



Bridget K. Behe
behe@msu.edu



Roberto G. Lopez
rglopez@msu.edu

Retail Garden Center and Florist Strategies to Sell in the Current Environment

If you are a retail garden center or florist, are you currently CLOSED; currently OPEN, but NO in-store contact (online and phone orders); or currently OPEN, but with in-store contact? In this article we will summarize tips to help you navigate through the ever-changing environment faced by retail garden centers and florists and help you plan for the future.

As we personally and professionally work under continuously changing circumstances and orders, we should keep some things in mind. Although changing daily, we must do what is legal at the national, state, and county/municipality levels (Figure 1). National green industry and small business networks such as: ([AmericanHort's Coronavirus Resource Center](#), [the Society of American Florists COVID-19 Updates for the Floral Industry](#), [AFE's Update for Supporters and Industry Members](#), and the [National Small Business Association COVID-19 Small Business Resources](#)) and state organizations such as the ([MI Greenhouse Growers Association](#)) can be key to finding the most up to date information.

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GET STARTED

Hours

Greenhouse and Flower Shop

FLORIST | PLANT FINDER | BLOG | CONTACT

Figure 1. Garden center websites providing customers with current information on operating status.

Due to the Governors order we will be closing for retail business. Please check back for updates.



Second, we need to do what is ethical. You want your business to survive, but you also don't want to contribute to the increasing spread of COVID-19. What can be done to ensure the health and safety of your employees and customers? Perhaps you can switch to online or telephone order sales, curbside pick-up, or no touch payments? You know your customer base and your market(s) best. Third, what can you do to be positive and helpful? Let good judgement and ethics guide your choices. Realize that your choices as a business, employer, and retailer affect the health and safety of others in your community.

Pause, prepare now, regardless of status

For the green industry, the most important time of the year is upon us. SPRING! Renewal of life! Optimism! Hope! Take care of yourself first (physical, emotional, and mental health) and your family. Also, remember that the lifeblood of your business is your staff. Be frank and honest with them and have frequent communication. Next, are your customers, make visible steps to keep them safe.

Contingency plans

Reiterate Dr. Charlie Hall's message: "Develop contingency plans" and Dr. Behe adds "do not reduce your advertising or communications" even during the pandemic (Figures 2 and 3). This is your lifeline to customers! Let them know that you are open (if allowed by your state government) and tell them what you are doing to ensure everyone's health and safety. Preparing for reduction in sales (and the impacts they will have on profits) will help your business survive this and other crises. Continuing to communicate and demonstrate how you can sell product will facilitate those sales (Figure 1).



Hi everyone! I just wanted to give an update as to what is going on right now with the greenhouse and COVID-19. As of today we are continuing our preparations for our spring opening on April 20th. In the meantime, we are building a different shopping experience that will follow Michigan laws and CDC guidelines, to ensure the safety of our customers and employees. We are not quite sure what this will look like, but we will continue to keep everyone updated through Facebook and our website,

Figure 2. Use social media for updates and to send positive and encouraging messages.

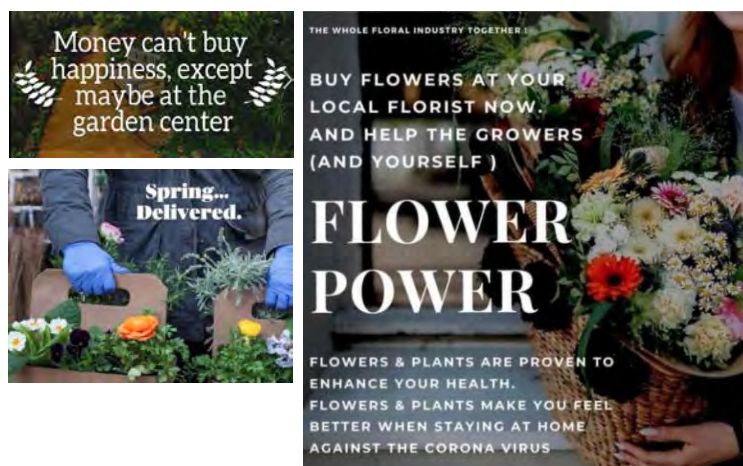


Figure 3. A vegetable gardening Facebook post uses humor to encourage consumers to garden (top left), City Grange's tweet promotes "delivering" spring (bottom left), and a Syngenta Flowers tweet encourages consumers to purchase flowers and plants (right).





