

## Kiss My Aster

5/1/2020

### Sign of the Times

*Amanda Thomsen*



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As I write this, I'm luckily healthy and still employed. Deemed "essential," I'm just about to leave for work. I'll bring my daughter with me to the farm I work on, so that my husband can have a quiet house while he's working from home. She's not thrilled with it and I feel anxious about bringing her out into this world, but I'll do it anyways because I don't have much choice. We're currently all healthy and sticking with it. There are four to six rolls of toilet paper in the house and, aside from work, I've been nowhere in three weeks.

We know we're privileged, but it's so, so hard right now. I feel shades of shame for being at work right now while all my friends are cooped up at home. I believe in my work, but I also feel oddly envious of those staying home right now. I wouldn't mind spending these weeks in my garden, finally getting the loads of stuff done I've always meant to do. I want to live entirely in the moment and give my anxieties some breathing room to only care about

NOW. My brain wants steady, physical work with no interruptions; there's so much to think about and somehow try to reconcile. But interruptions abound, even more than usual.

My friends, all at home and bored, decide they want gardening advice and text me while I'm at work (trying to juggle my personal workload, the anxiety I feel when I think about what my wonderful employers are going through right now and entertaining my kid). Then PING! "Where can I get soil right now?" PING! "I want to start a vegetable garden, help me!" or "Which hose should I get on Amazon?"

And heck, I've been evangelizing for years, hoping for a wake-up call; I've been writing and speaking and advertising gardening as a passion that non-gardeners should embrace and now they're coming and I'm ... annoyed. My instincts say it's time to circle my own wagons, not help others build theirs from the ground up. But for 100 years, I've told people that I was there to help them, that I was born to get them excited about their yards. And now they're here!

And I'm at work while trying to homeschool (and just reeling).

Customer service in the current situation is with teeth-bared and armor on. It goes against everything I've ever felt, up until now. I've wanted new gardeners to flock to us in droves and now, here they are, and I just feel resentment. Am I encouraging people to go shop at their local garden center? I don't know, it depends on the garden center, check their Facebook Page. Some are locked up tight, some are pretending everything is normal, and some are doing phone and online orders only. Some, like me, just want you to leave them alone so they can get in their

feelings. Some are concerned with how to offer a hands-free hand-off of flowers and soil, some are thinking about how to elude customers that want to close-talk and get in their personal space. Do I want people going to the big box stores? I think I want them to just stay home. Is ordering soil from Amazon cool? I don't even know anymore.

Medical professionals and grocery store employees are our heroes right now and it feels out of place to get lumped in with them. Our mulch deliveries aren't saving lives, but maybe they are ...? Maybe a family that works in their yard isn't out licking the handrails at O'Hare.

Oh my, this column is about to go off the rails, so I'll end it here. Whether you're working through this crisis or sitting it out, it's hard. I hold hope that on the other side, there'll be some sort of wake-up call that invigorates our industry and overall economy.

Until then, I'll be doing my best to help anyways. **GP**

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