

# Flower growers get good news

## No fungus found in chrysanthemums

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An inspection by state agricultural officials last week that found no trace of white rust fungus in Santa Cruz County's two remaining chrysanthemum nurseries could mean the lifting of a 3-year-old quarantine, county Agricultural Commissioner David Moeller said Thursday.

In Santa Clara County, the only other California county subject to the white rust quarantine, a clean bill of health is further way, according to Deputy Agricultural Commissioner Kevin O'Day.

### What quarantine means

When a greenhouse is quarantined, it means that no plants from there may be sold. Growers must destroy all infested stock and follow a stringent fumigation program.

Moeller said that in addition to an end of the quarantine, a ban on residential mum cultivation and retail sales in the county that was imposed last fall is to be lifted May 31. He attributed the ban's effectiveness to the quick response of home gardeners and retailers to a request to destroy all stocks of chrysanthemums.

A mailing of 60,000 notices describing the peril of white rust was followed by 25,000 door-to-door inspections, Moeller said. Response was good because inspectors didn't treat people with chrysanthemums as "bad guys," he said.

### Saps plant's strength

White rust, which feeds only on chrysanthemums, is a fungus that appears on the underside of the leaf. It saps the strength of the plant and mars its beauty, making it unmarketable.

Santa Clara County mum growers sell some \$10 million worth of flowers annually — about one-third of the national total. The majority of county mum greenhouses are in San Martin, Morgan Hill and Milpitas.

Chrysanthemums are a minor crop in Santa Cruz County, compared to Santa Clara and Santa Barbara counties. Moeller said a number of chrysanthemum growers in Santa Cruz County got out of the business because the cost of complying with quarantine provisions was not worth it financially.

The fungus remains a problem in Santa Clara County, according to O'Day.

Currently, six of the county's 65 mum growers have fungus problems, O'Day said.