

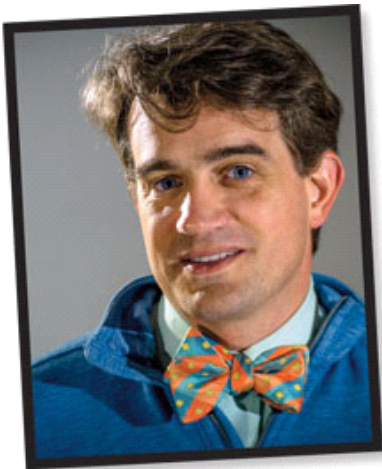
GROWERTALKS

Growers Talk Business

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Your Plants Just Murdered the Metaverse

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What was the Metaverse? It was supposed to be the “next big thing” and Mark Zuckerberg genuinely seemed to think it would fly. He went so far as to rename his Face/gram empire Meta.

You probably recall the massive hype: the gushing articles, the Super Bowl ads and, of course, the snarky memes. In 2020 and 2021, Meta invested oh-so-many-billions into what was supposed to be an immersive digital world where everyone on the planet could finally interact with each other via cheesy cartoon avatars while wearing dorky VR headsets.

But then something unexpected happened. The people who were supposed to be having a blast exploring the brave new Metaverse ... got a plant instead.

And then they got another one and then another. Pretty soon their apartments and gardens were teeming with life. And it was beautiful.

Turns out, nobody really wanted a utopian virtual reality—not when they could fill their actual reality with plants.

Savor the victory, plant people! This is as close as you'll get to blowing up the Death Star. We should be dancing like Ewoks right now because the funny thing is we weren't even trying. Like the little tree-huggers we are, we were just going about our business, humbly growing plants, unaware that we'd somehow joined the Rebel Alliance.

Wait a second. What are we rebelling against? Technology? Progress? Virtual reality?

These are all distractions. We who grow and plant are united by a desire to preserve meaningful human activity. We see the cultivation of gardens and the integration of living plants into our built human environments as being essential ingredients for a rich human society. It's not just what the plants do for us—which is an awful lot—but it's what our care for plants does to us. To grow a plant is to grow oneself.

There are a lot of cool and trendy things competing for our attention and money. They entice us. Crypto, NFTs, TikTok, sports betting, craft beer. At best, these things are a fun diversion. At worst, they're an assault against productivity and purpose. Either way, they're just another distraction.



Pictured: Images made with Stability.AI's Stable Diffusion with the prompt: "Realistic Instagram photo of apartment full of green plants."

Plants are different and we should understand that. Nobody loses their soul via plant addiction. Plants re-orient us. They turn our eyes and our hearts toward what we know truly matters: our earth, our community and ourselves. Plants don't just improve reality; they cause us to feel affection for reality. This is important because we care for what we care about.

Despite our incredible comforts and conveniences, our world is not a happy place. People are not content. The Metaverse failed because it was like offering heroin to a stressed-out parent who just wants a glass of wine to take the edge off. It was easy to reject because it looked just like it was:

a precipice to the abyss of unreality. Plants succeed because they root us.

But Meta didn't pull any plugs. They redeployed. The division that was developing the Metaverse (it's Orwellian name is Reality Labs) is as busy as ever. Their new focus is Artificial Intelligence.

In 2018, Google's CEO said, "AI is one of the most important things humanity is working on. It is more profound than, I dunno, electricity or fire."

There's a brave new world on the horizon. The models will make us all smarter and it's happening quickly.

In an effort to understand the potential of AI, I tried writing this article in a writing app powered by ChatGPT-3. The program worked and it was fascinating to see the screen fill with words I didn't actually write. But I hated it. The words weren't mine. The sentences were boring. The ideas were predictable. It felt like driving with lane assist: useful if you're incompetent or drunk, but obnoxious if you know what you're doing.

Nobody understands what AI will bring us. A flood of bot-boring articles? Deepfakes so real that truth becomes unknowable? Sure, it'll make our jobs easier, but maybe so easy that we won't need to work anymore? Is this the end of the human race?

Like the Metaverse, AI feels like a precipice. But we're jumping. That's not really a choice.

You'd have to be an idiot to bet against AI, so I won't. Unlike the Metaverse, AI is going to be huge. It really is "the next big thing."

But happily, so are plants. Anyone who bets against chlorophyll is a fool. If there's a reality worth living in, it will contain more beautiful flowers, not less. **GT**

Art Parkerson works at Lancaster Farms, a wholesale nursery in Suffolk, Virginia. He's also the creative director of PLANTPOP, a horticultural cinema studio that makes documentary films about people and plants. To say hello, write to art@lancasterfarms.com.