GROWERTALKS

Guest Column

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Growing Plants & Myself

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I am an introvert. That's one of the reasons I got into horticulture. I wanted a career where there would be limited time with people and more time with plants and nature. Plants don't give you attitude and you don't have to make small talk with them. Plants, like animals, are accepting of you no matter what. I can work with other people if need be, but truth be told, I prefer to work alone. I feel a certain freedom when doing a task by myself at my own pace. I'm the type of person who doesn't need constant supervision in order to get things done. In fact, I find that I work more efficiently if left alone.

One of my tasks at Classic Groundcovers in Athens, Georgia, is to spray pesticides using either the smaller hose and reel sprayer or the big tractor with the ESS sprayer attached. Spraying is an introvert dream job. You're suited up with PPE, which includes a respirator—basically a "keep-your-distance" mask. Also, since you're using pesticides, no one can go near you or speak with you.

At a certain point in one's life, though, in order to grow you need to get outside of your comfort zone. That's one of the reasons I began to inquire about doing trade shows for the nursery. If 10 years ago you would have told me that I would be doing nursery trade shows, where you have to meet people and talk—essentially be "on" all day—I would have told you that you were crazy.

In 2013, when I returned to school to get my horticulture degree in my 40s (long story there, for another day), I was the student who essentially kept to herself. Even though my fellow classmates were all amazing folks and I never had issue with anyone, I disliked group projects and preferred to stay in my own zone.

Real quick shout out here to Gwinnett Technical College in Lawrenceville, Georgia. Their horticulture program is incredible and the director—who was also my advisor and one of my professors while I went there, Aaron Poulsen—is an amazing teacher with the patience of Job.

I started doing trade shows for Classic Groundcovers in 2024, first one being Southeast Green in Georgia. Since then, I've worked the "big daddy shows"—MANTS and Cultivate—as well as smaller shows, such as SC Green Conference & Trade Show in South Carolina and most recently TNGRO in Lebanon, Tennessee.

The show in Tennessee was my first time doing a show solo and I was told what to expect and given a good amount

of direction ahead of time by Classic's long-time, recently retired General Manager, Wally Pressey. The hardest part of any show, in my opinion, is getting there and getting set up. The shows itself aren't difficult, although for an introvert like me there's that bit of anxiety just before the show officially begins and people start coming in. Then people come up to your table and maybe *gulp* start talking to you. That being said, once the show begins, the anxiety melts away and at the end of the day I feel a sense of accomplishment. I'm certain that those who thrive in settings where there are a lot of people don't understand where I'm coming from—but you fellow introverts, I'm sure do.

Although I always have and always will prefer time away from crowds of people, I'm honored to be a participant in trade shows and that I'm able to represent Classic Groundcovers. Participating in trade shows has given me more confidence. It's helped me to get out of my shell and improve my ability to interact with others. Thus far I haven't had any bad experiences with regards to meeting people, answering any questions or just chatting about plants. Every interaction that I've had, be it with a customer or fellow trade show exhibitor, has been positive.

It's really fun to meet our customers, as well. My job is primarily tending to the plants and I have no contact with the people who are buying them. I love meeting the people who are buying our plants and installing them in the landscape. I love hearing how happy our customers are with our product. It makes me continue to put in my best effort every day I'm at the nursery.

That being said, if anyone ever did have anything negative to say or a complaint, provided it's done respectfully, I would be open to listen because it would mean there's something that needs to be improved.

Here's to the 2026 nursery trade show year. Maybe I'll meet some of you at one of them. **GT**

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