

GROWERTALKS

Inside Look

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Staying Essential

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Being lucky enough to be owned by a breeding company instead of a publishing company, Ball Publishing gets invited to all of the company meetings and functions. I think we editors do a pretty good job at maintaining a good balance of keeping proprietary information “in the house,” knowing that, in those instances, we’re Ball employees, not industry trade journalists.

But we always keep our reporter hats at the ready, so when something interesting or newsworthy happens at Ball HQ, we ask those in charge if we could share the news with our readers. It helps keep communication between Ball Publishing and the Ball companies open, and enforces the understanding for them that we serve the entire industry. And I think they value and appreciate that.

One recent event was a virtual message from Ball President & CEO Anna Ball and Ball Seed’s Director of Sales Jim Kennedy to the entire company. I won’t quote them directly here (gotta keep it in the house!), but the gist of the conversation between Anna and Jim was to reflect on how the company was able to serve its customers during the pandemic this past spring and summer, and how we should continue to help them moving forward into 2021. COVID-19 is still here living among us, so that will be a determining background factor as growers and retailers plan for next spring.

One of the things Anna and Jim pointed out was the realization of how essential our industry really is. We always felt like we were essential, but after the whirlwind spring we had, with the end result of many growers and retailers having double-digit sales and millions of new gardeners, we can now say with confidence that we are definitely essential. It made us realize how essential flowers and plants are to people during times of stress and sadness, yes, but to also cheer them up and make them happy.

Bedding, nursery and houseplants have had it great during COVID. Potted plants and cut flowers ... not so much. In the early stages of the pandemic, many potted plant and cut flower growers and distributors had to hold on to shipments or had complete orders canceled because stores needed the space for toilet paper and hand sanitizer. In mid-March, cut flower sales at the Dutch auction in Europe were down 85%. It bounced back a bit in April, but many growers had to dump up to 80% of their crops.

For our industry at least, the timing of the pandemic coincided with our busy season. People were staying at home right when our products were supposed to be used and enjoyed them all summer. But what about the fall and

winter? (Especially when everybody runs out of houseplants?)

Hopefully, people will turn to fresh bouquets of cut flowers to put in their houses to add some quarantine cheer. And with the biggest cut flower holidays coming in a few months (Valentine's Day and Mother's Day), what better way to remind ourselves that this segment of the industry is still hard at work on breeding new varieties.

Scott Rusch, GM of BloomStudios Cut Flowers, gathered together information on the latest varieties, including a special crop for a holiday that many cut flower breeders are focusing on—Día de los Muertos. Cut marigolds are essential to the people who celebrate this day of remembrance. The bright colors and heady scent of marigolds help guide the spirits of their dearly departed to the memorial ofrendas (altars). You can learn about two new cut marigold varieties and others.

We also have our annual extended culture notes edition with growing information on new varieties and updated trials research on previous intros (next year's essential garden items).

And for a little levity in these dark times, find out what other pests your peers have had to deal with in the greenhouse. Some of them are waaaaay beyond aphids and Botrytis ... **GT**