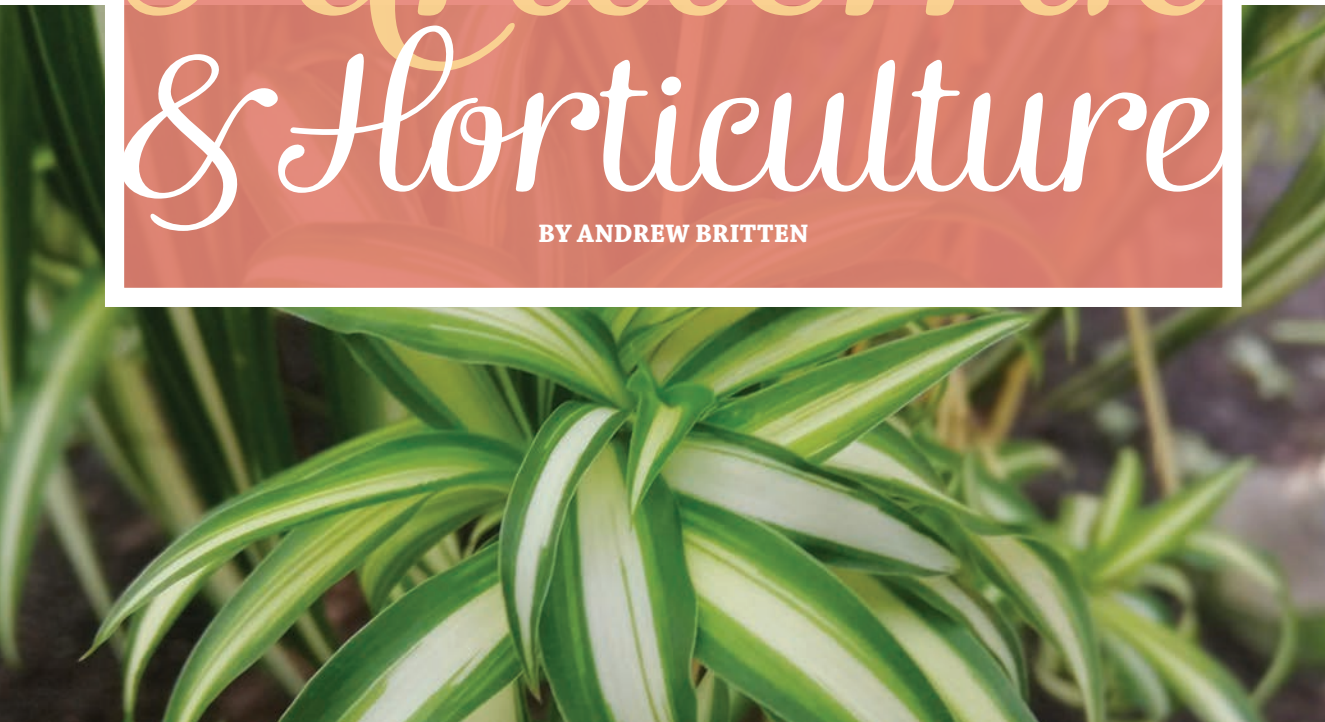




Let's Talk
Pandemic
 & Horticulture
 BY ANDREW BRITTEN



In these unprecedented times, growers must prepare for the unpredictable season ahead.

As I sit here and write this, I am now into day 73 of my Safer at Home crusade. It is not because I had/have the virus, but because I had five levels of my spine fused together in my neck. To say the least, I am probably the most ready person to get back to normal of anyone out there, yet in 17 more days when I finally get out of this brace, I probably still won't be able to do a whole bunch. The good news is that I am an avid concert goer and am happily not missing any of the bands I really wanted to see but could not with my surgery!

Being home, I have had a lot of time to watch what is going on in our industry in reaction to the

pandemic. Our products bring joy and cleaner air to our customers and as such have, in most areas in the United States, been considered an essential business. Without a doubt, we need to raise a toast to all the health care workers, firefighters and police that are on the front lines of this.

What we haven't done yet is raise a toast to all of the hard workers in our industry that are still coming in each day to make sure all the plants around the country continue to look good and make it to the stores and into people's homes. So, here's to all the agriculture workers that continue to work through all the craziness! You are all truly heroes as well.

