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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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Rally Consumers for Plants!

The greatest opportunity in Horticulture may be upon us during this COVID-19 crisis, to immediately increase awareness of the benefits of plants and to mobilize consumers to be vigilant and prepared to promote and defend our industry to their peers and officials in their localities, counties, and states.

A group of concerned industry leaders has drafted a letter for distribution to the consumer, and they are inviting everyone in contact with consumers, especially Independent Garden Centers to distribute.

The entire supply chain has a stake in this effort and it is requested that they publish the following message immediately to their audience, especially garden centers who can then publish to their consumer lists.

It is imperative as well as urgent that our industry mobilize to spread the good news about the benefits of plants now. This effort stands on its own merit however this spring in particular, there is pressure upon local and state governments to decide whether our industry is essential and should operate in the best and greater interest of our country. Within the letter are statements that clarify the importance of horticulture in these dire times, as well as a plea to the consumer to act in this belief.

Time is of the essence - There is no time to waste as it may be the very thing that helps you in the near future, and beyond. It can have lasting benefit by creating more awareness for the importance of horticulture in your area as well as around the region and country as similar efforts are made by others.

DRAFT LETTER - Garden Center - please review, customize, and send some form of the following message to your customers and others of influence in your community.

NOTE: Scroll down below the letter for some additional messaging copy & ideas to implement.

Dear _____,

Securing Health, Wellness, and Peace of Mind in Our Local Community

Will you help now to continue providing our community with trusted information on gardening, and plants & supplies?

Plant Now for Fresh Food this Spring & Summer!

Should the supply chains be disrupted and grocery store shelves and produce bins empty, **you'll be glad you have your garden for backup.**

Is there anything better than a juicy homegrown tomato? (without the trip to the grocery) How about fresh, crisp lettuce? And is it really summer without strawberries? If you're dreaming of delicious fruits and veggies, **the time to plant is now!** There are specific reasons to plant some vegetables in April, other types in May, and still others in June. Broccoli, lettuces, and cabbage grow better outside in the cool weather of spring, while others, including tomatoes, peppers, and eggplants need consistently warm nights (temps over 65 degrees) to thrive. **Not sure what to plant now? Ask us! We're here to help.** If you don't plant, you can't harvest, and the longer you wait, the less productive your veggies will be.

Pollinators + Flowers = Food!

Remember to plant flowers! **You can have your veggies, and flowers, too!** So, go ahead and grab a few of your favorite blooming beauties. **Flowering plants are an important part of your vegetable garden** because they provide nectar (life-sustaining energy) to those pollinating insects to sustain them from this growing season to the next season. Did you know, **insects pollinate the flowers** on fruit and vegetable plants and the pollinated flower becomes the fruit? It's true!

Community Resilience and Resourcefulness

We won't mince words. It's an unsettling time. Thankfully, **we've witnessed thousands of acts of kindness** and help around our community and around the world. One way we can **help each other and our communities be resilient and resourceful** in these

constantly changing and challenging conditions is to garden, and to support the local garden centers that sell food plants, seeds, and supplies.

Many local governments, as well as states such as California, Washington, Ohio, Connecticut, New York, and North Carolina, **have explicitly classified garden centers as essential businesses** because they are integral parts of the food supply chain, and especially now, for urgent need for the **mental and physical health benefits** that gardening offers. One of the few places it's safe to be is in your own garden.

Gardening Success Depends on Expert Local Info from Garden Centers

While gardening isn't difficult, there are tips and tricks that make it easier to be successful. (Just like trying anything new — **knowing the correct techniques makes everything more fun and fruitful.**) You'll find the people who know those tips and tricks are at your local garden centers. **We're open now**, and available via social media **to answer questions and recommend** which plants to buy, where to plant them, and how to take care of them so a juicy tomato is a delicious and comforting reality.

If you've ever tried to look for local gardening information on google and were absolutely overwhelmed by the thousands of pages of results, you know why **it's so important to have the opportunity to ask an expert** that knows precisely what will work in your area. We are here for you, prepared to provide locally important information, advice, and specific instruction, as well as being **a resource to obtain healthy seeds, plants and growing supplies** - all specifically suited for our local growing conditions.

