

It's time for creative thinking, plus how and how not to respond



THURSDAY, MARCH 19, 2020

subscribe



**COMING UP THIS WEEK:**

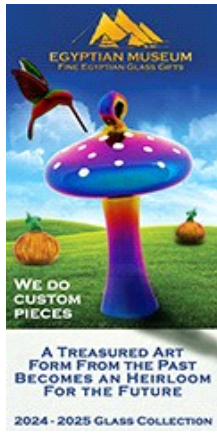
Cancelled, Not Completely  
Even More Choices  
"Dear Customer"  
Delivering Options  
Try a Plant Concierge?  
Private Bookings  
Make Yourself Essential  
Finally ...



## Cancelled, But Not Completely

COVID-19 has cancelled, delayed, shut down, and postponed innumerable events including the 2020 California Spring Trials, or CAST. But—as I wrote in the header—your annual look-see at plant breeders' new varieties has not been cancelled completely.





Trials sites aren't open—so how can I say they haven't been cancelled completely? As Bossman Chris Beytes reported this week in his *Acres Online*, the Bobbleheads (this year with bonus Bobble Bill)—and all of Ball Publishing, for that matter—will do our utmost to put out our regularly scheduled *Acres of Buzz* e-newsletters. We typically do six of them each year during our Trials tour, and we'll attempt six this year, too—Saturday the 28th through April 2.

Colleague Jen Zurko has been reaching out to Trial coordinators to see what kinds of new introduction information they have to share. Whatever it is, whatever form it takes, we'll be sure to share it with you. Could be a video of a trial coordinator showing us some plants. Could be a webinar. Could be the Bobbleheads flipping through a Trial book. We'll be hammering out a plan over the next week. So, stay tuned to the next *Buzz* for the hows, whats and whens of it all.

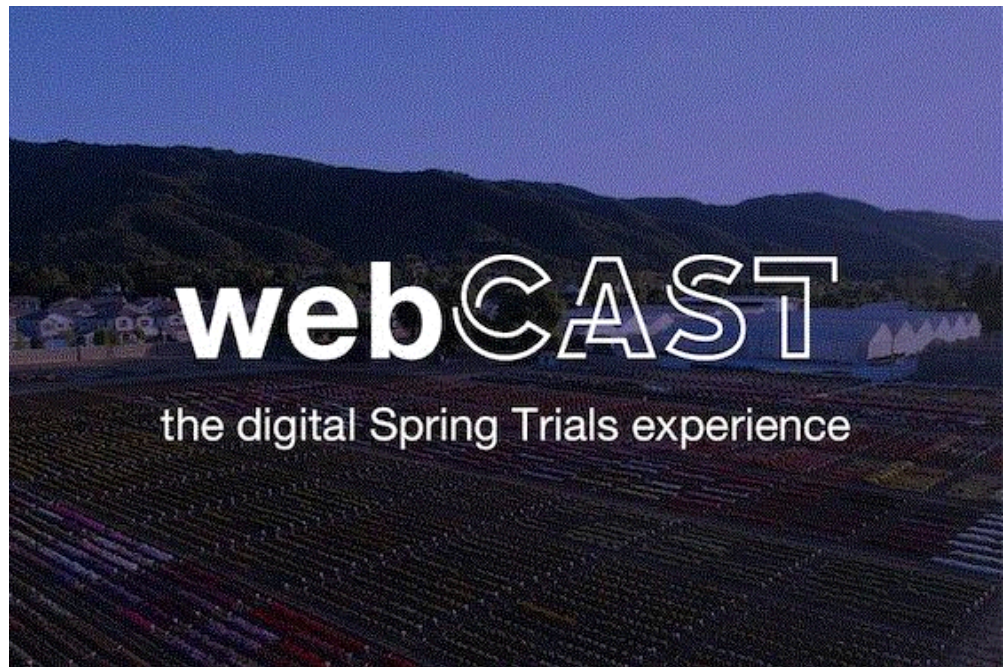


## Even More Choices

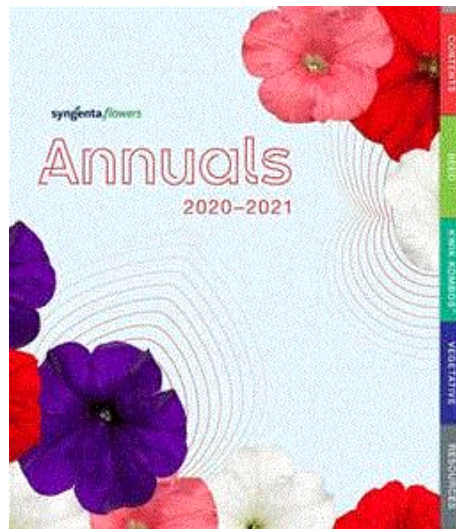
We've already heard from two of our now-unscheduled CAST stops how they plan on presenting their new varieties to the industry.

