



## Tropical Plant Trends and Sourcing Unanswered Questions

April 6<sup>th</sup> at 2:00 PM ET

1. What's going on with aglaonemas? When will we start to see varieties again?  
*Kingston, Morning Dew*– One thing to keep in mind is that Ags are slow growers. We've talked with growers about this availability. Growers have experienced not getting all the liners (or any at all) that they ordered over a span of several months. Deliveries are back, and growers are releasing Ags to limited customers as the plants get rooted.

*Maxwell, Mercer Botanicals* – Kingston is correct, we have seen issues at the farm with crop losses and growing issues that slow production which has caused shortages. They've also been taking some cuttings that were for sale and put them back into stock to have a better supply moving forward. Once growers start to getting cuttings consistently it will return 6 months down the road.
2. What advice would you have for US propagators getting into the business, when competing against Asia/South American supply? - Anthony Umann in Southern Oregon  
*Maxwell, Mercer Botanicals* – Talk with growers that you would be looking to have product available for, and see what cutting production they are lacking in. We've experienced great issues with Pothos, Scindapsus, and Philodendron cuttings from Central America and Asia. It has caused us to build our own stock on these plants to ensure consistent quality cuttings. If we could have consistent, quality cuttings that survive shipment we would absolutely decrease our need for stock, we just have not found that yet.
3. Do you feel like we are at a low currently for plant availability, or do you think availability will get worse before it gets better?  
*Kingston, Morning Dew* – This time of year, we would typically see 1200-1500 items on our availability list. We are seeing about 800+ this year and growing.

*Maxwell, Mercer Botanicals* – On our end I do not believe the availability is going to get much worse. It will be a slow trickle of assorted products on a weekly basis. It may not be exactly what you are looking for, but there will be product. If we get a small break this summer as travel restrictions start to get lifted, we may see a temporary dip in demand. This will allow the plants to grow and catch up giving a better full availability for fall.
4. Have you thought about prioritizing selling to customers that you have been working with for a few years and turn away new customers? It been a struggle as a plant shop for 6 years now. I buy year-round. I'm having a hard time. Garden enters and everyone jumping on the band wagon.  
*Kingston, Morning Dew* – I'm not sure if I can say "All," "most," or "many" growers do this. Reputable growers that are looking to build long-term relationships will ALL do this:

*prioritize selling to customers who have a history. New customers are being turned away by most growers I speak to.*

*Maxwell, Mercer Botanicals – We prioritize our customers and availability for them based off a few things: frequency of buying, consistency (year-round including summer), purchasing of our full product line, loyalty (are we being “cherry-picked”), and stays within our payment terms.*

*We currently do not feel right adding on new customers when we are shorting our current customers so much. This is a great opportunity though for new people to get their foot in the door and start a conversation with new vendors. Do not go in with the expectation of getting product now, but with the expectation of in the future. Now is the time to be building relationships with new growers.*

5. what would be your guesstimate (yes i know it is a guess!) on when the inventory might replenish to at least 70%?

*Maxwell, Mercer Botanicals – until the demand decreases enough and allow plants to catch up, it will be a slow trickle of availability. Growers are used to a decrease in demand in summer and winter. This allows crops to catch up so we have large numbers and availability for Spring and Fall. We have been in a never-ending spring since the first lockdown ended May of 2020.*

6. how far in advanced should the pre-books be placed?

*Kingston, Morning Dew – depends on your source for plants. Talk to your growers/broker and find out what they require (or allow – many growers are not taking prebooks because things are changing so quickly)*

*Maxwell, Mercer Botanicals – We are currently not taking prebooks, and typically have not in the past. I recommend you communicating with your suppliers and see if they are taking prebooks, and what timeline they need (my guess 4-6 months in advance).*

7. Do you find that some garden centers are hoarding plant material? Availabilities seem to disappear in minutes after publishing.

*Kingston, Morning Dew – That could be the case for certain items, but I can't say for sure. For high demand material – growers will typically divvy it out where they can spread the availability to as many of their long-term customers as possible.*

*Maxwell, Mercer Botanicals – I do think some Garden Centers are getting what they can, when they can. If they have the space to hold extra material they will. Some Garden Centers I know do not have that luxury so they are needing more consistency in availability from growers which is extremely tough right now. If you could work on having some sort of holding for extra material it may pay off for you in the loss of “sales floor” you would have to devote to that storage.*

8. There seems to be almost no availability for 6" or 8" staples and very few 10". How long do we anticipate this? Are there any things we can do to actually get material like Pothos?

