

CATOCTIN MOUNTAIN GROWERS

Keymar, Maryland

How One Grower Kicked Perlite Out the Door

For a variety of reasons, many growers are actively seeking a high-quality, cost-effective alternative to one or more of their media ingredients. The HydraFiber[®] team is often asked which raw material our products can best be used to replace, and we tell them it's whatever material is *their* biggest pain point. Some HydraFiber customers are using it in place of peat or coir because of the higher cost and uncertain availability of these materials. Former bark users cite inconsistency concerns and unavailability as their reasons for evolving to HydraFiber. And when it comes to perlite, almost every HydraFiber customer is seeing similar air space for root development as traditional mixes, but with a lot less dust, no shortage worries, and more efficient use of their labor and space.

"I don't miss anything about perlite. It's been good to get rid of it." These simple, straightforward words recently came from Henry Thorpe, General Manager at Catoctin Mountain Growers, and one of the first growers in the country to switch to engineered-fiber HydraFiber Advanced Substrate. Henry explained, "We used perlite as an aggregate in our soil for over 30 years. We used to get truckloads of it. Not only did storing it

"I don't miss anything about perlite.
It's been good to get rid of it."

Henry Thorpe, General Manager,
Catoctin Mountain Growers



take up valuable production space, but the clouds of dust were very unhealthy for our employees to breathe in and it was very abrasive to our equipment. When I learned about HydraFiber from my fellow growers, I knew that if it worked as well as perlite, this could be just the product we need to eliminate perlite from our growing facilities forever. We trialed HydraFiber in 2016, then started using HydraFiber Ultra 160WB full time in January 2017. We're very happy with it and have replaced some of the peat in our mix as well."

The bottom line according to Henry, "HydraFiber has saved us a lot of money, it's saved wear-and-tear on our machinery, and it's taken away the headaches of perlite availability. It's been a seamless transition, all our crops have grown well in HydraFiber, and the growers didn't really have to change the growing style very much at all."

Catoctin Mountain's first experience with HydraFiber started with growing trials. Henry noted, "We received a blended sample from the HydraFiber team that first summer. We transplanted some 3-quart mums and did direct-sticks of some 10-inch poinsettias in it. Both performed equally well in the HydraFiber-peat mix as in our regular perlite-peat mix. In fact, when we spaced the poinsettias, we actually 'lost' the HydraFiber trial poinsettias, and they got shipped and sold right along with the poinsettias in our regular mix. That showed us HydraFiber could grow plants that were at least as good when it came to quality!"



CATOCTIN MOUNTAIN'S GROWING TEAM

How difficult was it for the Catoctin team to learn to grow in a HydraFiber-peat blend versus their traditional perlite-peat mix? Henry reported no adjustments were needed. "Our growers have kept their watering regimes very similar. A HydraFiber blend dries out differently than a perlite-peat blend. So we've gone to picking up the pots and looking at the root zones to make a judgment on when to water next.

"Now that we've got a couple of years of production with HydraFiber under our belts, we're very confident in our blends. We started doing direct-stick programs on our mum and poinsettia crops, and were so pleased with the results that we now direct stick everything we can to save on transplanting labor. In general, that has shaved off about a one-week production time and it's working well for us."

"HydraFiber has saved us a lot of money, it's saved wear-and-tear on our machinery, and it's taken away the headaches of perlite availability."

Henry Thorpe

Making the move to HydraFiber has been for the most part seamless, explained Henry, although one challenge has been getting consistent fill. The beauty of the HydraFiber particle is that its 'cotton-like' structure adds air space to the soil. However, that same characteristic delivers a different flow out of the potting soil hoppers than a perlite-peat mix. So some adjustments to the settings on the filling equipment may need to be made.

"We started at 35% HydraFiber and moved up to 40% HydraFiber, 60% peat," Henry explained. "We're seriously looking at adding a second bin to mix two different blends and going a little higher with HydraFiber in one option. Then our production lines could call for either depending on the container size or crop."