First to announce was Syngenta Flowers, who let us know last Friday that they plan on hosting a webinar. They are calling it a webCAST—get it? CAST?





The live and interactive Facebook webinar will feature 10 or more of Syngenta's experts touring you through their own products. It's scheduled for three consecutive days: Monday, March 30, Tuesday, March 31 and Wednesday, April 1, from 9:00 a.m. to 1:00 p.m. PDT each day. They highly recommend you sign up in advance (do so [HERE](#)) because if you can't make it during the live-streaming times, they will notify you of when the recorded version will be available for viewing. Syngenta Flowers' 2020-2021 Annuals catalog just dropped, too—how convenient! You can download it from [HERE](#).



Ball Horticultural Company has updated and released the CAST | Mobile app, the digital companion that they offered last year. I used it last year while on the tour and I found it useful, if that means anything to you. The app lets you see and learn all about the latest varieties from Ball FloraPlant, Ball Ingenuity, Burpee, Darwin Perennials, Kieft Seed, PanAmerican Seed, Selecta One and Wave. It's a free download for phones and tablets and can be found in the App Store and Google Play.



**CAST | mobile** 4+  
Ball Horticultural Company

★★★★★ 5.0, 2 Ratings

Free

I am sure there will be further announcements about how breeding companies will be sharing their new varieties. As I'm sure you've heard a lot lately, "the situation is fluid." We'll bring you an update next week.



### “Dear Customer”

I'm getting e-newsletters announcing COVID-19 policies from every organization that has my email address, including garden centers. Chris Beytes shared one from Wasco Nursery earlier this week. And Jen Polanz just sent me a letter-slash-blog post from the folks at Watters Garden Center, notable in its personal tone in the intro and the “What we are asking from you” portion (wash your hands, etc.) after listing all that Watters is doing to protect *them* (you can read the letter [HERE](#)).

So many of the policy notifications I'm receiving sound like they were written by the company lawyer or bean counter, immediately jumping into official statements. For me, I just note the source and press delete (I did have to retrieve the one from my vet from my trash).

Like any of the communications coming out of your company, what's most important is that the reader or customer have a feeling that you're being authentic. Your concern and caring shines through. Your empathy for your customers' and your employees' health is tangible and not just a point of liability. Move the words “monitor” and “guidelines” and “CDC” to the second paragraph, please.

Speaking of communications, if you don't have an e-newsletter platform ready to go to inform customers about your policies (or your super plants), then I have a suggestion for you. *Green Profit* contributing writer Katie Elzer-Peters of *The Garden of Words* will be hosting a quick-and-dirty webinar TODAY (March 19) at 1 p.m. all about getting your newsletters up and running. In “How to Get Started with MailChimp,” Katie will give you a tour of MailChimp, offer strategies for spreading the word about your business and get you started on your first newsletter campaign. And it's free! Register for it [HERE](#).

Industrious Katie also created a bunch of marketing graphics for IGCs who are finding themselves quickly coming up to speed on e-commerce. Here are a few examples:



Katie is gladly sharing these with IGCers out there and you are welcome to download them from the [DROPBOX](#) file. Use, share, tweak them as you wish or use them to get your creative juices flowing. Thanks, Katie!



