Coronavirus: "A different kind of weather"



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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

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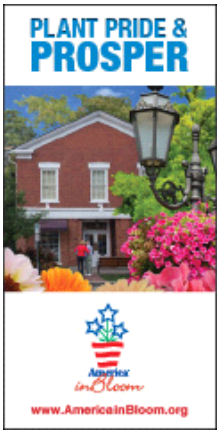


The latest on COVID-19 and horticulture

Show cancellations: Thus far, that seems to be the biggest impact coronavirus is having on our industry. Most recently, I got word that HPP Exhibitions is cancelling the 2020 edition of its World Floral Expo, which was scheduled for March 25-27 in Manhattan. Why? “Coronavirus concerns in New York,” says their website. A quick search for that reveals that three cases have been confirmed in New York City and the number of statewide cases is over 100. Some New York colleges are cancelling classes, and 83 people on Long Island are being “monitored.”









Plus, almost 60% of the show's exhibitors come from overseas and many of them may have concerns about traveling right now. So the organizers are pushing the show off to 2021 at the Jacob J. Javits Center and are working to secure dates.

I've been to the World Floral Expo several times, both in New York and when it's come here to Chicago. It's not a big show, but it's valuable for cut flower farms in South America and Africa to show off their product to U.S. buyers. It will be a shame for them to miss that opportunity for a year.

In Asia, I heard from a reader that both the both the Taiwan International Orchid Show and the World Orchid Conference (which was to be held in Taichung, Taiwan) have been cancelled, with no firm re-scheduled dates yet.

The World Orchid Conference is only held every three years, so that's an especially hard blow for that group. However, they still hope to reschedule for later in 2020.

In Chicago, I might have made an afternoon of it to visit the giant International Housewares Show, which draws nearly 60,000 people from around the world. That event got cancelled a couple weeks ago.

Some good news: The organizers of Myplant in Milan, Italy (which I told you was postponed) have announced dates for a redo: September 21-23, 2020. That, of course, assumes the virus threat in Italy and elsewhere have subsided. Let's hope so!



Shows that are NOT cancelled

I can tell you that the National Hardware Show, held in Las Vegas May 5-7, is still on as of press time. They are monitoring the situation, and have a coronavirus update bar at the top of their website. They say:

The National Hardware Show firmly believes in the importance of an industry gathering place and is committed to hosting the Show as planned May 5-7, 2020, at the Las Vegas Convention Center. Please know that the health and safety of exhibitors, attendees, industry partners and staff is, and will always be, our number one priority. We are collaborating closely with the Las Vegas Convention Center and local public health authorities and following local, state and federal public health guidelines, including those issued by the CDC. As their advice and guidelines are updated, we will inform our customers. Additionally, in an effort to fully inform attendees and exhibitors and eliminate any misinformation, we will provide weekly status updates regarding NHS to ensure the most accurate information."

I can say the same about IGC Show Chicago. I was emailing with show co-founder Jeff Morey about this topic, and he sent me their official position (again, as of press time). They are on, and hope to remain so, as they emphasize that they are NOT an international show but primarily a domestic one, and they hope that will make the difference. Here's their statement:

IGC Show organizers are closely monitoring the coronavirus situation. As you know, the IGC Show is still way off in August—nearly six months. Our expectation is that the situation will resolve itself by then. We are in constant communication with McCormick Place and the City of Chicago regarding any news/updates, and are monitoring the CDC website.



Please do keep in mind that all of US-based trade shows that have postponed due to the virus have heavy attendance and many exhibitors from Asian and other overseas locations. Many of those individuals can't leave their home countries and/or gain entry to the U.S. because of health restrictions.

In contrast, IGC Show has less than 3% international attendance/exhibitors. The vast majority are from the U.S.

IGC Show is busy planning for another successful year as the only & largest event exclusively for Independent Garden Centers. Will be here for you with a dynamic three-day event this August. Please be assured that the safety and health of our attendees, exhibitors and their families will always remain our top priority and we will communicate any updates with you as we get closer to the IGC 2020 Show.

