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First

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New Beginnings

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According to studies, it takes anywhere from 18 to 254 days to form a habit. Considering as of this writing I've been sheltering in place for approximately 277 days (okay, it's only actually been 50 days, but it feels sooo much longer), I've definitely formed some new habits—some good, some … well, not so great. Let's talk about the good ones.

Like most of the world, I've started to make my own bread. I don't know what it is, but making dough is very therapeutic. I've also delved into making pizza sauce and marinara, which also are quite satisfying. I've decided there's no need to order pizza ever again, between my dough and sauce and my husband's expert pizza-making abilities (thanks to a couple of teenage years working at a pizza place) we can make it better than the local joints.

Also, like most of America, we expanded our veggie garden this year. On a recent warm Saturday we spent the day as a family digging out a spot for our raised bed garden. On a subsequent weekend, we filled it with a mix of compost, top soil, potting mix and fertilizer. The kids spent hours researching which plants should go where in the garden bed and formulated a plan that we're following. It's a labor of love for everyone involved and will surely continue through the summer—I foresee my biggest challenge will be getting any harvest into the house before young hands pluck and eat our bounty.

We aren't the only family coming together in this way and that's a boon for our industry. Our goals now are to help support them through new experiences like fertilizing, pest and disease issues, watering, harvesting, and what to do with their fruits, veggies and herbs. They're changing their habits, too, and I suspect will gravitate toward making new dishes with their newfound produce.

We also have another challenge as an industry—in adapting so quickly to the threat of COVID-19 (which I think everyone should take a step back and appreciate just how fast everyone changed their businesses), we created new habits for customers. I know I appreciate the ability to order online and pick up virtually anything curbside now. And with the future unknown, I'd like to continue that way. How do we now make this a part of our business model for the foreseeable future? Katie Elzer-Peters has become an expert in this realm and we asked her to share how retailers can pivot to include e-commerce as a long-term digital strategy.

Another aspect of having a digital presence is getting customers to find you. To that end, we felt a beginner course on search engine optimization was necessary.

I want to call out Steve Bailey, a provider for The Garden Center Group and owner of RetailKPI Consulting Group, who's been trying to change retailer behaviors for the better for many years. He collaborated with Senior Editor Bill Calkins on a series focused on category growth. A special thanks to Steve, Bill and The Garden Center Group for all your work on this valuable series.

And finally, we asked our three *Green Profit*/RBI Young Retailer Award nominees how they've helped change their businesses to adapt in the age of COVID-19. They all replied (on deadline, no less!) with thoughtful and poignant essays. It always restores my faith in the future when I come into contact with our Young Retailer nominees and this year is no different. You can read their thoughts and we hope you can attend the virtual awards ceremony when we announce the winner during this year's Cultivate'20 Virtual. **GP**