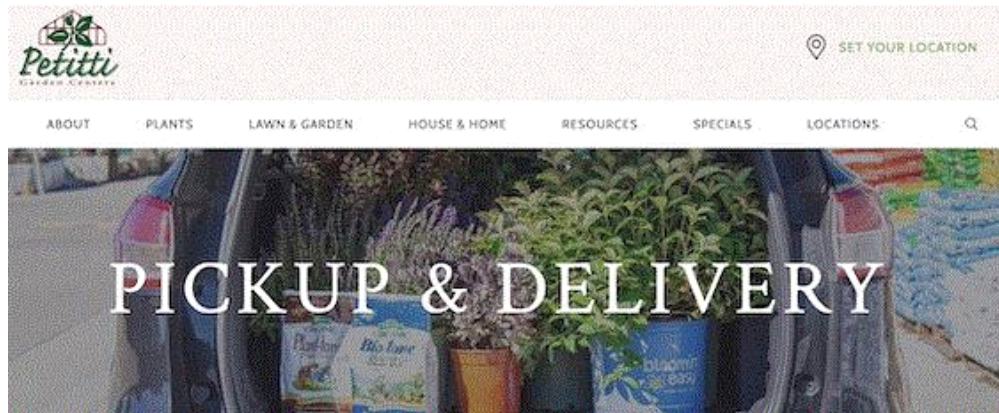
## Delivering Options

Delivery and curbside pickup of products are quickly becoming options for just about every category of business. In fact, I just returned from picking up meds curbside at my local vet. And Harpoon Brewery here in Boston offered curbside pickup of seasonal beers on St. Patrick's Day—they even threw in a fresh pretzel with every order! What a day for a forced closure for that type of business, huh?

For those of you who do not offer a delivery service, it's high time you did. Even without COVID-19 keeping folks home, it's a much-needed service for customers who are older, pressed for time or without vehicles.

Petitti Garden Centers in the Cleveland, Ohio, area have begun offering curbside pickup and delivery, due to the COVID-19 pandemic. They announced it via an e-newsletter and linked to the information on their [WEBSITE](#). **And this is important**—on that same page they have thumbnail listings of the most popular products purchased this time of year along with the contact information for each of their stores so a customer can easily place an order. Instead of spending time on getting paywalls and online stores up and running, calling in with a credit card number is really the easiest way to go.





How many of you have started offering delivery and pickup just this week? Do you foresee this option continuing beyond the virus concern? Share your thoughts [HERE](#).



## How About a Plant Concierge?

Leslie Halleck of [Halleck Horticultural](#) may be one of the smartest if not most sensible women in horticulture. Why? Because she knows what plant consumers want—because she herself has a healthy obsession with this industry's products.

But like many American women, she's non-stop busy and doesn't really have time to do all the shopping she needs to do—including plant shopping. What to do? Here's an idea she shared on her Facebook page last Friday, indicating that during the COVID-19 crisis is the right time to start:

*"If you [garden centers] have not yet started a personal plant shopping concierge service, NOW is your moment. I've been shopping this way for years now, because even though I'm a professional horticulturist and avid gardener, I'm a super busy lady. And I'm so busy helping green industry businesses, I don't really have time to garden center hop. But since this is not yet a formal service directly offered, I recruited my own personal plant shopper ([Flower Child Plants](#)) many years ago. I pay her to do it.*

*"Given the situation we all find ourselves in right now ... with many people stuck or working at home ... doesn't this seem like an ideal solution for your customers, who will no doubt turn to their plants and garden for comfort and stress relief? Do the custom shopping for them, and drop it off. IT'S AWESOME. Plus, it's a great way to help consumers continue to support local business yet maintain social distancing."*

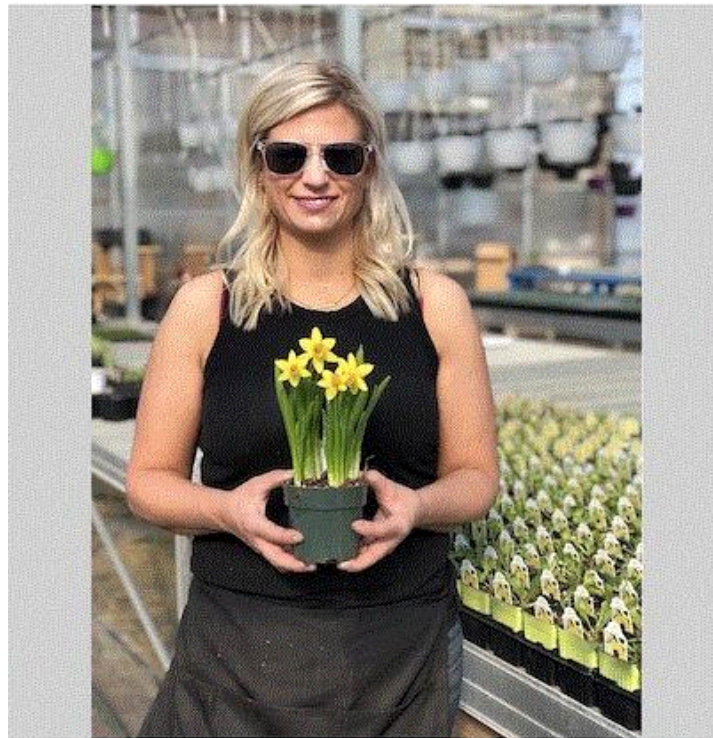
Leslie may be offering a few complementary 30-minute phone/online consultations on this very topic (among others) to garden centers and growers. I'll keep you posted on if and when those happen.