Figure 4. Snapdragons are great plants for kids. Promote the benefits of gardening as a family.



Figure 5. Create combinations of flowers, herb and vegetables for consumers eager to grow their own food.

Keeping staff safe and healthy

- Keep communications honest and upbeat!
- Meet with staff regularly (at a safe distance or virtually) and reinforce what is the new protocol in English and Spanish if necessary.
- Are you asking your employees to report any symptoms each day?
- Reinforce hygiene in all locations of your operation: cover nose and mouth for cough or sneeze; stay home with fever or other symptoms.
- Distancing from each other: communicate via phone or online
- In store: clear area around cash register of displays and place plexiglass shields.
- Place X's or boxes on floor at check-out to space customers 6 feet apart.
- Reduce hand-to-hand contact by not accepting cash, instead utilize credit card tap technologies, phone payments, or online credit card transactions.
- Follow [CDC guidelines for sanitizing surfaces in businesses.](#)

Communication with customers

- Be positive! Be honest! Communicate often!
- Deliver [positive messages about the health and well-being benefits of gardening](#) and how plants provide positive mental health and well-being! Plants make people happy!
- [Promote gardening activities with kids](#) because parents need help now, too (Figure 4).
- In a time of social distancing, a vegetable or herb garden provides many benefits from family activities to growing their own food (Figure 5).
- Show beautiful images or containers of food and flower combinations with positive messages and how and where customers might buy them.
- #PlantsDoThat infographics provide free positive messages about plants.
- People need to see your product, but not all at once.
- Sequence and feature 3-5 products per week (Google docs)
- Expect the basics to sell quickly (seeds, potting mixes, fertilizer, vegetable transplants, etc.).

Open, but limited offering/access

What is possible? Delivery, curbside pickup, concierge (personal shopper via Facetime, Messenger, WhatsApp, other videochat app). What does that look like through the entire transaction from selection, through payment, and delivery? Walk it through in detail and make sure it is going to be worth the time and effort!

- What can be done in a short time?
- Electronic communications with your customer base are essential now
- Email a newsletter with your (planned) options (encourage your customers to frequently check website for updates)
- Use social media to communicate with your existing network several times a week
- Be positive, helpful messages not just sales (plant benefits and humor)
- What can be featured? Think solutions Think packages not individual plants

Products: Think Packages

- Food first, pretty second, but combine them
- No discounts or sales and no price gouging
- Use low margin items as part of packages to move inventory
- Skip the fountains and statues, trees may be a tough sell
- Shrubs in some larger mixed containers
- Communicate, communicate, communicate! Show and tell worked well in kindergarten and works now (camera phone and social media are your best friends)

What's your take-out menu look like?

- Pizza pot: grape tomato, basil,

oregano, marigold, spicy pepper

- Pasta package: Roma tomato, parsley, nasturtium, green pepper
- Salad bowl: greens and seeds (some for now, seeds for later)
- Beginner's beauty: Easy-peasy marigolds, petunia, or calibrachoa
- What's your favorite color? Red, yellow, green, blue and feature a color a day to limit choice overload

Video concierge

- Make an appointment (using scheduling software)
- Minimum purchase order and add a fee or a percentage of purchase for time
- Walk around with video chat to show products
- Have customer place order
- Pick order and place on cart (number carts)
- Text or call with stall number
- Leave cart at car/vehicle (do not load in trunk)
- Wipe down cart and go back inside
- Delivery (provide a free flower or plant but charge for delivery) is simpler; leave on front porch, call or text

Curbside and delivery for spring and summer

- Call and place an order or place order online
- Pick order and place on cart (number carts)
- Text or call with stall number
- Leave cart at car/vehicle (do not load in trunk)
- Wipe down cart and go back inside
- Delivery is simpler; leave on front porch, call or text

Online store

- Work your network (or your IT person) for simple steps to get up and going in the short term
- Shopify (online store)
- Facebook and telephone? Newsletter and call with credit card?
- Add Paypal, Stripe, Venmo, Square, etc.

