

Kiss My Aster

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The Killer in Me is the Killer in You

Amanda Thomsen



Since I opened the shop, I've completely neglected my home garden and houseplants. Some of the houseplants are hanging on by a thread and are crying out for help, my vegetable garden is overtaken by barnyard grass and bindweed, and I harvested cucumbers like slimy land mines. My *Rosa glauca* finally has rose rosette and I haven't been out there to remove and burn it and I really, really should. When customers say, "Oh, I bet you have great houseplants at home!" I stifle a guffaw and tell them the truth. I did have nice plants at home and then I opened a shop and everything went cattywampus.

They laugh and then put a second, third or fifth plant on the counter because now we are the same, we are both murderers of houseplants and buyers of more.

Once I let them know that I'm probably killing eight things while we stand here and chat, their posture relaxes and they start to spill their own dark houseplant horror stories. I tell them that once I left an 8-ft. Norfolk Pine outside to die while the temps dipped because I was too worn out to care that year. Their faces soften and lean in. "Do tell!" their eyes say. Oh, I have done some MURDER, I tell them.

And then I tell them this fable: Imagine a huge sliding scale of plants; on one end is a \$4 grocery store bouquet of alstroemeria and on the far other side is a Giant Sequoia. I explain to them that a houseplant is sooo much closer to the cut flowers than the Sequoia, and they begin to see the light.

I tell them I fully understand that killing a plant feels terrible. However, A) if you start composting, it dulls the pain and B) I am proud to work in this amazing industry of greenhouses and growers all over the world. When you buy plants you're supporting the human that planted a seed or cutting months or even years ago to make this plant, or the soul who has had to water it every day since then, the trucker who hauled it up here from Florida or the wholesaler who has an encyclopedic knowledge of every plant in their care, or ME, a pain in the aster shop mama.

It's like "abracadabra" or "open sesame." They had never thought of it before and it turns out they do very much want to vote with their dollarbucks for what we do, daily.

So like any sane shopkeeper, I've started stocking items for the plant murderer. I have "sorry your plant died, murderer" greeting cards and pencils and a ton of fun stickers referencing horticultural death. There's a cat peeking

over foliage and the words “plant killa” and a few that riff on fiddle leaf figs being little more than ticking time bombs.

I like setting this expectation that houseplants are here for a good time, not for a long time, and that can be good. I bring their attention back to the fair price point and it isn't that they mind the cost, it's that they're down on themselves about killing plants. I tell them to continue their killing streak and come back and see me because now you get to try something new and not only support me, a local business, but a network of people who sweat more than the shopper could even imagine. Do it for the terminally dehydrated, I add.

I tell them that I've got 31 flavors of plants (at least!) and I won't hold it against you if you want to try each one. **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.