

Last Weekend, Amazon, Spring Trials and Music to Garden By



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COMING UP THIS WEEK:

- The score for last weekend
- Comments from the wet spots
- Where it was good
- Appeasing the Weather Gods
- "We are still on track"
- Amazon's plant returns
- Are Spring Trials still relevant?
- The Paul Ecke, Jr. scholarship
- Music to garden by



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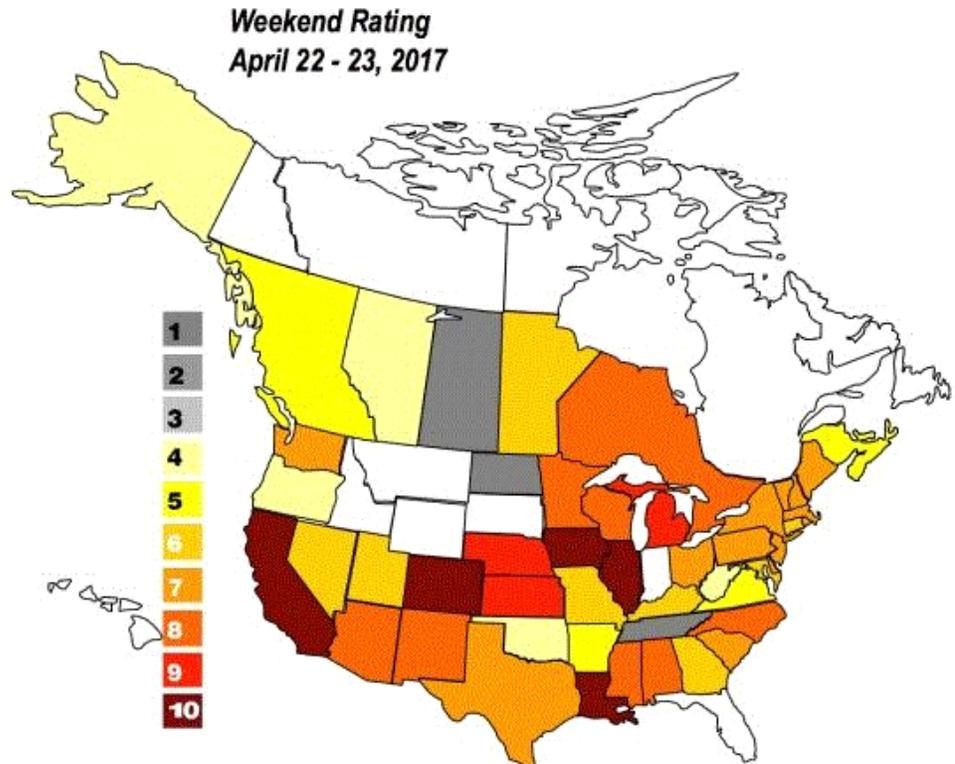
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Sales were not quite so hot for some of the country last weekend, at least according to my highly scientific and virtually flawless Weekend Sales Survey, which reveals a score of 7.0 out of 10 for the U.S. and 5.1 for Canada. That's a drop from 8.3/6.9 for Easter weekend, but an improvement over the first two weekends of April.

Here's the map:



Come to think of it, the score for a weekend following a major holiday usually takes a dip, as folks come up for air and regroup before diving back into their yards. However, last weekend took a bigger dive than it should have due to soggy weather across much of the country. There were still plenty of 10s (12 out of 89 scores), but also plenty of 4s, 5s and 6s, along with a few 1s and 2s where folks were really down in the dumps about the conditions. I mean, even Alaska managed a 4, so how bad does it have to be to warrant a 1?

Got an opinion to share? Or want to read what other folks have to say? [Click HERE.](#)

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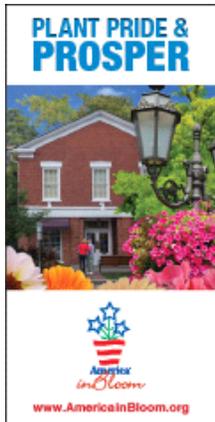
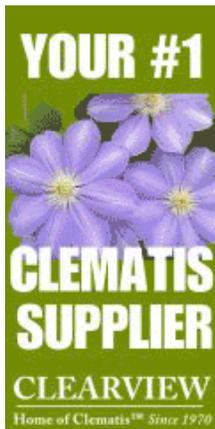
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A few comments from the wet spots

How bad was it? Ball Seed sales rep John Crisp of Oregon gave the weekend a big fat 2:



“One for the history books, as far as amount of rain/cloudy months. Spring has yet to break in a meaningful way out here.” He continued: “Last two years were barnburners in March and April. The contrast is both stunning and heartbreaking to growers right now ... hoping for a strong May.”

One state north in Washington, Kathy Wheaton from Kathy's Corner scored it a 6, writing:

“Never-ending rain. One day here, one day there that's half sun. The crops are behind, the weather anything but fine, and most folks are in hiding, or maybe down at the local boat shop learning how to build an ark. As opposite of last year as you could get ... makes one wonder, is this the year I hang up the shovel? [Business] after [business] here, retail and wholesale, doing just that.”

