

"Sweet Bedlam," Stan Cope, Wet Hops, More Hallmark



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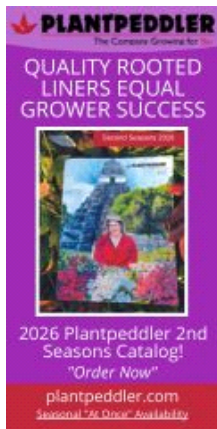
News and Commentary from GrowerTalks Magazine

COMING UP THIS WEEK:

- How was March 30-31?
- A very strong start for some
- High scores via events
- Bonnie's Stan Cope to retire
- Sign up for Your MarketMetrics
- A garden center/brewery
- More flowery drama



How was March 30-31? Actually, not too bad!



Hi there, everybody, and welcome to the start of the 2019 *GrowerTalks* Spring Weekend Survey, brought to you by ... well, there are no sponsors. So it's brought to you by sunny days and warm weather.

I like to start this survey around the beginning of April when things are kicking off in the south even though I'm well aware it could still be frozen and snowy up north (hence the rash of 0 and 1 scores I got.) I don't mean to taunt you northern readers, but I do want to capture the southern scores. Don't worry, you'll get even later in June when it's 103F in the shade in Florida and Alabama, and it's 73F and perfect in New Hampshire and Minnesota.

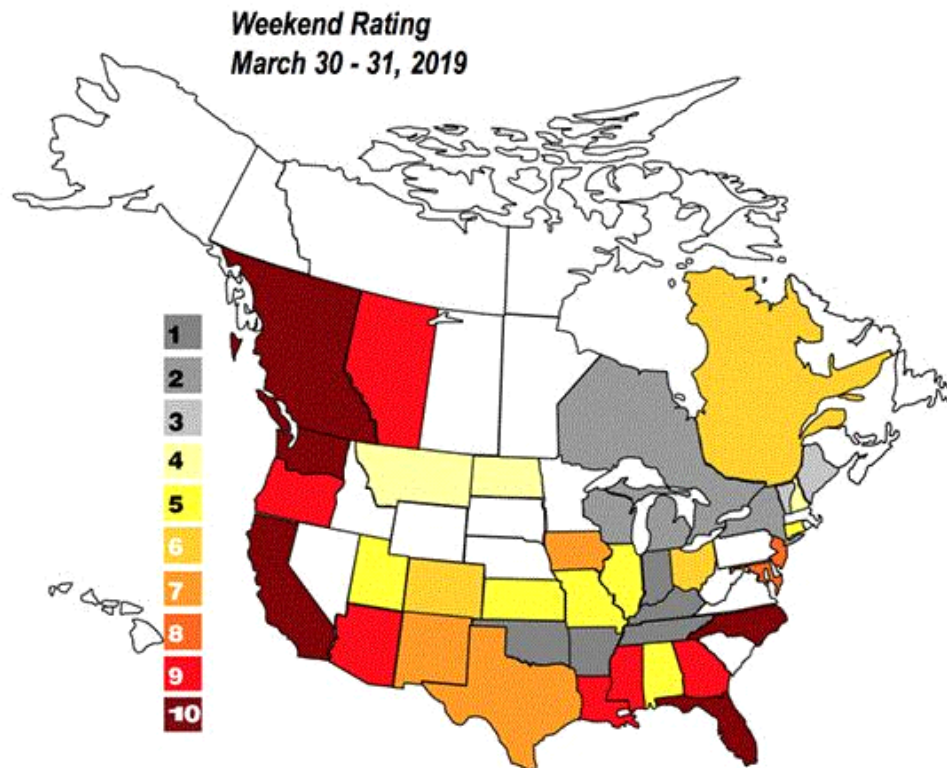
So what's the overall score? 5.7 in the U.S. and 6.8 in Canada. That's based on 64 scores from 35 states and four provinces. Twelve of those scores were perfect 10s. Ten were perfectly dismal 1s.

What? A 6.8 in Canada? How is that possible? Well, don't forget about British Columbia, much of which is Zone 7 to 8. Apparently, the weather is perfect in BC right now because I got three scores, all of which were 10s! The same goes for Washington state, which scored a pair of 10s (actually, Dave Vander Giessen gave it an 11, reporting "our best March day ever in the 81-year history of our business ... with a 55% increase in revenue over our previous best March day.")

Dave continues: "Perfect weather, a harsh slap of cold in February to kill a lot of plants in peoples' yards, and the excitement of a new season beginning made for ideal conditions for customers to flood through our doors. What a way to kick off the season!"

That's what I like to hear, Dave! Oregon readers were equally enthusiastic, sending in a 10 and two 9s. In comparison, in the first week of spring 2018, you sent in nine 10s out of 69 scores. And last year's first weekend was Easter!