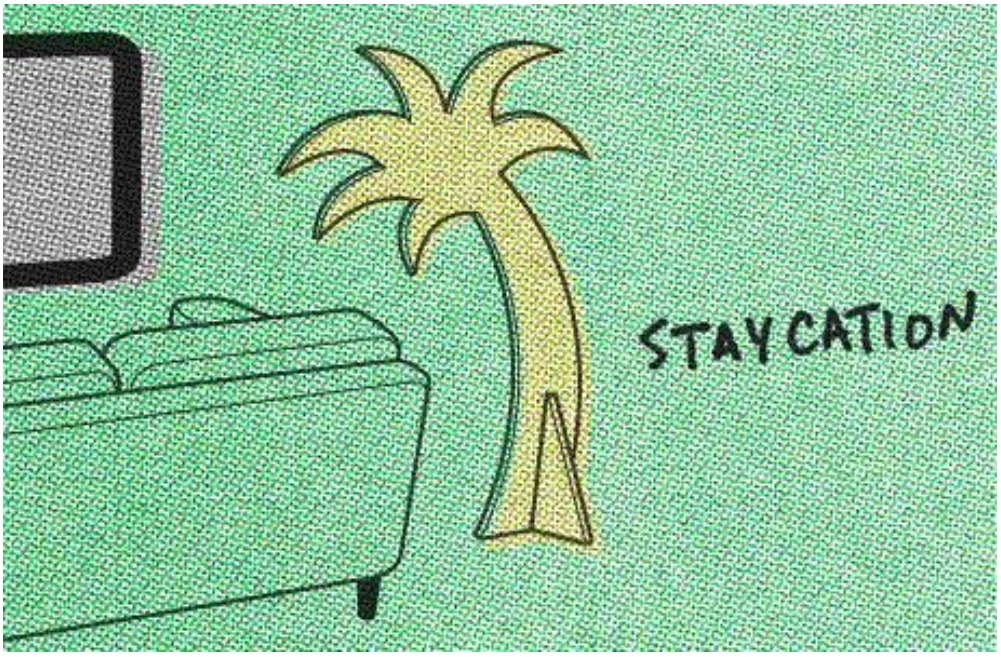


Coronavirus: good for gardening!

Aren't you glad you aren't in the cruise business?

I mean, when your own government is advising 300 million people to NOT partake in your product, that's pretty bad for business. It wouldn't surprise me if the cruise industry is planning some legal action. Certainly, you will be able to get a deal on that *Alaskan cruise you've been promising the family.

Beyond any jokes about using your Corona pruners against the virus (thanks, Sid Raisch), I do see a silver lining that we should all keep in mind: Less travel = staycations = gardening, decorating and growing food!



We can help them do better than this!

If folks don't fly or take a cruise, and they want to avoid crowded events, and there's nothing left but to stay home, they might as well make the place look nice. Plus, they saved a few thousand dollars on travel, and that money is burning a hole in their pocket. Retailers should be aiming to help them create a lush, tropical vacation spot in their own back yards.

Then there's the health aspect of plants. You should be stocking up on spaths, bromeliads and the other proven air-cleaners and natural humidifiers. I suspect people will be willing to employ every anti-viral strategy they can think of. Once they're sanitized and face-masked, a few houseplants (or a few hundred) might be just the thing to keep Covid-19 at bay.

(*Laurie and I cruised Alaska last August on the Westerdam, the same boat that was prohibited from docking in Japan, Taiwan, the Philippines and Guam back in February, due to coronavirus fears.)



CAST is still on!

Today (Monday), I got one call and one email specifically asking if I'd heard anything about the California Spring Trials (CAST) being cancelled, or if any exhibitors decided not to exhibit. The answer is no, so far all the LISTED exhibitors will be there. That is as of press time, of course, and anything could change.



I did get word that one distribution company's sales force—Griffin—has decided to not make the trip this year. That could be anywhere from 8 to 12 people. Brian Sullivan, director of sales, confirmed that via email.

"The well-being of our employees is our top priority, and we will continue taking the necessary precautions to ensure their health and safety. Out of an abundance of caution, we have taken the decisive step to withdraw our participation at the upcoming CAST event so the health and safety of the people we come in contact with outside of Griffin are not unnecessarily put at risk."

I have also heard that some Trials attendees and staff from Asia will not be coming.

Still, if there's an event, the Ball Publishing crew will be there capturing it all on video … which might be more important than ever, if you're not traveling. If you get this newsletter, then you should automatically get our six-day Acres of buZZ! coverage of the trials, complete with video links. You can also get it all at www.springtrials.com as well as our Facebook page.



Coronavirus: "A different kind of weather"

I asked for your views on the virus's potential impact last time. Here are three replies:

"As a small grower/retailer, I see two threats: One is the health of our workers, and keeping everyone safe. The other is the fear factor driving away customers.

"It turns out that we already practice strict sanitation for the benefit of our plants, and it's a small adjustment to start including and implementing sanitation for our people. After reading studies on sanitizer chemicals and practices in medical facilities, we already use some of the same chemicals that are effective against the virus. So we need to pay attention to keeping frequently touched surfaces regularly sanitized, and follow basic practices: frequent handwashing, asking people not to come to work when sick (for ANY sickness!), and practicing more sanitization.

