

GROWERTALKS

Inside Look

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Many Firsts

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This month has been a milestone of many firsts ... some not so great.

The elephant in the room is COVID-19. This is the first time that any of us have had to deal with an event like this and it's upended everything we know—work, school, our personal lives. Even grocery shopping is a source of stress. This is the first time I've had to wear a mask whenever I go out in public and it's an upsetting reminder of what our world is going through. I sometimes feel like I'm hurtling down Fury Road with Mad Max on my way to Panem for the Hunger Games.

That's dramatic, I know. But this is the first time I'm dealing with these feelings—trying to be strong for my 11-year-old, giving an only child constant pep talks on how to get through the weeks of not being able to see her friends. A new bike (a gift from Nana and Papa) and playing Roblox over Zoom with her friends has helped.

I'm also trying not to worry about whether my husband's company will survive. No one buys office products if they're not in the office, and since he's on straight commission, it's a scary, uncertain time. I'm thankful every day that I work for such a great company. I know I'm lucky and it's really the only stable thing we have going on in our lives right now. Having to create a monthly magazine, while juggling coverage from the cancelled California Spring Trials and the other printed supplements we do, has been a good, much-needed distraction.

Speaking of our monthly magazine, this issue we're celebrating another first—the first time we're dedicating the month to indoor plants. You may be sick of hearing about the “houseplant trend,” but consumers aren't. As a matter of fact, they're posting and buying and tweeting about them more than ever—especially as they're all sequestered inside their homes. The Ball Publishing staff has stumbled on a multitude of articles and news reports about people scrambling for more plants (indoor and out).

A lot of growers are increasing their production and retailers are dedicating more space in their stores. Some are even creating online platforms to sell them, which makes sense—houseplants (at least the tabletop ones) seem like they're the ideal live product for e-commerce and delivery.

I feel like we're just scratching the surface when it comes to this huge category, including the supply chain, but we have some great information for the newbies, and refreshers for the houseplant pros. Yes, monstera and *Pilea peperomioides* continue to be the hot houseplants, but there are other popular ones that growers and suppliers are

selling.

One of the questions growers sometimes ask themselves when it comes to indoor plants is whether to grow their own or bring 'em in. Bill Calkins asked a few operations how they handle houseplants.

Houseplants don't have to be strictly held to foliage alone, so how about some color with hydrangeas bred to be indoors? See what the Hydrangea Breeders Association has been bringing into North America through different brokers and growing partners.

What's the primary reason people say they don't grow houseplants? They kill them—mostly because of their own mistakes like overwatering. Having the right growing media from the start gives the end user the best chance of being successful.

Bossman Beytes' column talks about COVID-19 and how he refuses to say that this is "the new normal." I tend to be an optimistic person and I think he's right. We're feeling a lot of first-time pains and uncharted emotions right now, but I think we'll get through this. It may be a slow process and there may be new protocols to doing business or going shopping or eating at a restaurant, but remember the first time you had to take off your shoes and go through an x-ray machine at the airport? Now it's old hat. I think that's how it's going to be after we have steady testing, better treatment and finally a vaccine. After a while, we'll go from firsts to business as usual.

Here's to hoping that's sooner than later, that we all maintain our sanity, listen to the experts, and remember to be kind and love each other. Right now, that's the only certainty we have. **GT**