## Private Bookings

I'd heard from *Green Profit* columnist Bill McCurry that Debbie Foisy of Deb's Greenhouse in Alberta, Canada, had come up with a novel idea. They are dealing with the same advisories as the U.S. is, and she figured folks holed up with spouses, kids and themselves would need a break from the same four walls after a while. So she set up an "Escape to the Greenhouse" offering on her website. Folks can book a private one-hour outing in her greenhouse to wander around, find some quiet space and quiet time and just chill. Could be just a person wandering around or a family in need of getting some fresh air. And it's for free! She had her first booking within an hour of offering it—and that was around midnight.

I emailed Debbie about it and here's a portion of what she wrote in return:

"There's so much uncertainty right now ... people are going to be craving some sort of relief, and right now we can offer that. If we're mandated that I'm not allowed to [stay open] then we'll adapt to that, too. There's been a lot of buzz on whether or not a greenhouse is 'essential services' or 'essential retail,' and as agriculture, we can make a strong case. But if you want to be essential, then make yourself essential."



Escape to the Greenhouse - no charge

1 hr

Book Now

Debbie's not open to the public until April, so this is a nice way to offer customers not only a respite but also a sneak peek at what they could buy for their spring gardens. Great idea, Debbie!

## Make Yourself Essential

Debbie mentioned the "essential services" phrase, the phrase that, if substantiated, may allow

your business to remain open while other non-essential services must close if your local or state government feels closures are necessary for maintaining the health of the community.

Danny Summers of the Garden Center Group along with the AmericanHort staff and a few other industry stakeholders have worked on some messaging for presenting garden retailers as “essential businesses.” They are sharing this messaging with all garden centers so that they (meaning you) can personalize it to your own organization and send to your local and state officials determining what type of businesses remain open during imposed quarantines.

“We don’t want your garden center to be forced to close and not give your customers the gardening options it needs,” Danny wrote in an email to help spread this message. “I encourage you to send the statement to any of your U.S. Congressmen and state and local governing officials. Make it **personal** to your business.”

Danny is sharing the documents in two editable forms to make it easy for you to turn this task over quickly—i.e. DO THIS NOW. Here are those links:

**Word version** [HERE](#).

**PDF version** [HERE](#).

Danny did share that the message is being heard by some state governments, such as Pennsylvania, who released a statement on Tuesday that affirmed that, “Agriculture’s role is unquestionable: access to food is a right; we need local agriculture now more than ever.” If your garden center sells vegetable plants and supplies, make your case that you are an essential business.

## Finally ... Two Different Retail Responses

The other day I went into a local independent hardware store to buy toilet paper (yes, I was one of those people). Casual conversation at the register ended with the clerk, temple vein pulsing, sharing his political conspiracy theories on the current COVID-19 crisis. Not knowing what to say, I left with a quiet, “Well, I do hope everyone stays healthy ...”. I will likely not shop at that store again.

And then there’s what Rapoza’s Greenhouse & Florist in Westport, Massachusetts, is doing. Earlier this week, they were asking for donations for flowers to send to nursing homes and care facilities that are closed to visitors. Of all the people who could use some cheer, it’s the older among us who are suddenly completely isolated. Admirable effort, indeed.

This current crisis is hitting everyone hard. Our current way of life has changed dramatically. At this moment in time, it’s not about you. So be nice. Be kind. Have empathy. Listen. And if you have to switch to delivery or curbside pickup, reduce hours or close completely in order to help #flattenthecurve for your community, come back ready to meet a changed world.

And remember, stay at a distance and stay safe. Comments, questions, suggestions? Send 'em to [ewells@ballpublishing.com](mailto:ewells@ballpublishing.com).





Ellen Wells  
Editor-at-Large  
Green Profit

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