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Kyle Fessler

Brighter days ahead

This past month marked the one-year anniversary of our lives getting flipped upside down by COVID-19.

What began as a passing phrase on the news ticker quickly turned into what some expected could be the Great Recession 2.0.

Uncertainty became the norm. Expectations changed by the day. We were all in need of direction, and many of us didn't know where to turn to get the answers we craved.

Regardless of global events, March is typically a time of chaos in the nursery industry. It's the time of year when we deal with the problems of the day, and don't look out too much farther than a week into the future.

The chaos increased exponentially last spring. For some growers, the question of the day for was no longer "What are we shipping?" but "Will we ever ship again?"

The potential was there for the industry to take a massive hit. Our previous bout with economic disaster led to the demise of nearly half the nurseries in Oregon. It took us nearly a decade to climb out of that.

Fast-forward a few weeks. A brief pause in operations allowed many of us to examine our businesses and evaluate ways to move forward in the new world we were facing. Consumers took advantage of their time at home to evaluate their surroundings as well. As our executive director loves to frequently point out, "Gardening isn't canceled!"

Gardening, in fact, was not canceled. Gardening may have just received a new lifeblood.

New generations of potential nursery customers were suddenly stuck at home, sitting in a foreign corner of their living room that had become the de-facto "home office." They suddenly realized that their new home office could sure use a house plant or two.

Looking back on the events that unfolded last year, I feel extremely blessed to be where our industry is today.

Looking out the window to see the sun shining over a not-so-picturesque yard revealed the need for some landscape rejuvenation. Those kids on zoom in the other room? Ripe was the opportunity to get outside and plant a few vegetables in the garden.

Looking back on the events that unfolded last year, I feel extremely blessed to be where our industry is today. As businesses, we are always looking to build our customer base. This is far from the way any of us expected it to happen, but it's a blessing that has brought our passion of growing plants to more new gardeners than we could ever imagine.

In spite of the rocky start, last spring proved to be a great one for many in the nursery industry. Some reported record years, and it seemed like the spring gardening attitude continued straight through the summer and into the fall.

This year has all the making of being another great one for the industry. Limited supply and an increased enthusiasm for live goods present a grand opportunity for our growers. More importantly, we have the potential to build on this connection created with a new generation of gardeners. We can fan the flames of that passion for plants that will last a lifetime. ☺