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Kiss My Aster

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The Beet Goes On

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Growing food is one of my great loves (my others are growing perennials, trees & shrubs, bulbs and annuals, of course) and 2020 has been a BANANAS year for all things edible. I have all kinds of sage opinions about growing, marketing and selling edibles—just remember you herb it here first!

• Your integrity isn't serving your customers. It saddens me to say it, but if you aren't stocking tomatoes, etc. in March when the yoo-hoos start coming in for them, they'll just go to the Big Box and buy them. Stock plants when the yoo-hoos want them. Yes, you're right and they're wrong, but you can't win this so you might as well make the lettuce. If someone wants sweet potato slips in December, just figure out a way. All my years in garden centers and … I really regret doing the right thing and trying to dangle the carrot to their success. Just give them what they want and make a mint.

• Give me a minute to cry over that one. It was berry hard to write.

• If you can, have a "Growing Food"-type presentation a few times a year. You can guide new growers toward attending (in person is obviously much better than Zoom, so you can make and keep customers instead of educating them and then they take their dollars to the Big Box). Creating this presentation once and reusing it for years makes for easy work; talk about everything from the seeds and soil you offer, to annual vegetables, herbs and fruit trees. A presentation format like this will open eyes to what can be done successfully in your area and establish your team as the go-to because you're kind of a big dill.

• Growing food is always going to be this thing that gets turned into clickbait. Remember the Topsy Turvy tomato thing? I feel like that was the biggest fad in recent years, but since then, we've had hundreds of smaller assaults and they aren't going to stop coming. If you can romaine cool as a cucumber, you can use your social media accounts to talk about what's real and what's a hill of beans.

• Do you ever look for locals on Instagram (by looking at local town hashtags) and give them a little free advice? It's a way to spread your name around and get more followers. I can give you the words you'll need to know right now: "It's blossom end rot, try adding some calcium to your soil. Come on in and see us, we have some phenomenal products for that!" So now all you have to do is cut and paste that.

• I count it as an edible plant and it's just one word and I can't say it enough: sunflowers.

• How are we going to deal with all the first-time gardeners this winter? I hope they all don't just kale it and drop it like a hot potato; at the same time, some of their expectations are nutty. Do you have resources available for them? I'd really recommend Niki Jabbour's "The Year-Round Vegetable Garden"* to share with those customers that come in and ask about starting peppers in November. They need more help than you can give—send them home with a book.

I think it's time for me to leave peasfully before I get squashed. Remember that things are hard right now and you're doing a great job. I know it feels like you're swimming against the currant. Ask yourself, "Who better to sell these plants and educate these new growers than us?" and then go out there and do it! **GP**

Amanda Thomsen is a funky, punky garden writer and author. Her blog is planted at KissMyAster.com and you can follow her on Facebook, Twitter AND Instagram @KissMyAster.