

VDE PLANT TACKLES FUNGHI

Marcel van Rijn, production manager at VDE Plant in Woubrugge, faced two different root problems (Phytophthora and Ceratocystis) in two gardens, each with its own water system. This was what he encountered earlier this year. When treatment with a fungicide-based product didn't produce sufficient results, Van Rijn remembered he'd read about a special pump that "ionizes water." Could that be a solution?

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The article Van Rijn had read appeared in KAS Magazine in November 2024 and reported on the water ionizers that Freshwater had just launched. An energy-efficient circulation pump that pumps water through a special device, resulting in clean water with less algae, fewer viruses and pathogens, and fewer microorganisms. "Interesting," Van Rijn thought upon first reading. "But since those problems weren't an issue for us at the time, you quickly move on to the next article."

Making a few phone calls

That changed suddenly this spring, when Van Rijn and his fellow production managers were shocked by the brown and slimy roots they saw, and thousands of plants collapsed within a few weeks. They then discovered that the cause of all this trouble lay in their water system. "Then that story 'popped' back into my head, and we started making some phone calls to growers who had already had experience with Freshwater's approach."

The Freshwater device and pump, which you can connect to your existing water system or simply pour into your return water tank, operate on ionization. Water ionization is a process in which water molecules split into hydrogen and hydroxide ions, which, among other things, affects the water's acidity and tackles contaminants. "It's a new and relatively unknown concept. Certainly not a standard method we've known for years from the literature. We certainly encountered some initial skepticism. But for us, the main question at the time was: 'Does it help or not?'" Based on that round of phone calls and the fact that the investment was manageable, we decided to just give it a try."

Cautious start

Van Rijn started working at VDE Plant as a student over twenty years ago. He is now co-owner of this company, which has 80 employees and grows plants on 12 hectares, spread across the 8-hectare main site in Woubrugge and several rental farms.



Van Rijn now knows the company inside and out. After deciding to partner with Freshwater, they started cautiously with a single pump in one of the two gardens at their main location. Simply to see if it would work. When it proved to be the case—water samples visibly showed that the water had become cleaner—they decided to add ionization to the second garden as well.

Witches' circle

Besides the water samples, they can also read the results from the plants. The devastating effect of Phytophthora – "A hugely contagious disease. A large 'witch's circle' quickly forms around a sick plant, within which plants die en masse" – has stopped. "We are completely rid of that! The water samples are clean, and thankfully, we see healthy white roots again." The second fungus, Ceratocystis, came in through a supplier of young plants and has not yet been completely eradicated. "The water system is

according to our most recent sample, they're clean, but a small portion of the plants are weakened, which we'll be removing as soon as possible. Throwing away plants, even a small portion, is not something you want to do as a grower. It hurts your gardening heart, and of course, your wallet. "But now that the system is clean again, we can literally start from scratch."

Sober person

And there's more good news to report at VDE plant. "We can also clearly see that our pipes are cleaner. We've had less residue buildup on our filters since installing the Freshwa-ter pumps." Marcel van Rijn is a down-to-earth and realistic person by nature. "But that things are improving is undeniable. As far as we're concerned, the system has proven itself. The beauty of the pump is that it has a dual function: aeration and ionization. So even if you don't have complete confidence in the effectiveness of the ionization, the aeration is certainly worth it!"