Here's the big map:



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A very strong start for some

In addition to the Pacific Northwest, I got perfect scores from North Carolina, Arizona, California and ... Illinois? Illinois, where I live, and where I raked and pruned my garden in chilly, damp, blustery conditions that I would rank as an optimistic 5? But don't tell the customers of Woldhuis Farms Sunrise Greenhouse in the far south suburbs of Chicago. Wrote Trevor Woldhuis, who gave his first weekend a 10, "We make a big event out of our opening day of the season, which was on Saturday. People were lined out the door until we opened. Parking lot filled up after a few hours. Record sales for opening day. Glory to the Lord!"

Here are some more comments from 10-scorers:

A "beautiful, sunny day, mid '70s, perfect weather."— Judy Mitchell, North Carolina

"First three-day weekend that hit 70F. Sweet bedlam!"—Ed Blatter, Oregon

"If this was the start, well, I don't know how we will keep up. We set a record, by 37% over the previous year, which was up huge over the previous year—10 only because the numbers don't go higher."—Kathy Wheaton, Washington

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High scores via events

I noted that some folks sent in scores much higher than the average for their area. Like Beth Simpson, who scored her weekend a 7—in New Hampshire, no less—where the only other score was a 1. Beth held a raised bed gardening class, which delivered "record-breaking turnout." Admittedly, sales weren't all that big, since it was still so cold that all they had to offer in outside plants was pansy bowls.

Kate Terrell in Iowa scored the weekend a 7 "for traffic and enthusiasm." She said it was chilly and overcast Saturday, "but a seminar on houseplants inspired many purchases."

While you don't make a lot of money from early sales, I think early season events are a good way to get your staff primed for the season and to build some anticipation among customers.

Perhaps Sandra Daza should host an event. She reported a dismal 1 ... from Bogota, Colombia. The reason? "Lluvia, sin sol, baja liminosidad." Which Google tells me means "Rain, without sun, low luminosity."

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Bonnie's Stan Cope to retire

Hey, he put in 51 years, so he deserves the break! President and CEO of Bonnie Plants for more than 10 years, Stan Cope stepped down from the president role April 1 and will back away from his CEO position at the end of the year. Taking his place will be Mike Sutterer, formerly the Senior Vice President and General Manager, Gardens Business, at Scotts Miracle-Gro. Mike started as president April 1 and will take on the additional CEO duties January 1, 2020.

Bonnie Plants of Union Springs, Alabama, is the largest producer of vegetable and herb plants in North America.

What many may not know is that Stan is the grandson of Bonnie Plants' founders Livingston and Bonnie Paulk. They started the company in 1918.

"It has been my honor to lead Bonnie over the last 10 years," Stan says. "Throughout this time, I have been humbled by the commitment and hard work of our people and their passion for creating a truly purpose-driven company. I am extremely grateful to my Bonnie family, as they have worked passionately to help build our long-term success and sustainable future."

Mike Sutterer worked with Scotts Miracle-Gro for 19 years in several key marketing leadership roles, including leading the Miracle-Gro brand. He brings with him a focus on marketing innovation—including championing two major 2019 new product introductions.

Says Mike of his new opportunity, "The Bonnie brand has been around for over 100 years and there aren't many brands that have that type of rich and deep heritage. My No. 1 focus is to steward and care for the Bonnie brand, while we grow and evolve to ensure it is strong for the next 100 years. We're going to look to innovate in all areas of our business to continue to stay relevant to the next generation of gardeners."

What's Stan's plan in retirement?

"I will stay involved in the business for a while, offering advice when needed." He added that he enjoys hunting, fishing, camping and gardening, "so I doubt if boredom will set in any time soon."



Time to sign up for Phase 2 of "Your MarketMetrics—Grower Edition"

We constantly bitch that this industry has no data to help us run our businesses. That's why Dr. Charlie Hall's newest project, "Your MarketMetrics," is so groundbreaking. And you can get in on it!

The next opportunity to join ends April 21. You will join 42 subscribers from Round One, a group that represents a staggering \$1.2 billion in sales—a quarter of our industry's wholesale sales!

As a refresher, Your MarketMetrics is an anonymous group of peers who provide data to Charlie. He compiles all that data and makes it available to the group, so each can "see" how their company is doing compared to their peers, identify critical industry trends and make meaningful business decisions to drive better profitability and financial stability.

As their brochure says, "Your MarketMetrics is online, private, visual, filterable ... and best of all, ACTIONABLE."

Get more and sign up [HERE](#).

I've talked to a few growers who are subscribers and they love it! And these are businesses that are already large enough and connected enough to have access to excellent peer data. But when you add in Charlie's analysis, you've got a recipe for success. I say sign up now before your competition does ... or because your competition already has!