Also in Washington, David Vos of Van der Giessen Nursery seems to be taking more of a “glass half full” approach than Kathy is. He rated the weekend an 8, saying:

“We had a beautiful Friday—literally the first day this year where I could look outside and see a totally clear blue sky!—with excellent sales. Saturday was cloudy with an hour of rain and wind midday, but after the spring we've had, it was by all accounts a 'nice' day, and our sales reflected that. Our customers are so ready for spring after the wettest winter on record here in the Pacific Northwest; we're just waiting for a good stretch of dry, sunny weather to really bring on the crazy season!”

Got an opinion to share? Or want to read what other folks have to say? [Click HERE.](#)



Where it was good

Some folks are having all the weather luck. Earl Castlen of Kentucky gave it a 10, saying, *“Best season in 18 years.”*

Judy Mitchell of North Carolina also gave the weekend a 10, noting,

“Second biggest sales day ever on Saturday! Probably would have beat the record except cloudy damp morning early and 1 inch of rain from 3:30 to 4:00 when we closed.”

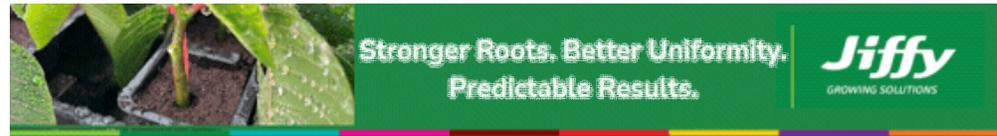
I'm sure the free hot dogs for their 38th anniversary open house didn't hurt!

Over in Ohio, Andrae Protzman of Primrose Hill Plant Nursery gave their opening weekend a 9:

“We opened up the nursery this weekend. Did a big push on Facebook. Glad to see and talk with repeat customers stopping back in. Chilly and overcast on Saturday didn't keep the customers away. Sunday was stellar, sunny and warm. Sold out of a few items already. We surpassed last year's opening weekend. Lavender, blueberries, lilacs, Caradonna salvia, Cheyenne Spirit coneflower, Magic Carpet spirea, hydrangeas were our big movers. Didn't mean

to ramble on, but it was a good weekend.”

Got an opinion to share? Or want to read what other folks have to say? Click [HERE](#).



How Ellen appeases the weather gods

Long-time reader Ellen Egan of Oregon tells me she can't seem to get more than one good day at a time so far in 2017, but assures me she's doing what she can to alleviate the situation. I laughed out loud when I read her ending:

"I have attempted to appease the weather gods in any way I can. I have given them thanks and praise for relieving our drought conditions by giving us precipitation—20 inches in excess of average since October 1. I humbly thanked them for doing only a few thousand dollars worth of damage in the April 7 windstorm, and for blowing the giant, ancient oak across the lawn instead of the road and the power lines. I have gently hinted that a return to average weather would be welcome. The gods seem to be easing up a bit, but I'm afraid they may demand the sacrifice of my annual profit before they are truly satisfied."

Got an opinion to share? Or want to read what other folks have to say? Click [HERE](#).



Metrolina: “We are still on track”

GrowerTalks columnist Abe Van Wingerden from Metrolina Greenhouses in North Carolina graciously sends me scores for each of the 13 states they serve, from Georgia north to New York and west to Ohio. He reports a soggy rainout in all but two of his markets last weekend:

"Had a very strong Friday, but then rain washed out most of our business Saturday and Sunday. We were against a big weekend last year same weekend, so that hurt us on some YTD numbers, but this upcoming weekend was the rainout LAST year, so hoping to gain back."

More importantly, Abe left us all with an interesting way to look at the season:

"The mantra is always 'Two good weekends in March, three good weekends in April and four good weekends in May makes the season good.' We are still on track."



Metrolina Greenhouses, Huntersville, North Carolina. Impressive, eh?

Got an opinion to share? Or want to read what other folks have to say? Click [HERE](#).



Amazon, plants and customer expectations

Davy Wright of Wright's Nursery and Greenhouses in Alabama has been a long-time score (and comment) contributor to *Acre's Online*. This time, his comments weren't about the weather, they were in reply to something I'd written previously about plants sales on Amazon, and his experiences:

"This is our second year on Amazon, and although sales are strong, the customer base is very disappointing. Most think shipping is free and doesn't cost me or them a dime; or living plants are as easy to ship as a book and shouldn't have a single broken leaf.

"We've been shipping mail order since '98 and normally have less than 0.5% damaged shipments. Amazon alone this year has reached 10% damage, with only 0.4% (of customers) having actually sent proof of damage. But I'm required by Amazon to refund/replace anyone who says their plants were damaged—with or without proof. eBay and our own website are at less than 0.2% damaged shipments."

Davy concluded sarcastically,

"I guess we're only sending the bad shipments to Amazon customers."

