

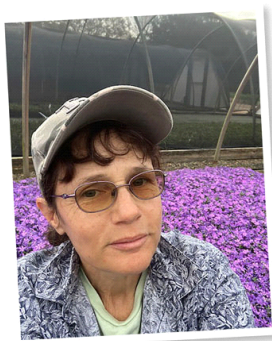
GROWERTALKS

Guest Column

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Mindfulness & Plants

Michele Sarti



MICHELE SARTI

I love philosophy. It's a way to think deeply about life, to ask important questions, to be present and enjoy the little things. Spending time with nature is the perfect environment for someone who enjoys philosophy. Working in a nursery gives one the opportunity to envelop themselves with nature—not only in spending a good portion of your day outside with plants, but also with various insects and animals.

In the routine of daily tasks, it's easy to take certain things for granted. Spring, summer and autumn are very busy here at Classic Groundcovers in Athens, Georgia, where I'm head grower. There are some moments where I can stop and breathe a bit—for example, right before Independence Day when plant orders slow down, although being in the heart of summer the plants still need a lot of care and I can't drop the ball with regards to scouting and being proactive with any diseases or invasive insect issues.

Winter is when I have the time to reset. It's the time of the year when some plants are dormant and others are slowing down. They need less water, there are less plant diseases present and less invasive insects to deal with. Winter is the best time to review what plant problems we dealt with the previous year and what can be done to prevent similar issues the upcoming year.

Here in Georgia, March is when things at the nursery begin to get busy again. The cycle is about to start and one must be ready. That's when the plants come out of dormancy and orders for plants pick up. This past March, I wasn't at the nursery for two weeks because I was in Thailand with family. Before the trip I was a bit concerned about being gone during what's a transitional time in the nursery business. I knew, though, that I have amazing coworkers who would stay on top of things and they didn't disappoint.

To be honest, I didn't give work a second thought when I was halfway across the globe. I was busy taking in all the amazing sights of Thailand and spending time with my family. When I returned, thankfully, there were only a couple of minor issues that I needed to attend to.

I've been working at Classic Groundcovers for 10 years and after all this time I know the cycle of things here. Things such as what time of year the shade cloth goes up, when certain greenhouses get plastic covering, when the cool cells are turned on in the upper greenhouses, when to clean and prepare the herbicide sprayer for the season. Having gone through the yearly cycle many times I became a bit complacent with regards to the work and dedication

it takes from everyone at the nursery to keep things running smoothly. I also didn't really appreciate the beauty of everything awakening and changing in the spring. When I came back to work after the two-week vacation, I was amazed at how things had changed.

For example, the greenhouses containing Phlox subulata that had no flowers before I left town were now a big sea of flowers. The ferns that were dormant were now flourishing. There were once again turtles in the nursery lake. The leaves on the trees were opening. The birds were more active. The air seemed fresher. The shipping shed was bustling with activity due to the increase in plant orders. I saw with fresh eyes the beauty of spring at the nursery.

With this awakened perspective, I was prepared for the season. I wasn't just going through the motions—rather appreciating the splendor of my surroundings. I made more of an effort to be present, to not always be doing things in a rush or be on autopilot. I'm working on truly putting into my life the philosophical messages that I read. Not just talking the talk, but walking the walk.

It would be nice to take a two-week break like I did this year every year as a chance to reset, but it's not always a doable option. Rather, I need to stay present each day and never take for granted the wonderful environment that I have the honor to be a part of. I'm fortunate to be working at a job that allows me to spend time with plants and to connect with nature. **GT**

Michele Sarti is head grower at Classic Groundcovers in Athens, Georgia.