*Maxwell, Mercer Botanicals – Pothos and other vining material is a lot of work for the growers. We maintain our own stock on all of these materials, which means we must take care of the stock daily, cut the vines when ready, cut up the eyes, and stick 12+ cuttings per pot. It is extremely labor intensive over everything else we grow, and we have the largest portion of our staff dedicated to these products. For this reason I know a number of growers that have gotten out of these types of products.*

*The best thing you can do is to communicate with your suppliers and ask them what timeframes they are looking at for the specific products you are looking for. Ask them to keep you in mind when they find out those products do become available.*

*Kingston, Morning Dew – growers have limited space and produce as much as they can as quickly as they can. Like Maxwell said, let your supplier know to keep you in mind when those products are available, and check back often.*

9. Given continued increased demand this Spring and limited supply due to all the factors - do you foresee less 10"+ pot size available in 2021 and more 2"-4" pot sizes being available until things even out?

*Maxwell, Mercer Botanicals – I think you will still see 10" product around, there are certain growers that have always done those larger sizes and will not change. Us personally, we have gotten away from 2"-3" market, and only focus on the 4"-8". Cuttings and tissue culture prices are increasing so those products typically do not go into 4" because customers won't pay the price point. As labor cost increase in California, and now Florida I believe you will see less of the smaller pot sizes and more of the larger material, because it requires less labor.*

10. We are thinking about having some of the 4" plants we need consistently contract grown. Do you think that would be possible?

*Kingston, Morning Dew – Contract growing is possible depending on the relationship you have with the growers/broker you buy from, but I find a lot of growers shy away from it (for good reason, explained below). A few things to keep in mind for contract growing: timing is very difficult to match up. The grower has to ship the plants when they're ready, but Mother nature dictates the timing. Often, when the plants are ready will not match when you actually planned to take the product. If construction is involved for where the plants will be installed/used, timing is nearly impossible – construction delays always happen. Also factor in that the grower is planting pots specific for you, it leaves less flexibility to account for any that go bad, or if there is an entire crop failure. Growers hate to let customers down, and take great pride in the plants they grow. Because of the risks involved, during normal times growers are more open to doing prebooks (advice: be sure to take everything you pre-booked). One last thing to keep in mind, contract growing doesn't lend itself to a volume discount and can often be more work for the grower.*

11. What are the relationships with the growers and brokers with big producers like Costa Farms, etc. Home Depot, etc. are buying from them.

*Kingston, Morning Dew - Large volume producers that service Home Depot etc work on a contract basis and it involves committed volume months (or even year(s)) in advance. Small volume buyers can sometimes get product through a subsidiary or a broker.*

12. Do you have any general tips on selecting potting media for replanting tropicals.

*Kingston, Morning Dew – This is a pretty robust topic as each plant has its own mix and every grower has their own mix. Typically, tropicals use a mix made up of peat, pine bark, perlite, and fertilizer. Some use coir, and some plants use sand (sand for plants that need really good drainage).*

*Maxwell, Mercer Botanicals – It is entirely plant specific. We generally use 50% peat, 10% Wood Fiber and 40% Green Bark. Sometime we modify that ratio for the plants that need better drainage. That doesn't mean it is the Gold Standard, it is just what has worked for us over the years. It really depends on how heavy of a waterer you are. If you tend to water more then you may want a soil that is more forgiving and have more items that would help with drainage.*

13. Are there any plants that seem to be consistently available?

*Kingston, Morning Dew – palms, ferns, some dracaenas, succulents, bromeliads*

14. Has anyone been successful finding a nursery who will contract grow or prebook material for future secured jobs?

*Kingston, Morning Dew – see answer to question 12.*

15. as an end-user Interiorscape sales rep working with a local plant broker, how can i get growers' availability so i can spec plants that ARE available?

*Kingston, Morning Dew – having a grower's availability may not help. Even something on the list with specs listed may be gone by the time the customer gets approval for the service and your company goes to place the order. (I'm making a few assumptions here). Many growers have online availability lists. Morning Dew availability list is updated daily with up-to-date interiorscape quality plants. There are people that can help on the "interiorscape.com" facebook group who may have good advice on sales tactics.*