Ways we are specifically serving our customers: (each garden center customize)

- Local information by phone, email, text and messaging
- Contactless local pickup and delivery
- An open-air environment where the virus is unlikely to survive and transfer
- Ensure customers adhere to social distancing practices
- Phone, electronic and video shopping from home

Plant Benefits Go Beyond Food

Of course, eating homegrown food helps you feel better, but plants are more than a meal. Here's what research shows plants do, beyond providing physical nourishment:

- Plants are therapeutic, **counteracting stress** and uncertainty
- Exposure to landscaping has been proven to **speed recovery from illness**
- The act of **gardening supports social distancing** and Stay-at-Home orders
- Gardening provides **passive and active aerobic exercise** as an alternative to sports and excessive media viewing

- When gardening, **children engage all of the senses, learn science and math,** and can develop speaking and writing skills
- Children learn **life-sustaining skills**, becoming stewards of their environment
- Gardening supports the **development of gross and fine motor skills**

Do you know someone making decisions about what's essential and what's not right now? Please share these findings with that local official. **If anyone can use stress relief and a good reason to stay home it's, well, all of us.**

Learn more: a compendium of scientific research documenting the benefits of plants and the act of gardening is available here: <https://ellisonchair.tamu.edu/benefitsofplants/>

Please Help Now

We are asking you to regard local family garden centers, greenhouses, and plant nurseries as **“essential” businesses to** support our community and your family, providing essential food security and services during these trying times. We urgently need your help to inform others such as your friends, relatives, co-workers, and community officials that you rely on your local garden centers for information and advice as well as for plants and growing supplies appropriate for your area.

Yours for happier gardening,

(The Associates at Garden Center Name. Contact _____ for more information.)

FAQ's

Q. How do the activities related to plants and gardening benefit our community?

A. We have become accustomed to a world where most everything is taken for granted, yet substitutions for the important things in life have encroached and became expected. A better future is within our reach. When we put faith into action by expecting a tiny seed or a bulb, or a small plant to grow, flourish, flower, and produce a vegetable or fruit like tomatoes or onions, we are taking control of our own little piece of our world. With this little investment of time and energy in our future, we inspire hope.

Q. Do we “need” processed food, or nourishment?

- A. Plants provide antioxidant- and mineral-rich “raw” food sources not found in processed foods that can then be prepared quickly for more nutritious and convenient meals.

Q. Can we get socially distanced exercise at home

- A. We all know how difficult it is to get enough exercise when left to our own devices at home. The passive exercise that is built-in while gardening and working with plants provides aerobic exercise that feeds the mind, body, and spirit. Plus, it’s a lot more fun than pounding miles on the treadmill.

MORE IDEAS FOR MARKETING & COMMUNICATION

Extending the Season

We have a unique opportunity to educate novice gardeners and re-educate those (including ourselves and our employees) who are established gardeners, that buying plants or gardening doesn’t end on Memorial Day or July 4th or Labor Day. Gardening is 365 days a year! Depending on where you live and weather conditions, it just means some things are brought inside, or cooler temps mean it is time to grow cold crops (like you did in the spring) again in the fall like cabbage, cauliflower, etc... We need to seize this moment to spread the word that gardening is 365 days a year; let’s reset the clock on gardening before this opportunity slips through our fingers. Utilize one of these hashtags and let’s trend on social media!

#gardeninplace

#garden365

#grow365

#gardenallyear

#LifeisaShadeBetterUnderaTree

#gardeningisgoodforyourhealth

#thegardenismyhappyplace

Curbside Captive Audience

You have customers coming in for curbside pick-up and you're making deliveries. Be sure you also seize the messaging opportunity!

- SLIP - in a simple sheet of paper about your products and services?
- PROVIDE- an order list of tie-in items that they didn't order (plant food, etc...and with the prompt they will) and things that are coming up so they can pre-order.
- INFORM - them of a product line you want to focus on that they may not know about.
- INVITE - them to follow your Social Media posts? They are a captive audience so keep them engaged!
- RESIST - the urge to erode your value with discounts and coupons. You have just demonstrated your superior value, so why ERASE it?

Staycation

It seems everyone is planning a staycation this year. Suggest projects that make their home a place where they WANT to stay. Help them create a Happy Place to escape the pressures of their workday and to enjoy time with their family. Provide pictures of inspiring scenes for outdoor living surrounded by flowering plants they can buy for different looks

Connect with Fellow Plant Geeks

Now more than ever is the time to connect with your local garden evangelists and influencers. Garden writers, Master Gardeners, and others who spread the gospel of gardening. Ask them to help spread the word that your store is open. Help each other by sharing good gardening information on social media, in blogs, newspapers, etc.