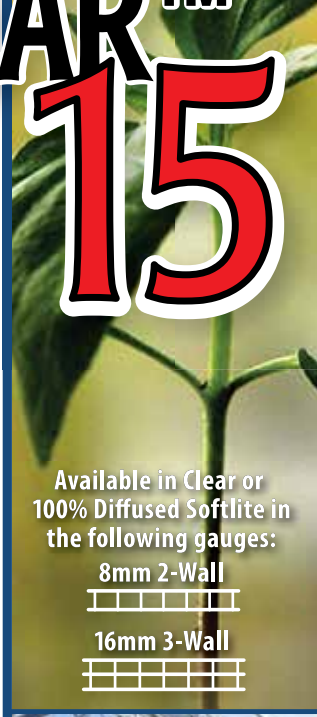
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