"For growers just starting out, we recommend that on anything smaller than a 4-inch pot not to go higher than a 30% inclusion rate," explains Jennifer Neujahr, Business Development Manager for HydraFiber. "At the lower inclusion rates, smaller containers are easier to fill. Once you get comfortable, you can explore going higher in inclusion rates. Our team has assembled a strong arsenal of resources to share with growers to achieve the ideal fill with our products."



ADVICE FROM HENRY

It's been five years since Henry took the advice of the very first HydraFiber growers, and he's now happy to pass along a few quick thoughts to those either still considering the product or just starting out with HydraFiber:

- Don't be afraid to try it. We were skeptical when we started but we now use 40% HydraFiber in all of our blends. I encourage all growers to look at HydraFiber.
- In smaller containers like packs, use an inclusion rate less than 30%. It makes it much easier to get consistent fill.
- When going above 40%, be sure to evaluate how much lime you use. As you take out more peat, you will need to make adjustments. The HydraFiber team can help you with that, like they did for us.
- You can count on the HydraFiber team. They're very supportive, with plenty of contact and lots of visits...back when that was possible!

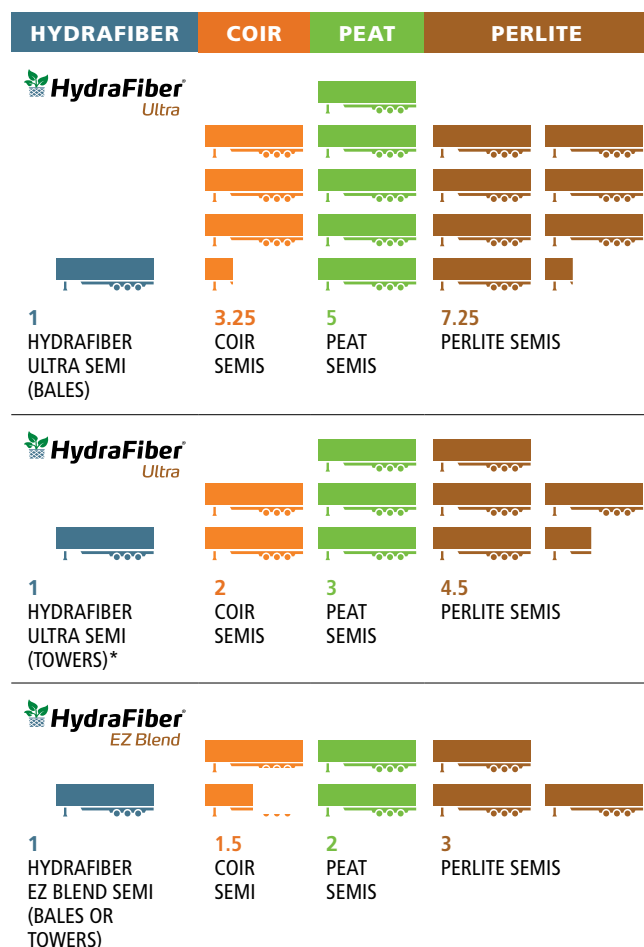
Our thanks to Henry for talking about Catoctin Mountain Growers' successful move away from perlite to HydraFiber. If you're a grower or blender interested in learning more and starting your HydraFiber trials, check out our brochure now, visit hydrafiber.com for more information, or reach out to us at hydrafiber@profileproducts.com or 800-496-0955.

What separates HydraFiber from other substrates?

Because HydraFiber is a unique, factory-engineered material, it comes with built-in consistency and year-round availability across all sizes and formulations. This "Made in the USA" product line is giving many North American growers and blenders great relief from rising material, manpower and shipping costs, while producing superior plants.

HydraFiber's **LOW BULK DENSITY** is a huge advantage. The highly compressed materials ship very efficiently, with a single truckload of HydraFiber Ultra bales replacing five semis of peat and more than seven semis of perlite. When it comes to weight, a HydraFiber-peat blend logs in at 8% lower than a comparable perlite-peat blend.

