

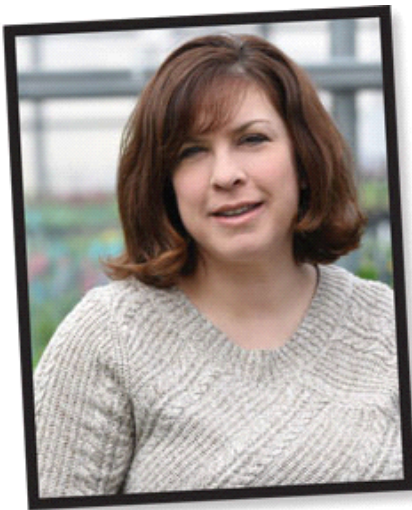
GROWERTALKS

Inside Look

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Working to Find the Facts

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Recently, I read an excerpt from the work of Hannah Arendt, a political philosopher and Holocaust survivor, that I thought was especially poignant in these crazy times. She explained that there's a "curiously varying mixture of gullibility and cynicism" in how exploitative politics affect people.

"In an ever-changing, incomprehensible world, the masses had reached the point where they would, at the same time, believe everything and nothing, think that everything was possible and nothing was true ..."

She wrote that over 70 years ago, but in these times of partisan punditry, Internet memes and bad social media takes, it feels like she's talking about the now-times. It's become very difficult to know whether what you hear is fact or fiction. I'm not just talking about politics, but on anything.

Can you swim after you eat? Are bats really blind? Are poinsettias poisonous?

I've learned that if you want to get the true facts about something, you have to do the work of finding them. And today's technology makes it a lot easier to spread misinformation or present opinions as facts.

Case in point: Ball Publishing hosted a webinar with Premier Tech Horticulture back in October that focused on the sustainability of sphagnum peat moss. It was a well-attended event, which wasn't surprising because there's been a lot of talk about whether peat is a renewable resource or not. New bans on peat moss in Europe and the UK have environmentalists here in North America questioning the necessity of peat even harder. Pull the lever on the ol' Google Machine and you get a lot of erroneous information and negative opinions about peat moss.

One can assume that's why a participant in the webinar said he's always seeing people online "bashing peat," especially from Europe. So how do we change people's perspectives on peat?

Susan Parent, who was Premier Tech's presenter, said, "I think it's a lot about education and giving us the opportunity to talk about our industry and to understand what's going on. And I think the information has to be out there. Some people maybe don't want to hear it—there are always going to be people who are resistant to it. But I think it's all about education and understanding about the peat bogs. And we as an industry have to work harder to put the information out there."

So we thought it was important to delve a little deeper into the topic of peat and its sustainability. I included a lot of

information from our webinar with Susan, along with some facts and statistics from the Canadian Sphagnum Peat Moss Association, who works with scientists, ecologists and government officials to ensure that Canada's peatlands are being used properly and managed responsibly.

Need some other fact-based growing info? We've got the experts giving us a lot you can use in the upcoming production season, like how your irrigation water impacts your nutrition regime, the latest on growing media, new tricks to grow pansies, and the beautiful relationship between mycorrhizae and plants.

One industry expert we've tapped into countless times is Dr. Will Healy, who retired from Ball Horticultural Company this month after a 30-year career traveling the world visiting greenhouses and telling growers they were doing stupid stuff. One story I wrote where Will was the main source started out like this: "Ball Seed's Senior Technical & Research Specialist doesn't have a problem telling you when you're doing something dumb in the greenhouse."

I said that Will "serves his words whole, never minced." That's because he's got the most prolific and colorful ways of describing greenhouse production. Bossman Beytes sat down with Dr. Healy and collected some of his more popular "Willisms" for his column on page 86. If you're feeling especially sentimental—and have personally taken a few verbal lashings from the good doctor himself—I would highly recommend it. **GT**