"By the way, a lack of PPE is going to impact our industry. Gemplers' N & P95 ventilated masks are ALL backordered until at least the end of March. Wish I had stocked up last year. Who knows if they will even be available at the end of March.

"The fear factor—and in more urban areas, potential quarantines—is going to be the wild card, and I pray we get lucky. But we're used to dealing with wild cards, i.e. weather. This is just a different kind of weather. Hopefully we can come up with some business strategies to compensate somewhat for the potential impact of fewer customers walking in the door. Maybe pushing the health benefits and immune-raising benefits of living with plants, and being out in fresh air of gardens, and eating home-grown vegetables."*—Ara Lynn, Amazing Flower Farm, New Ipswich, New Hampshire*

"I really do hope this coronavirus slows down and the stock market evens out. That said, the last time we had a stock market crisis the number of people who took up gardening noticeably increased. I remember hearing about shortages of vegetable seeds. People will soon be making spring/summer plans. Perhaps it's a good year to put off that trip to Europe or Asia."*—Bill Carter, Prairie Moon Nursery, Winona, Minnesota*

This is from retail consultant and *Green Profit* columnist Bill McCurry of McCurry Associates:

"1. Had a financial analyst tell me if they [the media] call it coronavirus they are filling a 24-hour news cycle with information to instill panic so you'll stay tuned. If they call it COVID-19, they are more in tune with the facts and reality of the situation. An interesting perspective.

"2. U.S. employment still rocking on … which means consumers have bucks in their pockets. If they cancel their international vacations, what are they going to do? How about fixing up the yard with fresh plantings and some outdoor living spaces for stay-cations? Great time to invest in the homestead for enjoyment at home rather than head overseas … How will our industry capitalize on that?"

Ah! Great minds, Bill!

Seeing how it looks like coro—excuse me, COVID-19—will be a factor this spring—along with a challenging stock market situation—how do you suggest the industry handle it? Ara has some great thoughts, above. Have you any plans of your own? Shoot me a note HERE.



Helping ensure we have employees in the future

Okay, enough negative news. How about something positive about our industry's future—namely, two ways groups are working to inform, educate and encourage young people about careers in horticulture.

1. An article (front page, I was told) in the March 2 *Baltimore Sun* talks about how the American

Landscape Institute has partnered with the Community College of Baltimore County to help fund a two-year “earn and learn” program for students in the landscape industry. Read more HERE.

2. The American Floral Endowment (AFE) has launched a new industry-wide Career Center to connect floral industry employers with job seekers, students and other professionals pursuing careers in floriculture and horticulture.

Within the new AFE Career Center’s intuitive platform (powered by YM Careers) employers can easily post job opportunities, screen and manage applications, and access a resume database of targeted candidates. Job seekers will find it equally easy to post their resume and search for jobs and/or internships that match their skills and interests. The platform is completely mobile-responsive — users can access it anytime, anywhere.

The AFE Career Center is accessible to job seekers free of charge; employers pay a fee to post positions. AFE is offering employers a 25 percent discount on new 30-day job postings through March 31 when you enter coupon code MARCH2020 at checkout.



Weird pests



Pigs? Rabbits? I asked what’s crawling or flying or slithering in your greenhouses, and you answered:

"Wild pigs are a concern here in Texas. They are in the woods and pastures around the greenhouses. Hog fence was installed a few years ago, but if they want in, they can get in. The population is exploding and they are inching ever closer. We had a cow die, and the wild hogs ate it all in one night. Horror movie material! I long for good ol’ owls."—*Don Andrew, Chittamwood Nursery, Washington, Texas*

"We’ve had quite an infestation of rabbits! They are eating all sorts of crops. We’ve also had a “murder” of crows (yes, a murder) swarm down upon our recently planted annual crops that were planted outdoors. They seemed to just pull the newly planted plugs out of their pots and toss them around without really eating them. I’m talking thousands of crows. A very singular event."—

Jim Pugh, American Farms, Naples, Florida

Thankfully, sometimes there are answers to these problems. Graham Spencer, Director of Plants For Europe Limited in the UK, sent me a link to this ARTICLE about how Chinese ducks are helping battle locusts in Pakistan.



Finally ...

Where am I off to this time? Florida, for a TPIE planning meeting at the event's new home (for the time being, anyway) in Tampa. We'll check out the convention center and one of the host hotels. I'll also be getting in at least one foliage grower visit, so stay tuned for what I might learn on your behalf.

As for my plan to stay healthy while flying? Only breathe out.

See you next time,



Chris Beytes
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