

Editorial

No Time to Wilt!

MAX F. ROTHSCHILD

All of us, the general public, horticulturalists, and scientists are facing a major life-threatening crisis. This crisis is a loss in confidence in science and the role scientists play in our society. Recent studies suggest only 57% of Americans say science has had a mostly positive effect on society (Tyson and Kennedy 2024). While many scientists and their institutions wish to present scientific results and the nature of their work to the public (Hunter 2016), at least one report suggests that



the perceived political party of the scientist or that of the individuals receiving the data greatly affects the willingness to accept the science presented (Sonmez et al. 2023).

Most concerning is how many of our friends and neighbors react negatively to issues such as vaccinations to prevent disease and ways to mitigate climate change. The increasing ongoing outbreak of measles offers a glimpse into the challenges that society faces when science is ignored. Rumors, misinformation, and false information are pervasive, especially on social media and the internet. Sadly, many people use those social media sites as their only source for so-called scientific information. Tragically, these doubts on the role of science were greatly enlarged during the Covid pandemic due to the many unknowns, the fast-changing scientific information that became available, and political issues that helped to destroy the confidence many had in both the science and those who presented it. Sadly, these outcomes still persist, even to this day.

For those scientists among us we must face this challenge head on in the face of disbelief. How can we infuse and support science in our everyday lives and those of people we interact with? First, we must politely engage others and tell them in “public speak” what we do. Second, we should emphasize the value of the work we and other scientists do for the public. Third, we must be careful not to be condescending or argumentative when we discuss science issues. Finally, we should remind people that the best source of scientific facts is NOT THE INTERNET!

We should consider participating in activities that support science and enhance its acceptance to



the general public. Such activities include volunteering at a science museum or nature center or speaking out about our work when the situation arises. We could also urge others to become citizen scientists; in these projects the public is asked to collect and contribute information to answer real-world scientific questions. Many public science projects are available to which we can contribute and include public projects with

genealogy data collection, habits of our pets, data from fisher people on species caught and their size, collection of bird census data, plant identification, and the growth of plants in your garden or landscape.

The acceptance of sound scientific information, not fear mongering or false myths, is vital. The



public will be best served when we politely remind them that science plays an enormous role in our quality of life. The rejection of scientific facts threatens our food supply, our health, and our planet.

Now is not time to wilt from this challenge.

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