

GROWERTALKS

GT in Brief

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Ball Customer Day: Now ... and Then

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The weather was set to be perfect on Thursday, July 30 and a washout on Friday the 31st for Ball's annual Customer Days, but, thankfully, the meteorologists missed the mark by five hours and the Friday rain held off until after lunch. In fact, Friday was the better day overall because the overcast conditions kept temps low and the contrast, too, making for better photography.

As for crowd size ... as Vic Ball used to say, "Big!" We were told that Ball had 1,761 guests from 28 states, six Canadian provinces and Germany, the Netherlands and New Zealand.

One of the questions we've asked Anna Ball on numerous occasions is: "How long has Ball been hosting Customer Day?" Her answer is generally, "Since the '50s, I think."

That's because nobody is left who knows exactly when Customer Day started. Until now, that is, when I decided to take a deep dive into the *GrowerTalks* archives. After all, the magazine has documented every important event in the history of Ball and the industry since 1937. I was sure I'd find record of the first Customer Day.

And I did: August 5, 1953. It was called "Ball Field Day" (or "Field Day at Ball's" on a few occasions). It was sunup 'til sundown, with refreshments at noon and nearly 600 trial rows of new and standard varieties of petunias, marigolds, salvia, zinnia and dozens of other popular annuals. There were also greenhouse displays of mums, the new Yoder carnations and labor-saving machinery. They even showed a film, "'Mums the word' for year-round profits," a 20-minute color-sound motion picture about year-round mum growing.

Before 1953, they welcomed folks to visit the trial grounds, but on an informal basis, with Vic Ball writing in *GrowerTalks*: "If your summer travel plans include Chicago, be sure to stop in on us at West Chicago—there'll be many chances for you to pick up worthwhile and profitable notes on new varieties and growing."

In my research, I discovered another event at Ball that I'm not sure anyone was aware of: Every March or early April, starting in 1936 (one year before the birth of *GrowerTalks*), Ball played host to the annual Chicago Flower Growers

Short Course, which included a half day of lectures by guest experts, as well as tours of the greenhouses. But sometimes Vic or his brothers called that “Field Day”—as in the coverage of the 1948 meeting. **GT**