Displays

- Intentional design (product themed). Integrate products to sell “packages” and not one or two plants. Cross merchandise with related products.
- Follow the supermarket concept and put milk (high volume product) in the rear to make people walk past other great products.
- Creating displays with plants by use not by botanical life cycle. Mix annuals, tropicals, shrubs, perennials, and edibles in some containers and displays. Let customers know the containers are seasonal not meant to survive through the winter.
- Inspire by showing use and cross-merchandising with containers, gloves, statuary, and fountains.

Signs

- Benefits, benefits, and more benefits! Give them a “why” to buy. Features on the tag and maybe some in smaller print when you pull them in closer.
- Prices lower, smaller, and to the right. People read signs like a newspaper. Get them more compelling information first before the price.

- Show people reflective of your community interacting with products. We like pictures of plants; customers want to envision themselves enjoying the plants.

Summary

- Reset to a new “normal” as retail shopping has fundamentally changed
- Be positive, communicate positively to both employees and customers
- Safety and health are priorities (Your choices affect others)
- What is possible now, should be continued and developed (curb-side, online, remote shopping)
- Work with the store’s IT network to upgrade and update online communications and sales. These investments will continue to provide dividends in the future
- Importance of networks, use the information state and national trade associations provide. Join and become a loyal member of these organizations and associations as they are your voice especially in times of crisis
- This new “normal” is likely to persist for months. Prepare to keep many of these consumer convenience measures
- Please stay well and let us know how we can help
- For more information, please register for Dr. Behe’s webinar “Garden Center Retail Strategies to Sell in the Current Environment” on Thursday, April 2, 2020 at 1 PM EST: bit.ly/flowers4life

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CONTRIBUTORS

Dr. Nora Catlin
Floriculture Specialist
Cornell Cooperative Extension
Suffolk County
nora.catlin@cornell.edu

Dr. Chris Currey
Assistant Professor of Floriculture
Iowa State University
ccurrey@iastate.edu

Dr. Ryan Dickson
Greenhouse Horticulture and
Controlled-Environment Agriculture
University of Arkansas
ryand@uark.edu

Nick Flax
Commercial Horticulture Educator
Penn State Extension
nzf123@psu.edu

Thomas Ford
Commercial Horticulture Educator
Penn State Extension
tgf2@psu.edu

Dan Gilrein
Entomology Specialist
Cornell Cooperative Extension
Suffolk County
dog1@cornell.edu

Dr. Joyce Latimer
Floriculture Extension & Research
Virginia Tech
jlatime@vt.edu

Heidi Lindberg
Floriculture Extension Educator
Michigan State University
wolleage@anr.msu.edu

Dr. Roberto Lopez
Floriculture Extension & Research
Michigan State University
rglopez@msu.edu

Dr. Neil Mattson
Greenhouse Research & Extension
Cornell University
neil.mattson@cornell.edu

Dr. W. Garrett Owen
Floriculture Outreach Specialist
Michigan State University
wgowen@msu.edu

Dr. Rosa E. Raudales
Greenhouse Extension Specialist
University of Connecticut
rosa.raudales@uconn.edu

Dr. Beth Scheckelhoff
Extension Educator - Greenhouse Systems
The Ohio State University
scheckelhoff.11@osu.edu

Dr. Paul Thomas
Floriculture Extension & Research
University of Georgia
pthomas@uga.edu

Dr. Ariana Torres-Bravo
Horticulture/ Ag. Economics
Purdue University
torres2@purdue.edu

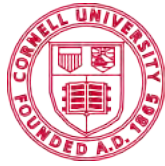
Dr. Brian Whipker
Floriculture Extension & Research
NC State University
bwhipker@ncsu.edu

Dr. Jean Williams-Woodward
Ornamental Extension Plant Pathologist
University of Georgia
jwoodwar@uga.edu

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