HYDRAFIBER: A LITTLE GOES A LONG WAY!



* Numbers based on bale shaver processing; expected yield will be lower with less automated processing (i.e., bucket blending). Due to the large range of variability, Bark/Compost comparison numbers are available upon request.

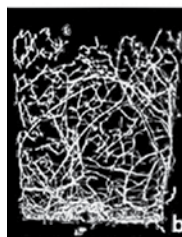
HYDRAFIBER'S LOW BULK DENSITY IMPROVES BUSINESS EFFICIENCIES

	SAMPLE BULK DENSITY (LBS./CU FT.)	INCLUSION (%)	BULK DENSITY (LBS./CU FT.)
PEAT	10.5	85	8.9
PERLITE	7	15	1.1
TOTAL WEIGHT			10.0
PEAT	10.5	85	8.9
HYDRAFIBER	1.9 (SHRUNK)	15	0.3
TOTAL WEIGHT			9.2 (8% LOWER)
MIX	PALLET WT. AT 2:1 (LBS.)	UNITS PER TL	
85% PEAT: 15% PERLITE	2,200	20	
85% PEAT: 15% HYDRAFIBER	2,024	21	5% MORE UNITS PER TL

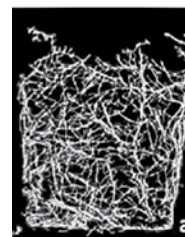
Note: This example provided for illustration purposes. Individual results for peat and perlite will vary.

Growers using HydraFiber blends report **EQUAL OR BETTER ROOT STRUCTURE** compared to other mixes on their bedding crops, succulents, tropicals, perennials, vegetables, hemp, woodies and more. HydraFiber delivers higher air space than other popular substrate ingredients, and creates a superior, **AIR-RICH ROOT ZONE ENVIRONMENT** while providing **MORE AVAILABLE WATER FOR PLANT UPTAKE**.

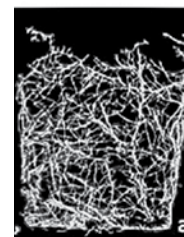
HYDRAFIBER PRODUCES EQUAL OR BETTER ROOT DEVELOPMENT



PERLITE 20%
PEAT 80%



HYDRAFIBER 30%
PEAT 70%



HYDRAFIBER 40%
PEAT 60%

Marigold root development 38 days after planting. Trial results from Dr. Glenn Fain, Auburn University.

Independent studies show that crops can be grown safely using HydraFiber at **HIGHER INCLUSION RATES**. Dr. Glenn Fain's poinsettia trials took HydraFiber to 60% with success, while recent lab tests conducted by RHP certified the suitability of using HydraFiber Ultra at rates of up to 50% in the growing mix without needing to increase nitrogen rates. Located in the Netherlands, RHP is widely recognized around the world for more than 55 years of expertise in monitoring and certifying the quality of substrates.

Learn more in our **HYDRAFIBER VS. PERLITE TECH SHEET** in the Resource Library at hydrafiber.com.

"Don't be afraid to try it. I encourage all growers to look at HydraFiber."

Henry Thorpe

HYDRAFIBER BLENDS DELIVER EQUAL OR BETTER PLANT PERFORMANCE COMPARED TO PERLITE BLENDS



CONTROL: PERLITE 20%
PEAT 80%

HYDRAFIBER ULTRA 160WB 30%
PEAT 70%



CONTROL: PERLITE 20%
PEAT 80%

HYDRAFIBER ULTRA 160WB 50%
PEAT 50%



CONTROL: PERLITE 20%
PEAT 80%

HYDRAFIBER ULTRA 160WB 60%
PEAT 40%

Poinsettia trial results from Dr. Glenn Fain, Auburn University.



750 W. Lake Cook Rd., Ste. 440, Buffalo Grove, IL 60089
www.hydrafiber.com | www.profileproducts.com
Email: hydrafiber@profileproducts.com
Toll Free: (800) 496-0955 | International Calls: +1 (847) 353-2148

