

Garden Centers' Response to COVID Outbreak

Here's a look at how four independent garden centers and one young plant producer are adapting during the COVID-19 epidemic.

By Teresa McPherson

Wellington Gardens' spacious property and posted signs helped with customer and employee safety.



“We have the advantage of plenty of room to spread our customers out, says Christine Wellington, owner of Wellington Gardens in Brentwood, New Hampshire. “We located retail areas over all the property. We have been overwhelmed by the positive response to our COVID guidelines. We have had so many thank us for making them feel safe. Our clients have been great, very conscious of spacing, wearing masks, and sanitizing.”

McDaniel's Greenhouse rebuilt their website for online orders and provided curbside pickup.



“This year went well for curbside pickup and shopping on site in our outdoor space,” says Bryce McDaniel of McDaniel’s Greenhouse in New Concord, Ohio. “Our online site was a huge help to those most at risk for COVID. We had several online shoppers that wouldn’t have been able to get plants if they had to come in. It was a big undertaking to rebuild our website, but in the end it was a lifesaver this spring. We also gained new customers because of it.”

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Weston Nurseries incorporated colorful signs with reminders of social distancing and other safety precautions.



"We are working hard to maintain the standards set by the state of Massachusetts. It is important to us to respect the rules that are there to protect all of us and keep us healthy," says Peter Mezitt, president and CEO of Weston Nurseries in Massachusetts.



"We have put up as many signs as we can because our customers mean the world to us as do our staff and keeping them safe is our first priority," says Mezitt.



The IGC's yard is filled with bright, colorful and beautiful plants, trees and shrubs, and Mezitt says it brings them joy to be able to bring nature and beauty into their customers' lives as much as they possibly can.



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Mezitt says their signs are bright and colorful and bold because plants are bright and colorful and bold and they want people to see them and smile.

Raker-Roberta's Young Plants created a retail outlet.



Because the COVID-19 outbreak forced schools and nonprofits to close this spring, the fundraiser business of plug and liner producer Raker-Roberta's Young Plants was greatly impacted. To combat this, the Litchfield, Michigan, grower decided to get into the retail game and launched Raker-Roberta's Retail Outlet. Product grown on spec for the fundraiser business was now available for sale to consumers right in the greenhouse. The retail business is not meant to compete head-to-head with full-scale independent garden centers. "We are specifically calling it a retail garden outlet ... an outlet for our products," says Susie Raker-Zimmerman.

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Country Mile Gardens built custom, positive-pressure checkout sheds and designed staff t-shirts to keep customers and staff at a safe distance.



A sign is posted at the front of the store asking customers to wear masks and practice social distancing.



Thomas Gallo of Country Mile Gardens in Morristown, New Jersey, sporting new t-shirts they had made that say "If you can read this, you're too close" on the front and "CMG Wellness Team" in the back, as a gentle reminder to customers to practice social distancing.



Circle 117



Country Mile Gardens built two custom, positive-pressure checkout sheds to keep both employees and customers safe. The sheds offer contactless transactions, an intercom and hand sanitizer dispensers.