There's no doubt that Amazon has the capability to sell a lot of plants for a lot of companies. The question is, how profitable will it be once shipping, returns and other costs are factored in? I've never heard anyone talk about that.

If you sell via Amazon, what's been your experience with customer expectations and returns? Let me know [HERE](#).

I do know this: Amazon has spoiled all of us with superfast service, "free" delivery and easy returns. As consumers, we love it. As business people competing against Amazon, the bar has been raised. As business people partnering with Amazon? I guess we will see. Again, let me know your views [HERE](#).

Got an opinion to share? Or want to read what other folks have to say? Click [HERE](#).

Are Spring Trials still relevant?

The short answer is yes. The long answer is yes, absolutely! Some folks might have noticed that attendance has been slipping slightly. I'm told that my sister company, PanAmerican Seed, hosted about 1,150 visitors—down about 4% from 2016. Is that significant? I don't think so. What is that, 50 people or so? A drop in the bucket.



Colorful entrance to the PanAmerican Seed trial in Santa Paula.

Anyway, what I hear is that the same companies tend to attend, they just might send one or two fewer people. I know Ball Publishing had one fewer person this year simply due to a scheduling conflict. At the same time, I get the feeling more international visitors are attending. So the quality and diversity of attendees is as high as it's ever been.

Anne Leventry, President of PanAmerican Seed, puts it this way:

"I would say that it is still an extremely important marketing event for us. It is our one opportunity to see the entire spectrum of the industry in just one week. It is the only venue available to us where we can meet with all of the distribution sales reps across North America and show them our new products. Because distributors are our primary vector to the market, this is critical. We also get a lot of growers who are making decisions about what to add to their programs and we have the opportunity to influence them. It's also a great opportunity to get feedback on products, trends and generally what is happening in the industry."

Granted, it takes place in early April, when most growers and retailers are too busy to even consider attending unless they're local. Which is a shame, because there's so much amazing stuff to see.

Which is why I suggest you consider the Red-Eye Trials Tour: Fly out Friday night to either Los Angeles or San Jose, hit six or eight trials on Saturday and Sunday in either the north or south region, then take the Sunday night red-eye back home. You're back at work Monday morning a little worse for wear, but jazzed for the season and loaded with ideas.

Got an opinion to share? Or want to read what other folks have to say? Click [HERE](#).

Kaylee South awarded Paul Ecke, Jr. Scholarship

Botrytis, look out! There's a smart Ph.D. student at The Ohio State University that's working on ways to take you down. She's Kaylee South, and she's been awarded a \$10,000 Paul Ecke, Jr. Scholarship by the American Floral Endowment to help pay for her education. Kaylee is pursuing her Ph.D. in agriculture and is researching botrytis in floriculture crops. Her focus is isolating bacteria with beneficial qualities that can be successfully applied to control botrytis.

Her future career goal is to work at a land-grant university teaching and working in research with floriculture crops. Kaylee earned her BS at the University of Georgia. She's also a recipient of an AFE Vic and Margaret Ball Internship, which she did at the Sun Valley Group in California.



"There were a record number of applications this year, which shows the growing interest and need for AFE scholarships," said Dwight Larimer, AFE Chairman and Education Committee Chair. "The high quality of students is a testament to their exceptional determination and passion, and I am confident these future leaders will help the industry progress."

The Paul Ecke, Jr. Scholarship was established in 2010 and honors the late Paul Ecke, Jr. Paul recognized that creative scientists and educators are required to lead the floral industry in the 21st century and beyond. This scholarship assists in funding the education of floriculture graduate students who will become leading floricultural scientists and educators.

Music to garden by

I've heard of lots of interesting plant partnerships and sponsorships, but here's a new one: an online streaming music station.

[Endless Summer hydrangeas](#) has partnered with streaming music service Pandora to create a Pandora station with a "reblooming" theme (to tie in to Endless Summer's reblooming characteristic).

When I first heard about this, I imagined the songs had flowers themes ... you know, "Every Rose has its Thorn" by Poison or "Marigold" by Nirvana or "Supermarket Flowers" by Ed Sheeran. But actually, the theme is artists who have "rebloomed" and reinvented themselves throughout the years, such as Justin Timberlake, Prince, Aerosmith and Gwen Stefani.

"Who doesn't love listening to music while they're working in the yard?" said Endless Summer spokesperson Ryan McEnaney. "Artists Rebloomed has something for most anyone's music taste, takes the guesswork out of picking a station, and keeps you moving and energized while you're out in the garden."

To find the station, open Pandora and search for Artists Rebloomed; it will be displayed as a

Featured Station.

Got an opinion to share? Or want to read what other folks have to say? Click [HERE](#).

See you next time!



Chris Beytes

Editor

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A promotional banner for BASF GrowerTalks. On the left, the BASF logo is displayed with the tagline "We create chemistry". In the center, the word "GROWERTALKS" is written in large, bold, white letters. On the right, there are three overlapping magazine covers for GrowerTalks, each featuring a red chili pepper. A red button with white text says "View ONLINE!".