This much is clear — we as a world are coming together against this. It shows the best in people, but unfortunately also brings out some of the worst. I have had more fraudulent emails in the past month than I can remember in the past year!

WHAT'S NEXT?

People are not traveling and, for the most part, really cannot. This is the time where we always see an uptick in the plant industry as people stay home and want to spruce up the place. We see in the nation that people are learning to social distance in stores and still be able to get the plants that they want. It is nice to see that grocery stores have also started stocking plants again as well.

This is all new territory for us, so it is incredibly challenging to predict exactly what is going to happen. One thing for sure is that it is going to happen in stages and not simply like an on-and-off switch. Access to plants, landscaping and outdoor activities will likely be the first things to come back. I certainly do not expect to be attending a concert in Miami anytime soon.

I am writing this in mid-April, so my predictions will likely be known as right or wrong by the time you read this. We have missed some of our key spring sales this year, but people are still going to be anxious to have their yards looking good.

Without a lot of the normal places for people to spend extra cash available, there should be a good flow of money for our industry. I predict that June will become a large month for our industry compared to years past. I am also predicting there will be an increase in the purchase of houseplants as well. We have already been seeing the tropical trend increasing year over year lately. Many of the interiorscapes have not been maintained lately and will be changed out, putting a large demand on the industry when things open back up. Many landscape changeouts have been delayed just the same.

I believe that now is the time that we need to look at planting up crops, particularly warm weather annuals and tropicals to meet this upcoming demand. Remember that the first dump is always the least costly. If you are holding onto product in hopes to resell later, you are probably best off dumping and getting a fresh crop started for when the demand comes back in a strong way.

CROPS TO CONSIDER

For some ideas on things that would make great plants to put in pots right now, I have put together the following list.

- 1. Aglaonema** – You can purchase rooted cuttings of these and plant in a 4-inch pot with a grow time of six weeks!
- 2. Chlorophytum** – Spider plants are something everyone knows and certainly an item that brings me back to happy childhood

memories of growing them.

3. **Croton** – Just like the aglaonema, you can purchase rooted cuttings or liners of these and have a quick turn in a smaller pot. Having so many fall colors in this plant will make it a great item to extend the summer sales.
4. **Curcuma** – Although commonly grown for outdoors, did you know that these can last indoors once in bloom for over a month?
5. **Dieffenbachia** – Another great houseplant with both large and small varieties that work very well in the home.
6. **Heliconia** – This is a plant that just screams tropical. If you cannot travel to a tropical region, bring it to your home this summer. Plant clumps of *Heliconia choconiana* for a 12-week turn in a 1-gallon pot.
7. **Neoregelia** – There are many varieties here that will color up nicely and quickly in a smaller pot. They make great plants for indoor and outdoor use.
8. **Tropical Perennials** – These are those summer annuals that take the heat.
 - a. Coleus (sun varieties)
 - b. Cuphea
 - c. Duranta
 - d. Euryops
 - e. Evolvulus
 - f. Lantana
 - g. *Lavandula pinnata*
 - h. Lysimachia
 - i. Plumbago
 - j. Ruellia
 - k. Setcreasea – Purple Queen
 - l. Strobilanthes
 - m. Homestead Verbena
9. **Tropical Vines** – As listed in my last article, there are many attractive tropical vines available for use in baskets and pots. Look into epipremnum, pictus and philodendrons.

Feel free to reach out to me for any growing advice on any of the above listed crops.


As many companies are struggling a little financially at the moment, consider having whatever product you are thinking of producing done as a liner at another company so you can buy the grow time of the liner

plus normal terms before you have to pay for the product. If you work on items that finish relatively quickly, cash should be much more manageable in this way.

In conclusion, I want to wish the best for everyone out there — you, your family, friends and businesses.

This soon will be behind us and we will be back filling the world with joy in plants. Now is no longer the time to be canceling on what will be selling in the future; you will be missing out on a lot of sales and may potentially lose your contracts with your customers

to others that were prepared to supply the plant chain.

Safer at Home should be Safer and More Beautiful at Home! 

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