

Front Lines

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Q & A on Houseplant Availability

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AmericanHort's "Trends & Availability for Tropical and Foliage Plants" webinar that took place April 6 had a tremendous amount of attendee participation in the form of submitted questions. The webinar's panelists—Kingston White of Morning Dew Tropical Plants, Denise Godfrey of Olive Hill Greenhouses, Maxwell Mercer of Mercer Botanicals, and Bryan Johnston of Tri-State Foliage—did their darnedest to answer all the questions I threw at them as moderator. But we couldn't get to them all.

At least, not during the webinar. Several of our panelists were able to quickly type up some answers to the remaining questions. Here are a few of them:

Q. What's going on with aglaonemas? When will we start to see varieties again?

Kingston's reply: "One thing to keep in mind is that aglaonemas are slow growers. We've talked with growers about this availability. Growers have experienced not getting all the liners (or any at all) that they ordered over a span of several months. Deliveries are back and growers are releasing aglaonema to limited customers as the plants get rooted."

And Maxwell's answer: "Kingston is correct—we have seen issues at the farm with crop losses and growing issues that slow production, which has caused shortages. They've also been taking some cuttings that were for sale and put them back into stock to have a better supply moving forward. Once growers start getting cuttings consistently it will return six months down the road."

Q. Do you feel like we are at a low currently for plant availability or do you think availability will get worse before it gets better?

Kingston: "This time of year, we would typically see 1,200 to 1,500 items on our availability list. We are seeing about 800+ this year and growing."

Maxwell: "On our end, I do not believe the availability is going to get much worse. It will be a slow trickle of assorted products on a weekly basis. It may not be exactly what you are looking for, but there will be product. If we get a small break this summer as travel restrictions start to get lifted, we may see a temporary dip in demand. This will allow the plants to grow and catch up, giving a better full availability for fall."

Q. What would be your guesstimate (yes, I know it is a guess!) on when the inventory might replenish to at least 70%?

Maxwell: "Until the demand decreases enough and allows plants to catch up, it will be a slow trickle of availability."

Growers are used to a decrease in demand in summer and winter. This allows crops to catch up so we have large numbers and availability for spring and fall. We have been in a never-ending spring since the first lockdown ended May of 2020.”

And a bonus question because you’re likely asking this question yourself:

Q. Are there any plants that seem to be consistently available?

Kingston: “Palms, ferns, some dracaenas, succulents, bromeliads.”

If you missed the original AmericanHort webinar, you can watch it at www.hortknowledgecenter.org. **GP**