

Kiss My Aster

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Amanda Spouts Unpopular Opinions

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My thoughts are disorganized here in the early stages of 2022 and I'm willing to bet I'm not alone on that one. The holidays, an ongoing pansydemie and freakish weather have pulled many of us off our chartered courses. I'm always thankful for February, that buffer between last year and this year's new levels of nonsense. February has become one of my favorite months, strictly as one who's worked in this industry for eons. There's stuff going on (enough to have purpose and not get into too much trouble), but not enough that you can't enjoy long breakfasts, a quick getaway or a well-timed staycation. The excitement/trepidation for spring is in the air, but not in an oppressive way just yet.

So what am I going to talk to you about this month? I've decided to pick on unpopular and half-cooked ideas to see what they sparked:

- I'm into the idea of buy-back programs for pots, garden ornaments and outdoor furniture. So it'd go like this: You'd have to set up some parameters—for instance, only doing buy-backs on Monday mornings or you'd have to be emailed photos first. But the gist of it is to bring in some unusual, affordable pieces that younger gardeners could afford to opt into. Old materials could be good for some amount of in-store credit. I know there are a lot of kinks to work out, but there's something there for this idea. I'm just not sure I've cracked the code just yet.
- Use the onesies/twosies left over in annual flats to create flats of pre-designed containers "to-go" and set them up on end caps with a sign that says, "This is all you need for a 24-in. pot, yo!" And, yeah, some thought can go into the boxes, but really, it's mostly leftover stuff that's been arranged to look decent on an endcap. What a fabulous way to deal with "go-backs" (insert sly smirk emoji here).
- I'm one of those people who would rather swim in ice-choked Lake Michigan right now than talk on the phone—ESPECIALLY to someone I don't know—but the customer phone calls that punctuate our days seem so ... can I call them fruitless? Disruptive? I hate to say it, but having a full-time phone answerer seems like the real answer. Dedicating phone call answering as a real staff position makes sense. People Google you, then they call. Those phone calls can be converted into dollarbucks walking through your gate with someone trained to make it happen.
- And even more unpopular, those little chat windows on websites are going to become unavoidable for YOU someday soon, too.
- I'm still in love with the idea of personal shopper hours. Customers can reserve an hour of dedicated help. They put down some money on a deposit that's refundable with their purchase, and I feel like this setup just respects

everyone's time and sets you high above any Big Box experience.

- This is a great time to treat yourself like a human and figure out how you can continue to schedule yourself some peace in the upcoming months. Stay curious. Get yourself an Audible or Libby account. Book a vacation later in the year to look forward to NOW or make Friday night movie night no matter what.

Invest in the things that will keep you moving with, if not a smile, a sly smirk. **GP**

Amanda Thomsen is a funky, punky garden writer and author. Her blog is planted at KissMyAster.com and you can follow her on Facebook, Twitter AND Instagram @KissMyAster.