

Kiss My Aster

9/1/2019

Remember the Sea Monkeys

Amanda Thomsen



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An ad pops into my Facebook feed—no doubt it was fueled by my nonstop quest for acquiring more seeds. Keywords are going to get us all. On my screen, I see a large-leaved hosta and every leaf is a different, true shade of ROY G BIV (red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet). It is so obviously a doctored photo that I can chuckle to myself. It advertises 1,200 seeds for \$7.95 and ships from China. I can get a good laugh out of it (and keep on scrolling) because it's just so ridiculous, but what about those who are so gullible that they fall for this stuff?

When it comes across their screen they instantly fall in love, thinking "if it's on the Internet it must be true" and "I'll get this before the neighbors do and then show them who's boss!" simultaneously. Of course they don't want to send off for the 1,200 seeds and wait two months for shipping from China

because that would take too long, so they come into their local garden center and demand to know where you keep the rainbow-colored hostas. These customers will then get mad at you for not having this make-believe thing in stock.

How dare you not have the pink-leaved weeping willow that's promised to sound like "Someday My Prince Will Come" being played on a saw?

As you know, this also happens with the blue, weeping, cutleaf Japanese maples, the rainbow roses, the Japanese dragon-face orchid and the clematis with multi-colored, much-doctored blooms.

The fact is, to one this gullible, you must do a little do-si-do around their egos because once you deny that yellow blueberries are a "thing" they'll get defensive. How does one fight against something so obviously fake?

- Buy the scam seeds. I know, it hurts. Try them, grow them and blog or use social media to document your findings. This is great information to fill those winter months when you're struggling to find content. Do the rose experiment where you cut the stem into four and put each piece into a different color of water and have it on display for customers at the cash wrap. Educate. How do we have people so removed from nature that the purple pumpkin seeds seem totally legit? We need to keep educating people so they have less of a chance of being duped.
- Tell them the story of saving up your allowance and sending off for Sea Monkeys when you were a kid. "A bowlful of happiness! Instant pets!" Tell them how disappointed you were when the packet of brine shrimp showed up. Ask

them if they ever had a similar situation in their life, then let them know that they were just about to buy some Sea Monkeys 2.0.

- Utmost commiseration. Use the word “deceptive.” You’re sorry that those predators are even out there. Perhaps they’ll take your pity, but not your straight talk.
- Ask them what would happen if they went ahead and purchased the seeds and tried them and what their recourse would be. We both know they could drive from garden center to garden center looking for them and they won’t find them.
- Let them know that you’re on their side. You’re trying to save them from wasting time and money. Breeding has come so far you never know what’s real anymore. Remind them to buy from reputable breeders and sending off to China is a red flag.
- Try talking to them about your credibility and that you have no skin in the game; you just want them to not get scammed on the Internet.

How do we defeat make-believe products when customers want so badly to believe in them? Of course, there’s a 99% chance they really weren’t your customers anyways, just a one-off, so don’t get too bent if they’re looking for a fight as well as a rainbow hosta or two. **GP**

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