

GROWERTALKS

Acres & Acres

2/1/2021

Our Melting Combo Pot

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Horticulture can teach the world a lot about tolerance and inclusion and compromise and getting along—all traits that seem to be in short supply these days. That's because horticulture is made up of the most eclectic, interesting, broad-spectrum group of people one could ever be fortunate enough to meet, all of whom manage to get along just fine in spite of our differences. Hippies and hunters and vegans and people of faith and Yankees and Southerners and Corvette drivers and Prius drivers and mom-and-pop operators and corporate mega-growers and ... I was going to call us a melting pot, but a more apt analogy would be that we are a giant combo planter of diverse genetics, all growing together in colorful harmony.

I'm not sure when I first noticed this ... perhaps not too long after the advent of social media platforms, when folks I know began expressing views on topics outside of what I would normally talk about with them—you know,

crops and greenhouses and the market (and barbecue). On social media, normally taboo topics that didn't use to be discussed in polite society suddenly weren't so taboo anymore, and I got to know my industry colleagues for more than just their horticultural exploits. And what I learned was that members of our industry hold a gamut of viewpoints from far left to far right and everything in between.

Yet we are bound together by a common glue—a love of plants. We may disagree on whom to credit for those plants—God or Mother Nature or a brilliant breeder—and we may not see eye to eye on the purpose of our businesses—beautifying the world, saving the planet, lining our pockets—but we love plants and the plant industry nonetheless, and that common ground allows us to overlook our differences and cheerfully break bread and share a beer in Columbus and Baltimore and Portland and Ft. Lauderdale.

Now that I think about it, my awareness and appreciation of our differences and similarities goes back to when I first started in the business in the early 1980s. Laurie and I belonged to two local horticultural organizations: the Brevard (Florida) Horticultural Co-op and the Brevard Florist's Association. You can readily imagine that these were two uniquely different groups. The co-op was made up of local nursery, greenhouse and garden center owners who'd meet monthly at Fat Boy's Barbecue to eat pork sandwiches and drink sweet tea and complain about the weather. The Florist's Association also met monthly, usually at a fancy restaurant like the Black Tulip in Cocoa Village, to eat veal piccata and drink Irish coffee and complain about brides. If you know nurserymen and florists, you can picture the scenes. We loved every minute we spent with both groups because, not in spite of, their differences.

Here's a question I've often pondered: Does any other industry attract as broad a group of participants as horticulture? I've wracked my brain trying to think of another industry that's as diverse as ours and I honestly can't come up with one. What other field would attract a broad range of people to a common purpose? Medicine? I can see that. Architecture? Maybe. In both fields I can see some common elements of attraction and also opportunities for tremendous diversity of purpose and meaning. But I haven't come up with many others to add to that list.

My appeal to you, my fellow member of this eclectic little industry, is to never lose sight of (or appreciation for) what bonds us together. You and I and our customers and suppliers and colleagues and employees and employers may have diverse political, spiritual and social points of view, but we all love plants, and we all agree that they bring beauty and pleasure to a world that can never have enough of either. That's what makes this work so interesting and this industry so great.

One last tip to keeping the peace: avoid the really controversial topics. For instance, there's a certain grower in Pennsylvania with whom I will NEVER discuss Philly cheesesteaks. His views are just too radical! **GT**