Garden center and brewery: The perfect combination

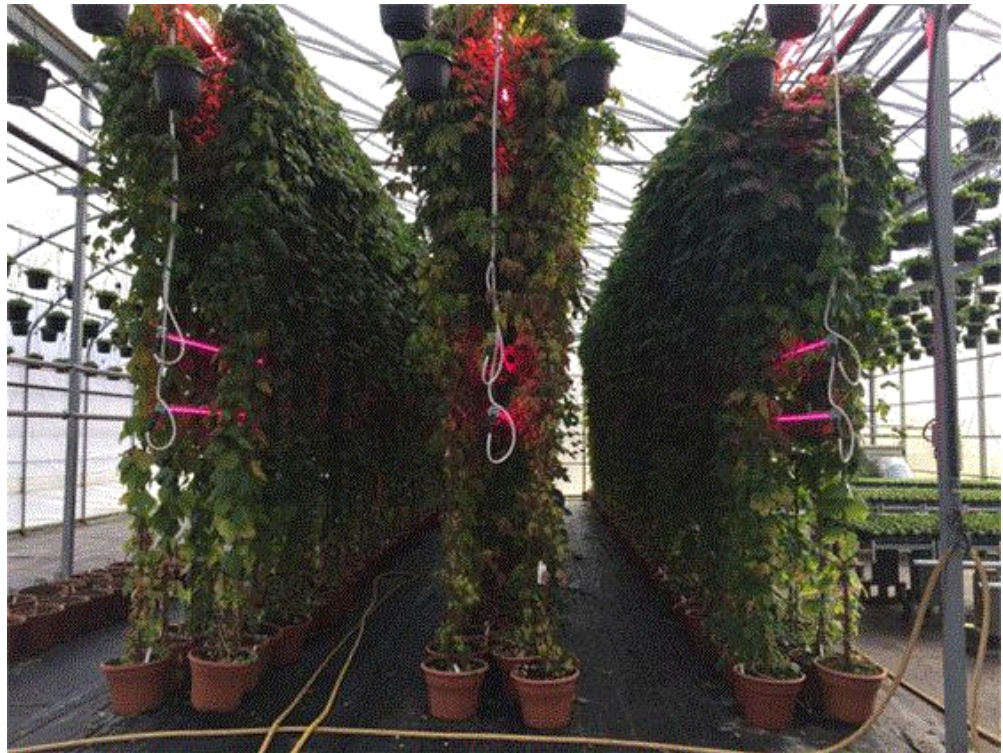
(Although a winery would be fine, too. Toss in a smokehouse and I'll move in permanently.)

I've said for a while that garden centers are the perfect business partner for ... well, just about any sort of venture, from restaurant to bicycle shop. A brewery is a certainly a natural fit, especially when the garden center side of the partnership can produce fresh hops for the brewery.

That's what they're doing at Barone Gardens in Cicero, New York. Owners John and Merry Beth Barone have partnered with brewer Paul Richer (right) on the venture, which saw a soft opening April 4.



"We're probably the first brewery in New York to have wet-hopped beer (ready) in March," Paul told *Syracuse.com*. We got the story from Cornell's Neil Mattson.



Wet hops are those used while still fresh rather than dried. That only happens once a year, usually in late August (in New York). That could give the business a niche in the local market—which already has 21 other breweries.

Said John Barone, “The idea is the you can be here, drinking your beers in the midwinter, with snow, and be in the middle of all this green. I can’t wait to take people back to see the hops growing in January and February.”

Read the full story [HERE](#).



More flowery drama from the Hallmark Channel

Remember the epic “Poinsettias for Christmas” in which the poinsettia “farmer” couldn’t figure out why his crop wouldn’t bloom in time for the big Christmas parade and the local botanist couldn’t help either, but the farmer’s daughter returns home and saves the day (and, spoiler alert, she fell for the botanist).

Well, they’re at it again, this time with “Tulips in Spring.” It’s a much different story this time, with the tulip farmer struggling to get his prize tulip to bloom for a big competition that will save the

business. Home comes the farmer's daughter who figures out the problem and saves the day ... and falls for the local flower broker.



I only caught a bit of this one (it's coming on again April 14 and my DVR is set), but I will say the silk tulips looks a lot more realistic than the plastic poinsettias. As for the tulip production scenes, well, it looked more like a handful of folks doing some gentle gardening. And who digs tulips from the field to pot and sell?



What I really want to know is, which of you helped out on the film? Above is a shot of a very nice greenhouse featured in the made-for-TV movie. Is it yours? Let me know [HERE](#) what it was like working with Hollywood.

I may kid a bit about the fromage factor and the horticultural inaccuracies, but I'm actually very pleased that Hallmark finds our industry so appealing as a setting for their wholesome, edifying brand of entertainment.

Which is why I'm also recording "True Love Blooms," in which the handsome real estate developer threatens the community garden and the pretty urban gardener saves the day (I won't spoil the ending for you).

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Chris Beytes

Editor

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