

GROWERTALKS

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A Perfect 15

Chris Beytes



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It's Monday and as I stare at my blank screen wondering what words of wisdom to offer you this month, my computer is rhythmically sending 28,850 emails to *Acres Online* readers asking them for their Mother's Day scores, which I tally into a weekly and season-long Weekend Sales Survey.

Mother's Day fell on May 12 this year; being that it's celebrated on the second Sunday of May, it can fall anytime between May 8 and May 14, putting May 12 right about in the middle. Does that matter? I doubt it. Statistically, the weather isn't liable to be any better on May 8 or 12 or 14. Maybe there's a better chance for warmth on the later days? But that works both ways: down south there's a better chance of it being too warm.

More importantly is where Memorial Day falls. It's always the last Monday in May and some years (two out of seven) we get three weeks between Mother's Day and Memorial Day—an extra seven days of spring, you might say, as many folks view Memorial Day as the start of summer and beach, not gardening, season. The last time we had that nice three-week window was in 2021 and 2022; the next time will be 2027. I thought we would also get three weeks in 2028, but I think Leap Year messes us up because the next time we get two three-week Mother's Day to Memorial Day spans back-to-back are in 2032 and 2033. Gads! So look forward to 2027, I guess.

In the meantime, the scores are rolling in now ... 49 replies thus far, some with multiple scores ... let's see how it's trending ...

First email I open and ... ugh, a 6 overall, representing 16 states. Strong in the South, weak in the mid-South and upper East Coast, he says. An 8 from Florida where I live (it was darned hot and we're in a bit of a drought). A really nasty score from New England (6 for Saturday and 2 for Sunday).

Ooh, a 10 from Nevada! That's more like it. And a 15 from central Illinois (I round down to 10 in my spreadsheet). This retailer reported sales up 30%-plus over last year "and even an increase above the crazy high 2020 numbers." That's good news! The next nine scores I read are 9 (Ontario), 10 (Maine), 9 (Connecticut), 9 (Oregon), 8.5 (Texas), 6 (Alabama, where it's getting hot), 10 (Kansas), 10 (Minnesota) and 9 (New Hampshire). Wow!

I had to scroll down past six more high scores to find another 6, for New Jersey, where Saturday was nice, but Sunday was cold and wet. Then it was through 9s and 10s until I found a 7 from New York, where it also rained on Sunday. Overall, it looks like this is going to be a fun, high-scoring Mother's Day report to share.

Of course, you're reading this in June, with Mother's Day and Memorial Day (and Victoria Day in Canada) in the rearview mirror, so you already know how those holidays went and you probably have a good idea how your overall spring went, too. With luck, you've got a few more weeks of selling you can do and maybe you even hope to extend those "shoulder-season" sales into the summer.

Wait, I just said "luck." And "hope." Yet last I heard, "Luck is not a strategy." And "Hope is not a plan." True! As golfer Lee Trevino likes to say, "The more I practice, the luckier I get."

I've noticed among my dependable weekly score contributors (and most of them are regulars, sending scores ever week) that those who score high seem to have a strategy at work. Some growers cover multiple states or regions, which limits exposure to weather (my first contributor, above, who covers 16 states, sent scores from 3 to 10). Some retailers host events or special plant buys throughout the spring, which draw crowds even when the weather isn't ideal. I'll see them score 8 or 9 while others in the same state score half that. And covered shopping is definitely a weatherproofing strategy at retail these days.

The best thing about my Spring 2024 Weekend Sales Survey is that it once again reinforces that weather is the No. 1 factor that can affect sales. In fact, it may be the only factor. Inflation, politics, global upheaval, fuel and food prices ... all fun dinner table conversation-starters, but when it comes to spring gardening, they haven't dampened our customers' enthusiasm for plants. And that I score a perfect 10. Better yet, a 15! **GT**