

# Solexx Paneling

Frustrated with films? Find out what other growers have to say about an alternative greenhouse covering.

By Meghan Boyer



It is not uncommon to hear growers complain about their greenhouse covers. With installation problems, longevity issues and overall exasperations at hand, some have been prompted to explore the entire world of greenhouse coverings. One newer option for growers is Solexx paneling from Farm Wholesale Ag, a company that specializes in commercial plastics and twin-wall products. Solexx paneling is a twin-walled, polyethylene glazing that is UV certified and comes with an 8-year warranty. Overall, growers who currently use this product feel that the Solexx paneling's design, sturdy yet pliant material and ease of use and maintenance, among other positive traits, make it an excellent alternative for those fed up with covering problems.

## THE FIRST STEP

Logically, the first problem any grower will encounter with greenhouse coverings arises during the installation process. A good example of an installation problem is a stiff wind that comes up while covering the greenhouse in poly; the plastic is unruly and can get caught on nearby objects, either tearing or accumulating holes. Russell Houser of Earth Touch Nurseries, Huntsville, Ala., knew he liked Solexx paneling from the start: "I like this paneling because it's a lot easier than putting on the plastic. There are no problems, no holes." Solexx paneling comes in a continuous roll that is up to 1,000 feet long. Customers can order the exact lengths necessary for their needs, minimizing waste. The width of each roll is 49 1/2 inches (or 4 feet, 1 1/2 inches), which fits easily on buildings with supports spaced 4 feet apart. The paneling can be run horizontally or vertically.

Most growers found it quite easy, though a bit time consuming, to put the Solexx paneling up. "The stuff is easy...It's like building end walls for

dummies. It was on a roll, and you can cut it easily. It's just much easier to install," said Bob Sposato of Sposato Wholesale Greenhouses, Worcester, Mass.

Tom Miller of Country Comfort Greenhouses, Middlebury, Ind., found the installation process more complex because his supports are spaced 6 feet apart. He explains: "It was designed for 4-foot bow spacing, mine are 6. So we went horizontal rather than over or vertically, bow to bow, which just meant that there was a lot of time involved in putting material across the greenhouse full length. To lay that and fasten it, too." Despite the time involved and the creative efforts he put forth (he constructed his own makeshift scaffolding to get paneling to the top) Tom is pleased with the outcome; the effort was worth it. "It's nice when it's on," he said.

## MORE PERKS

George Takemori of Golden Nursery, San Mateo, Calif., argued that the elements often test poly's durability. His never lasted more than a year; they were constantly tearing, collecting water and flapping in the wind. His advice to other growers, coming from his experience, is "don't waste money on film. It is just labor intensive, it doesn't look as good and you have to do it every year." He found Solexx paneling stronger and better able to withstand strong winds and heavy precipitation. When Miller was putting his up, it took a 50-mph wind and caught it like a parachute. "It'll take whatever comes, no problem," he assures. "I've been watching plastic flop in the wind for the past 16 years. I can look out in the biggest wind, and it's just standing there. There's nothing billowing. There's nothing being pushed on that I can recognize. I'm not having to go out and figure out if I need to crank up my inflation fan."

The paneling comes in two types, regular 3.5 mm,

the standard thickness, and 5 mm, which provides added strength. The longevity of Solexx paneling is furthered because it is impervious to chemicals, moisture and mildew and will not yellow or bruise. Most growers we talked to have had Solexx for about one year, generally since last fall. While that isn't long enough to truly test the longevity of the product, growers did point out that the paneling weathered a year's worth of issues (from season changes to freak meteorological occurrences) splendidly, which gives them high hopes for continued durability.

Two other bonuses of the twin-walled design that growers have found are that it provides added insulation and filters sunlight. The flutes between the two layers diffuse light, resulting in 70-75 percent evenly distributed sunlight and no problems from solar burning. The air trapped between the two layers also reduces heating costs. Miller agrees with both: "I was a little questioning on light with this. On the heating end, I know there was improvement in my situation. I did it with less heat; I can do it with a smaller heater."

Other benefits of Solexx paneling, according to growers, are its lack of maintenance needs and its price. Jim Mood of Woodman Gardens, Higginsville, Mo., expresses many growers' sentiments in terms of maintenance: "I've done nothing to it since I put it on." Overall, growers are pleased with Solexx paneling. Those who have it are happy with it because it was relatively easy to install, doesn't need maintenance and shows promising signs of longevity. GPN

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